

# THE PRESENTATION OF CHRISTIANITY IN CEYLON.—II

By J. PAUL S. R. GIBSON

## III. LITERATURE AND THOUGHT

WHILE there is not an extensive literature, much has been written on religion and history. The language is high Singhalese or Pali, which need more thorough study than I have been able to give them. However, I write down the impressions I have received as they may be of interest. As we would expect, imagination and realistic expression find little place. Reading is usually intoned and without emphasis or passion. One day at Trinity College, Kandy, the house was brought down by one of the masters imitating an Englishman speaking Singhalese ; the great attraction was the stress put on syllables instead of the even and equal tone. Often the majority do not understand what is read, for the book language is not understood of the people. The main effect is sensuous rather than mental. Much is learned by heart before it is understood. In fact my students often find it hard to tell me what a verse is about that I have told them to read, even when in simple Singhalese. They have read sounds and not ideas. They usually fail to explain clearly why I chose a text instead of the one before or after to support some spiritual truth.

Analogy and simile play a very important part in the literature. They not only assist the mind by producing pictures but in a most remarkable way are endowed with the validity of proof. They are far more potent than argument. Frequently instead of the simile being an explicative adjunct to the truth, the truth is built up on the simile. This may seem illogical, but in the hands of

a clever teacher it proves a powerful means for driving home a truth. In the hands of the crafty or the careless it may become a veritable snare.

The characters in the books are mostly mechanical. The conversions recorded are almost automatic. We do not see the convert nor the Buddha. The Pali stories pale when compared with the characterizations of the gospels. The same is true of the folklore. I constantly hear the stories told by my students when off with them for walks or climbs. They are all the same. There is no characterization, no pathos, no depth of feeling, no far-reaching significance. They are tremendously funny with the humour of the clever knave and compare with some of the *Canterbury Tales*. I have probed and probed in vain for any other kind of story. There is no passion to express either fact or thought; no desire to stimulate the mind; there is no passionate expression of devotion. This is no wonder, since all such is condemned by the great ideal of passive indifference which is the crown of virtue and without which none shall reach the unknown haven of Nirvana. One exception is claimed, namely, the songs of the nuns given us in Mr Saunders' *Heart of Buddhism*. It is true these express more than is found elsewhere, but the exception is comparative rather than fundamental and only serves to bring into relief the impersonality of much of the rest.

Writing is frequently a means of separating the writer from the reader and, as was once said of words, its result is to conceal thought. Nothing flatters the average man more than to tell him his opening sentences could not be understood. Even keen Christian writers find it hard to overcome this desire to conceal thought with words.

As I have moved among the people it has become evident to me that in their thoughts also one of the fundamental though subconscious factors is lack of relationship, or the isolation of everything. My experience in teaching is that the students are slow in following an argument.

Thought connexions are very hard to establish. Facts tend to remain long as disconnected islands, distinct from each other and seldom visited by a steamer relating them to the world as a whole. The same idea is present in that mind-stirring powerful picture of the ideal Buddhist as a lonely elephant forcing his way up-stream. The life of each man from ages past to the time of reaching Nirvana is the product of his own deeds. Karma alone affects him or others. From this conception, as I have shown, arises a self-centredness which is kept from appearing merely selfish by the great teachings of Buddha on mercy and kindness, and from being strong and virile by the fatalism which though not inherent in the Karmic belief yet has arisen from it.

There is no God to whom to be related. There are no personalities to which to be related. Man must not be of the world, and as far as in him lies he must strive not to be in it. The ideal is to so live that there shall be no rebirth. The lack of the god idea robs nature of its beauty and one of the most wonderful things is to see this sense arise in the young Christian. I was perhaps never more rewarded than by the prolonged hush that fell upon my students as from some high peak we contemplated the glory of God revealed in the majesty of a sun rising over a land rightly called Lanka, the resplendent. The lack of the sense of personality robs man and his body of his dignity and value as man. For the body there is contempt,<sup>1</sup> for it is not the temple of the Holy Spirit; for man as man there is little respect. He is little more than the animal who like him is reborn (hence the respect for animal life). The condition and recognized treatment of the outcaste is the proof of this disregard of human personality. There is more light in the eye of a dog than in that of a Rodiya, for it has been deliberately crushed out of

<sup>1</sup> Murder cases are very prevalent. Out of 17 cases at the Galle Supreme Court Sessions, in April 1918, 13 were for murder and one for attempted murder. *Times of Ceylon*, April 26, 1918.

him by generations of degradation to body, mind and spirit.

