

# THE MONASTIC INSTITUTION OF BURMA AND ITS PHONGYS, THE BUDDHIST PRIESTS.

(Read on 28th June 1922.)

## I.

After attending, from the 28th January to the 1st of February 1922, the second Oriental Conference at Calcutta, to which I was nominated a Delegate by our Society and by the University of Bombay and some other Literary Societies, I had the pleasure of visiting the Oriental countries of Burma, the Malay Peninsula ruled over by England as Strait Settlements, Indo-China, including Cochin-China and Tonquin ruled over by the French, and China and Japan. My visit was a flying visit to some of the principal cities and towns of these countries. Though it was a visit of a globe trotter, it was undertaken with an eye to study with pencil and note-book in hand. I propose submitting before this and other societies some papers on my Notes of what I have seen, heard and read. This paper is one of such papers. The object of this brief paper is to submit a few notes on the Pongys or Phongys, the Buddhist priests of Burma. These Phongys are generally connected with the monasteries. So, before speaking of them, I will first speak briefly on the Monastic Institution in general and the Monasteries of Burma in particular.

## II.

Monasticism or monachism (from monos, alone) literally means "living alone." It is an inclination in the mind of man to live alone, away from others, either temporarily or for a long time. When we say "alone, away from others," it may be in the midst

of towns and cities, or far away from cities, in desert solitude. Thus, we see that the monasteries, the seats or homes for persons of this kind of inclination, are both in the midst of cities as well as out of cities, in less frequented places. As said by Dr. Herbert B. Workman<sup>1</sup>, the root or the basic idea is that of a kind of "a yearning for self-surrender." He says: "In every human heart, except, possibly, the utterly depraved, we find a yearning for self-surrender rising at times to a passion. Even in the worldling, buried deep beneath the deposits of self, there is an instinct he cannot explain, the power of which he may attempt to laugh away, that leads him, in spite of himself, in a moment of heroic decision to give his life a ransom for others. Few there are to whom there do not come at times visions of a nobler life." Rev. A. F. Littledale says similarly: "The root-idea of monachism in all its varieties of age, creed, and country, is the same—namely, retirement from society in search of some ideal of life which society cannot supply, but which is thought attainable by abnegation of self and withdrawal from the world. This definition applies to all the forms of monachism which have left their mark on history, whether among Brâhmans, Buddhists, Jews, Christians or Moslems."<sup>2</sup>

### III.

Rev. Littledale does not name among the people which had, or have, some forms of monasticism, the ancient Iranians or Zoroastrians. The idea of a kind of "self-surrender" is not absent from Zoroastrianism; nay, it is more than prevalent. A Zoroastrian is asked not to think much of 'self.' In the good of the community in general, he is to drown, his 'self.' Herodotus refers to this teaching when he says of the ancient Persians: "He that sacrifices is not

<sup>1</sup> The Evolution of the Monastic Ideal (Chap. I. Historic Survey of the Ideas of Monasticism), p. 3.

<sup>2</sup> Encyclopædia Britannica, 9th ed., Vol. XVI, p. 698, "Monachism."

permitted to pray for blessings for himself alone; but he is obliged to offer prayers for the prosperity of all the Persians, and the king, for he is himself included in the Persians."<sup>1</sup> He is to pray for all men.<sup>2</sup> But the idea of "retirement from society" is foreign to his mind. He is to seek a kind of "self-surrender," but that not for his 'self' but for the 'self' of 'society.' So, in order to do so, he must remain in the midst of society. If that kind of "self-surrender," self-surrender in the midst of society, was the basic root of monasticism, Zoroastrianism had no objection to it. To try to be "unworldly" in the midst of the "world" is one thing; to be "unworldly" out of the world is another thing. Like the king Janaka<sup>3</sup> of the Indian story, one can lead such a life of self-surrender, remaining at the same time in the midst of society. Such a self-surrender can be displayed in the midst of an active life. Again, this question of monasticism in relation to Zoroastrianism may be looked at from a general point of view. It leaves a broad field for views. It permits no extremes, no faddism of any kind, *e.g.*, it does not enjoin fasting from any religious point of view, though it teaches moderation. Again, another reason why ancient Iran had no monastic institution, is, that the Zoroastrian religion of the country advocated marriage and prohibited celibacy.

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<sup>1</sup> Herodotus, Bk. I, 132. H. Cary's Translation (1889), p. 60.

<sup>2</sup> *Vide* my "Moral Extracts from Zoroastrian books," p. 27.