The Buddhist doctrine that life is essentially evil and the highest bliss the escape from it robs life of the enjoyment, by the fullness of one's personality, of even the holiest things. There are four paragraphs in the Dhammapada dealing in absolutely equal terms with lust, desire, friendship and family love. From all these comes grief and fear. He who is pure from these knows neither grief nor fear.<sup>1</sup>

The ideal is mercy and kindness without attachment, that is without any sense of relationship. Attachment and desire for attachment to anything are the great bonds to be severed at any cost. As I discussed these passages with my Pundit, a man usually possessed of the control of a Stoic, the tears streamed from his eyes as he confessed that his 'attachment' to his son was a blemish in his Buddhism. Much lies behind the simple fact that birthdays are rarely celebrated.

This treatment of life, though different from the Hindu conception of Maya, or of all as illusion, has yet had a somewhat similar effect upon the popular mind. Life with its facts as well as fancies is thought of as unimportant and fleeting, if not unreal. Subconsciously I believe this attitude towards life is responsible for the utter disregard for fact which any study of the law court trials reveals, and which is also clearly noticeable in daily life. Fact as fact has little value. Its only worth lies in what the mind can make of it. Hence the intense difficulty of getting any witness to say what he heard or saw apart from either what he wished to hear or see, or what he may consider you wish him to have seen and heard. A celebrated barrister told me how impossible it was to get any man to tell the plain facts, even when to do so was to his advantage. Nothing is, but thinking made it so. The hasty Westerner says they are liars. It is not so, if by a lie is understood

<sup>1</sup> Dh. 212-15.

the deliberate intent to deceive. Very often it is merely the desire to please.

The sense of the value of fact is undeveloped and therefore also the sense of the value of time. Eastern unpunctuality is not a failure to arrive in time but a supreme contempt for the value of time at all. How often I have arrived to keep an appointment with a Singhalese friend, breathless and full of apologies for being five or ten minutes late, only to realize how utterly I bewildered him and what a fool I appeared in his sight.

Much the same applies to ordinary promises. They are not—and are not meant to be—promises as we understand them. The spoken word, like the written one, is not meant to convince but to please. In other words, this misunderstanding only arises when we interpret eastern words in a western fashion. The photographer in the West who initiated me into the knowledge of the fickleness of man by keeping me quiet by the promise of some chocolate, and then laughed when I afterwards claimed it, would not have so surprised an eastern child. Such easy promises create little expectation of fulfilment. In wonderful contrast to this stands out the reliance placed on the missionary's word.

Besides the lack of relationship and value in life there is a third factor which bears due sway over the mentality of the people, namely, fear. Who shall gauge it? Fear of day and fear of night, fear of friend and fear of foe, fear of the living and fear of the dead, fear of beast and fear of man, fear of principalities and fear of powers, fear of disease and fear of death. It is hidden but it is there, and reigns supreme through the towns and villages of the land. No truer book was ever written than *The Village in the Jungle*, by L. S. Woolf.<sup>1</sup> Never was a more powerful apologetic for the need of Christ produced from the pen of one who outwardly at least cared not for these things. There is no God, but there are gods many and demons more.

<sup>1</sup> London: Arnold. 5s. net. 1913. See IRM, 1913, Oct. Bib. No. 756.

In its promise and experience of help from forces outside oneself Christianity speaks with power. The appeal of a supreme God, who loves His children and cares for them in body and things material as well as in soul and things spiritual, and who can be loved and trusted in return and not feared with terror but rather with trustful awe, is one that again and again causes restless and bewildered souls to come and inquire further of Christ's gospel. In Buddhism there is no Holy Spirit, and there is little doubt that this line of approach is one which Buddhists most readily accept.

The secret and unexpressed life of the people gives much room for brooding and revenge. The insult may appear to pass unheeded but it is not forgotten and like the elephant in the story the debt is one day repaid. And interest is high.

#### IV. LANGUAGE

As may be expected the language bears many traces of these national traits. Its letters are rounded and beautiful, their distinctive marks elude the casual observer and distract the beginner. The language itself is the Italian of the East. Every discordant sound has been eliminated and every harsh one softened. Consonants seldom come together but are kept apart by vowels. The subtleties of thought can be expressed while the coarse crudities can be elegantly veiled. The difficulties of leave-taking are overcome by the neat 'Havir.g gone I will return.' Its vocabulary is large and its idioms many and I can add my experience in support of these who maintain it to be the hardest of all Aryan languages to master. The main pitfall for the beginner, one too that constantly trips the unwary though older man, is that the Singhalese word given in the dictionary opposite an English word very seldom has the same connotation. For ordinary things this scarcely matters but in questions of religion it is very serious; to my mind it accounts in large part for the idea

so current in these days that our Christian truths all lay hidden in eastern books long before Christ gave them to the world. Nothing is simpler to prove if only a word full of Christian content is used to reproduce the Sanskrit or Pali word containing hidden within its letters only depths of Buddhist or Hindu significance.