<sup>3</sup> It is said of this king, that he led a monk's life and declared himself to be a monk. Some monks asserted that a king, living in the midst of all temptations of pleasure, &c., cannot live as a monk and cannot be a monk. King Janaka heard this and he once invited all the monks to his city as his guests. But he stipulated, that they all may come to the outskirts of his city and then enter the city, holding on their heads pitchers, full of water. They must reach his palace without spilling any water on their shoulders out of the brimful pitchers. If their shoulders were found wet with water spilt from the pitchers, they would subject themselves to punishment. The monks accepted the invitation, and collected themselves at the city gate. Then, they were given on their heads pitchers full of water upto the very brim. They all entered into the city and, looking straight before them, walked very slowly, steadily

Celibacy is enjoined for a monastic life. We know of cases of marriage, or, what may be called, half-marriage among monks in spite of this injunction. For example, Dr. Workman speaks of "married monks living in 'outer cells' with their wives and children,"<sup>1</sup> at the monastery of Beth Abbé in 594 and of their being driven out. Dr. P. Smith<sup>2</sup>, while speaking of the clergy before the Reformation, says: "The vow of celibacy was too hard to keep for most men and some women; that many priests, monks and nuns, broke it cannot be doubted. A large proportion of the clergy was both woefully ignorant and morally unworthy. Besides the priests who had concubines, there were many given to drink and some who kept taverns, gaming rooms and worse places. Plunged in gross ignorance and superstition, these blind leaders of the blind who won great reputation as exorcists or as wizards were unable to understand the Latin Service or creed in any language." But in spite of such occasional breaches of discipline, celibacy was a general rule and injunction in the monastic institution of the West.

In the East also, there were occasional breaches. I remember seeing a woman in one of the three Tibetan *gumpās* or monas-

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and carefully, so as not to spill any water on their shoulders from the pitchers over their heads. They looked straight, lest any attempt to see the city on the right or the left may spill the water. Thus, they all reached the royal palace, and were welcomed by Janaka, who then asked them how they liked his city. They all replied: "Sire! We have seen nothing of your city. We looked straight and walked, lest looking either to the right or to the left may cause any spilling of water, which, you said, should not be the case." The king was pleased with the answer and said: "I had made that stipulation, to show to you that just as, while walking through a crowded city where people and assembled to see you coming to the palace in procession, you looked straight and did not look to the right or to the left to avoid a mishap, so I, as a king, though I live in a city and in a palace in the midst of a number of temptations, always try to look straight, and, unmoved by worldly things here and there, lead a true monk's pious life."

1 "Evolution of Monastic Idea," by Dr. Workman, p. 55, n. 4.

2 "The age of the Reformation," by Dr. P. Smith, p. 25.

teries round Darjeeling, and was surprised to learn, that she was kept by one of the Lamas. On speaking to them of the injunction of celibacy, I was told: "Buddha said: 'Do not marry.' So, we do not marry, but keep." But, in spite of such cases, celibacy is the general rule. But, in Zoroastrianism, according to the Vendidad, married life is held generally to be a virtuous life. All the clergy and the laity are required to marry. Ahura Mazda himself is spoken of as preferring a married man to an unmarried one, a man with children to one without children. So monasticism, which enjoins celibacy, can have no room in Zoroastrianism. Though we read of Christian monasteries being tolerated in Persia,—*e.g.*, Firdousi in his account of the reign of Yazdazard, speaks of a Christian monastery whose good monks saw the dead body of the murdered king and bemoaned his loss—we read nowhere, either in Parsee books or in other books, of a Zoroastrian monastery in Persia.

#### IV.

Monasteries, though mostly dissolved in Protestant countries, still exist in many parts of Europe,<sup>1</sup> and Western Asia. Mr. Harry Charles Lukach,<sup>2</sup> in his chapter on "the Monasteries of the Levant," gives us an interesting account of the Monasteries of St. Luke in Stiris, Meteora and Mount Athos. What he says of some monasteries reminds us of what we read and know of some Lamaseries of Tibet, and monasteries of Burmah. His mention of the following facts principally reminds us of the similarity:

I. Some monasteries had a few monks, and some had a very large number.

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<sup>1</sup> I had the pleasure of visiting the great monastery of Chartreuse at Naples in July 1889.

<sup>2</sup> The Fringe of the East. A Journey through Past and Present provinces of Turkey (1913), pp. 6-32.

2. Some were situated in some sequestered places. Some were situated on the tops of such inaccessible cliffs that one can go to them only by seating himself in a rope basket which is let down by the monks above. When you shout out from below, a monk in the cliff monastery comes out and looks below as to who shouts. At times, you fire a shot and then it is the sound of the shot that draws his attention. In some places, there are "perilous step-ladders that swing loosely away from the overhanging cliff", and these take you up. Some of the abbots there, are illiterate in our sense of the word. They do not know how to read and write, though they possess traditional lore of their order and religion.

3. Some of them indulge in drinks. Mr. Lukach says: "With every circuit of the bottle the ecclesiastical character of their songs was becoming less apparent." I saw at Darjeeling that some of the Lamas drank the country liquor prepared at the monasteries known as *marwá*. It looked like *toddy* in colour and was drunk like it in large quantities.