For instance, in Buddhism faith means the intellectual assent to the law, including what is understood and what is not. It is infinitely removed from that faith which is personal contact with the living Master and becomes the substance of things hoped for and the evidence of things not seen.

Hope, again, reminds one more of that longing for the night when the wicked cease from troubling and the weary are at rest than the eager expectancy of the dawn of endless day. It has that so-called optimo-pessimist element voiced by the phrase—‘Cheer up, friends, we’ll all be dead soon.’ The hopelessness of a Buddhist funeral is beyond description. There is no soul to return and of the body there remains but to say ‘Vanity, vanity, all is vanity.’

Love is devoid of all relationship. It is mercy and kindness without attachment—at least when considered as a virtue ; otherwise it is a vice.

Sin likewise is devoid of the sense of personality. It is the breaking of a law, no more, no less. The conception is therefore very incomplete. It covers the idea of transgression and to a limited extent that of falling short, though the doctrine of rebirth robs this latter of its sting. The idea of a father against whose love as well as command the sin is done is unknown. What soul’s awakening awaits this people when the knowledge of the holy love of the Father reveals the horror of the sinfulness and indifference of the prodigal.

Forgiveness is religiously speaking unknown. With Karma there is no forgiveness. Amongst the people it means remission of penalty. In daily life when one man

forgives another, even in his imperfect way, relationships are naturally affected but not consciously thought of.

Prayer as far as it exists at all in Buddhism is making merely casual petitions, and is generally due more to the influence of Hinduism than of Buddhism. No idea of communion with the Supreme Personality and of receiving from Him strength and power, guidance and support is in any way included.

Salvation only contains the idea of one's own efforts performed with fear and trembling. The Saviour is not only unknown but rejected.<sup>1</sup> So we might go on. The words we missionaries use are the nearest to the idea to be conveyed that it is possible to get, but in most cases we wish to convey  $x y$  where  $x$  is great and only convey  $y$  where  $z$  is great. The words we use only convey Buddhist ideas. Their words are weighted with the thought of countless ages and can but discharge their own freight. Certain ideas almost refuse to be conveyed by any paraphrase. Amongst these I would mention peace, gratitude, the cost of a thing to oneself, conscience, personality, moral responsibility and 'Thank you.' You will of course find nominal equivalents for these in the dictionary, but not one of these words will convey anything like the deep meaning of our Christian English words. Moral obligation is very difficult to express. The usual word for 'you should,' rather implies 'it were better if you did,' without any moral implication at all. There is one delightful word behind which I constantly shelter now. For instance, I have not done what I said I would and some explanation is needed. '*Mata beriwuna,*' 'I could not do it,' I remark. This covers a multitude of sins and saves my face. First it means I wouldn't, and then it means I couldn't, and then it insinuates I'd tried! It covers determination not to, forgetfulness, a frustrated attempt and what not. You say it with a smile and no more is expected; further provings would certainly be unexpected just as further

<sup>1</sup> Dh. 160.



questionings would be resented. The English words specially mentioned above depend for their deeper meaning on the relationships implied. Apart from this sense of relationship they lose the greater part of their content. We in Christian lands scarcely realize the vast meaning many of our words have acquired from the knowledge of being sons of God and brothers one to another, of being linked together by the divine bond. Unless we carefully guard against the error of forgetting this we cannot fail fundamentally to misunderstand Buddhist classics, and read into them conceptions which were far from the minds of the writers. Nothing, I am sure, would more cause them to turn in their graves than to find the way their thoughts and tenets are now construed by those who use them to prove Christianity borrowed.

#### V. SUGGESTIONS FOR APPROACH

So much for the attempted analysis of the mind of a people whom to know is to love. The problem before us is how to bring this mind into touch with the unsearchable riches of Christ and to make them partakers of their heritage together with us as sons of God. I came out in 1908 filled with the idea of so studying Buddhism as to be able to use it effectively as a stepping-stone to Christianity. The experiences recorded in the foregoing pages have gradually but surely led me to see the fundamental uncrossable gulfs that separate Buddhist philosophy from Christian faith. The very moral similarities that strike one at first sight are ultimately based on such different concepts that they become as differentiated in principle as the striking contrasts. My firm belief is that Christianity should be presented to the Buddhist mind, and will come to it, with the expulsive force of a brand new affection. I do not mean that the missionary should not know and study Buddhism, but I do mean that the more he knows of it the less will he build upon it, and the deeper will he feel the need of laying the one new foundation than which

none other can be laid, even Jesus Christ. Christ and His gospel message are so transcendently new and they come with such direct appeal to every heart that they need no preparation but that humbled and contrite spirit which the vision of the Christ alone produces.

The most effective direct presentation of Christ will be made by the man who knows and sympathetically studies Buddhism, not by the man ignorant of what is good in Buddhism and cold to it. Nevertheless, the presentation should be direct. I cannot feel Christ to be the crown of Buddhism, nor that He will be reached better or understood more clearly through the medium of Buddhist philosophy. The knowledge of Buddhism is not a stepping-stone to Christ but merely the means by which at times a sympathetic hand can be reached out to draw a man out of darkness into light.

My work has been far more connected with training Christians than with direct evangelization. But the causes that have led my men to Christ have always been a special study. The results are very definite. There are only two main causes which correspond to the two main lacunae in their old beliefs.

First, the truth of God the Creator of worlds and men. Buddhist cosmology is upheld by very few now. The first chapters of Genesis contain the truths for which the heart longs, and tell them wondrously as the child mind loves to hear them and in such a way that the deepest thinkers find them unfolding their beauties and mysteries still. Let none be afraid of telling this part of the 'old old story' which mind and heart alike demand. The mind takes its rest on the inexplicable 'In the beginning God,' and the heart at once finds in Him the love and tender care which it has sought in vain on Karma's cold bosom.

Then secondly, the fact of salvation, and immediate salvation. Doubtless the idea of the remission of penalty plays a prominent part and only later is this seen to be

secondary to reunion with the Father ; yet the aspiration is fundamentally sound though incorrectly apprehended. The endless round of rebirths, the crushing sense that there is no forgiveness anywhere, that 'not in the sky, nor in mid-air, nor in mountain cave can one find sanctuary from one's sins,'<sup>1</sup> finds instant relief when it accepts the gracious 'Come unto Me . . . and ye shall find rest unto your souls.'

The creation and the atonement speak with power. There is no special need to philosophize about them. If presented by a heart that believes them, in words that are straight and simple, to hearts that are restless and crushed, they work their own way in and bear fruit.

Not one student has ever told me it was devotion to Christ or a deep sense of sin that brought him to baptism. These have been later developments, though naturally from the first the gentleness of Christ has been the one thing that has made any consideration of Christianity at all possible.

The problems that face the man in charge of training work are somewhat different. He has to build up the faith of his students and fit them both to bring others into their joy and also to build up the Christian church. Those special errors of their old religion must not only be corrected but the far-reaching effects of those errors on attitude and character must be counter-balanced ; lacunae and their evil results must be filled in.

The main lacunae are :

No creation and no Creator.

No true sense of a spiritual personality whether human or Divine.

No true sense of relationship of man to man or man to God.

These lacunae lead to :

Indifference as to nature ; the thought of the body as vile.

Emphasis on mind rather than on feeling and will.

Buddhism being a philosophy rather than a religion.

Ego-centricity. Incomplete ideas of faith, hope and love, sin, suffering and holiness.

Absence of passion ; obsession by fear.

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<sup>1</sup> Dh. 127.

The main positive error appears to me to be :

Assertion of the Karma law as the one great exclusive principle, explaining the universe.	Fatalism, formality, trust in merit and good works, rejection of all that arises from personality, no possibility of forgiveness, self-satisfaction.
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Each man will have his own method and plan in dealing with the difficult problem of remodelling the whole inlook and outlook of the new convert. I venture to append the constructive line I adopt, but before doing so let me state just a few of the qualifications which help the teacher to get his message home.

I make no apology for this as the Singhalese certainly learn more through sympathetic appreciation than by cold logic. What the teacher is goes much deeper than what he does or says. This is true in all lands, but specially in Ceylon. The fundamental concept of the inter-relationship of men will be more effectively taught by the teacher who establishes such a relationship with his students, in spite of differences of race and language, by means of his piercing and loving personality than by any other means.

The silence often of pure innocence  
Persuades when speaking fails.<sup>1</sup>

The following traits will greatly facilitate the work. Happy is the Westerner who even approaches to them !

1. Courtesy and gentleness. One hasty angry word is far more destructive than much unpunctuality or even deceit or lying. Avoid these as well !

2. Patience and readiness to go over and over the ground. The Buddhist books are written on this line and the method of telling any story in Singhalese is always—'So and so went, and having gone he did this, and having done that he . . .' The mind works in the line of repetition.

3. Firmness without over rigidity. Readiness to see people at almost any time. It is hard to fit this in with punctuality and regularity, but at times a compromise is better than too great exactitude.

4. Continuity of character. Be the same day in and day out. Let the character be so known that it can be relied on. The greatest genius or saint often fails in this very point and much power may be thus lost. A Singhalese man reads character far more than we do.

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<sup>1</sup> *Winter's Tale*, ii. 2.

5. Readiness to give time to students and to let them take their own time. No Singhalese person will make an appointment to come and tell you anything. He probably will not even tell you at all, but by patiently sitting with him and talking of many things you may be able to find out what he came to say. The length of such interviews probably largely depends on our density. They naturally do not care to leave till they think there is at least an odd chance that they have been understood. I only know of one really quick Englishman. His workman came to him and asked for leave as his grandmother had died. 'Why,' said the master, 'that is the third time in two years! How long have you served here? Oh, ten years is it? Very well, I will look into the matter of a rise.' The employee salaamed and said 'Master understands.'

6. The careful choice of similes and analogies. These will impress where logic fails. A good analogy is far better than a clear argument. This is one of my chief stumbling-blocks, as I resent producing an effect on others by a means that does not convince myself. However, once the truth is driven home argument can be resorted to and one's conscience relieved, though in most cases the student will still see more power in the analogy than in the logical vindication.

7. Lastly let the missionary be careful about unnecessarily taking life. It is often necessary to do so for food or preservation of life, and constantly for cleanliness. But even when life must be taken, avoid doing it in the presence of those whose minds have not been prepared by the consideration that man is of more value than many sparrows. Otherwise a wide breach may be caused which will long delay the development of the idea of man's relation to both God and man, which is so fundamental in leading a soul to Christ. Does not Christ Himself say that on these relationships hang all the law and the prophets?

My constructive course is along the following lines.

Genesis forms a basis for teaching divine creation and relationship; that these are real human relationships can be worked out from the common Father whose sons we are. Their ideas being ego-centric I press home at once the comfort and hope for self. This makes an appeal. Then I try to develop the sense of the majesty and the greatness of the divine Creator and Father, and then lead on to His holiness.

From this I return to the contrast between God and man, and for the first time press home the meaning of sin as separation from this holiness rather than that of sin as mere law breaking. This leads to insisting on personality

rather than law as ruling the universe,<sup>1</sup> and to relation to personality being the ground of salvation rather than deeds (cf. 1 Cor. xiii.). Next, I dwell on the suffering that arises from such separation from God through sin, not only to the sinner, but to God who still loves the sinner. The power of such suffering in God to draw back the sinner leads to the suffering Christ, the revelation of God in Christ, and the whole subject of the atonement and forgiveness.

This strikes at the very root of Karma, and having found a valid meaning for unmerited suffering one is in a position to drive away the fallacy of the legalistic principle which so far has ruled their lives.

God's relation to us is now seen to be not merely passive but one that calls forth active love and sacrifice for us. Something has been done for us that we cannot alone do for ourselves. This opens the way for gratitude in its deep sense. Love and gratitude are the basis of true and holy passion and thus one tries to create within them a longing for the expression of love and gratitude to God and man.

Man's relation to man gives new meaning to their inbred kindness and courtesy. These are no longer for self but are seen to be done to Christ, inasmuch as they are done to one of His little ones. Thus ideas of responsibility grow, man is seen to be his brother's keeper. The Holy Spirit is thus shown to be the dynamic which is so palpably wanting in Buddhism. This is the barest outline, but anything more would lead one into a compendium of theology.

Thus we try to train our colony students and they leave us to go out into the world. They have in many cases forsaken much to be Christians, what relationships they knew have been broken, and they have learned the

<sup>1</sup> With advanced students one might show how even in Buddhism some of the attributes ascribed to Karma lead on to a far more personal conception of it than is generally ceded.

deep bond that binds the sons of God. If the readers of this article have been interested in our problems we ask their prayers for the Colony<sup>1</sup> that there may be learned and experienced the free full salvation of Christ, the dynamic of the Spirit, the corporate brotherhood that is ours through our sonship in God. Prayer is also asked for Ceylon churches that they may learn to welcome each new member of the Body of Christ.

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<sup>1</sup>The Training Colony under the direction of the Rev. J. P. S. R. Gibson is located at Peradeniya, three miles from Kandy, and has about 25 acres of agricultural land attached. Students sent by various missionary bodies to be trained for spiritual work have at the same time instruction in agriculture and handicrafts, thus emphasizing the dignity of manual labour and preparing the way for closer bonds of sympathy between them and the classes amongst whom they will eventually work. The Colony is an interdenominational institution.