4. They had simple, but copious or full meals over which they spent a long time.

5. Prohibition of the entrance of women in the monasteries.

We have no regular statistics about the number of monasteries, their wealth, classes, etc., of other creeds, but from what we have of the Christian creed, we find, that, at one time monasticism was much prevalent in Christendom. According to Beeton,<sup>1</sup> in England alone, there were, at the time of the Reformation, about 3,182 monasteries—Greater and Lesser and including those belonging to the Hospitallers, Colleges, Hospitals, Chantries and Free Chapels,—and their wealth amounted to £140,784. "Taking into account the value of money at the time—at least six times as much as at present, and considering that the estimate of land is generally supposed to have been

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<sup>1</sup> Dictionary of Universal Information, Science, Art and Literature Vol. II, p. 450.

much under the real value, and making some allowance for omissions, the entire revenues of these houses must have been enormous." Rev. Littledale, at the end of his above article on Monachism, gives a table, naming in chronological order from 250 to 1870 A.C., "the more remarkable foundations" of the monastic order which prevailed at one time or another in various countries of Christendom. The table contains about 194 names of the different monastic or semi-monastic orders which prevailed at one time or another. They were founded not only by cardinals and bishops, and abbots and monks, but also by other pious men and women, married and unmarried.

## V.

Monasteries stand second in the list of the religious institutions of Burma, which are of three classes : 1.

Religious Insti-  
tutions of Burma.  
The Pagodas.

The Zedi or the Pagoda. 2. Kyaung or the Monastery, and 3. The Temples. The Pagodas are to the Buddhists of Burmah what the stupas or dagobas were to the Buddhists of India and Ceylon. It is said<sup>1</sup> that the word pagoda is the same as dagoba uncorrectly pronounced by old voyagers, who are said to have changed at times the Indian word *rajah* into *rodger*, *upayaza* into *upper rodger* and the word *mantri* into *mandarin*. The pagodas are like Indian *Stupas*, topas which enshrine sacred relics of Gautama Buddha or some other Buddha or Saint, and are solid brickwork structure of various heights varying from ten to hundreds of feet in height. They are seen from a distance before you enter the port of Rangoon, and you see them by hundreds on your way from Rangoon to Mandalay. I remember well the fine morning of 14th February 1922, when, sailing from Mandalay to Mingon to see the great bell there, I had, on both sides of the river Irrawadi, a charming view of the country studded with a number of pagodas, here and there, near and distant. As said by Sir George Scott, the pagodas and the monasteries "usually monopolise the best

<sup>1</sup> Burma, by Sir G. Scott, p. 329.

sites of the country." Of all the pagodas of Burma, though that of Pegu is a little larger, that of Shwe Dagôn at Rangoon is most interesting, attractive, grand and rich. You see it from miles afar when entering and leaving the port of Rangoon. On leaving Rangoon, during my two visits of the city—one on the way to China and Japan and the other on the way back—the sight of the great pagoda reminded me of the sight of the great Acropolis of Athens which you continue to see for a long time on leaving Piræus, the port of Athens.

## VI.

The monasteries of Burma form, next to the pagodas, the second class of its religious institutions. Monasteries of Wood being very cheap in the country, Burma. they are generally built of wood and Sir George Scott thinks that its style "resembles that of the wooden temples of Nepal."<sup>1</sup> He adds that "there is little reason to doubt that they reproduce the traditional forms of ancient wooden architecture in India, Assyria, and elsewhere. They may represent to us the wooden palaces of Nineveh, and hint at the architecture of king Solomon's Temple, built of the cedars of Lebanon."<sup>2</sup>

In my papers, before this Society, on the subjects of Rosaries Prayer-wheels, religious Processions, &c., I have referred to the Buddhist monasteries of the Tibetans, known as *gumpas* and seen round about Darjeeling. Burma is the next Buddhist country where we see such monastic institutions. I had the pleasure of visiting a monastery at Rangoon on 11th February 1922 in the company of Mr. Mg. Tun Tin (of 16 A. Phayre street), an intelligent young Buddhist who had taken his education in St. Paul's High School at Rangoon. The monastery was called Aletawyu, *i.e.*, the middle monastery, because it was situated in the middle of the inhabited portion of the city. It is situated about half or three-fourth of a mile from

<sup>1</sup> Burma by Sir J. George Scott (1906), p. 334.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*



the Royal Lake and is to be approached by a road passing by the side of the Fish-pond containing sacred fishes.<sup>1</sup> I spent an interesting hour and a half there in inspecting the institution and having a talk with the Phongys there. These monasteries form a very important institution among the Burmese, not only from a religious point of view, but even from a secular point of view. Just as every Christian child must once go through Baptism, and then, through confirmation, and just as every Zoroastrian child must once be initiated and invested with Sudreh and Kusti, the sacred shirt and thread, so every Burmese child must go through a kind of monastic initiation. Otherwise the child will not be taken to be a good human being. The initiation consists in living in a monastery for some time, at least for a few days, and do all monastic work, even that of sweeping the monasteries fetching water for the monks and going out a-begging for food for them. This initiation in a monastery is not required for women, who, though otherwise occupying a tolerably good position in society, are held in such matters to be somewhat out of the human pale—a view not unlike that of some Christian priests of the mediæval times who held that women had no souls.

All male children of Buddhist Burma must enter a Buddhist monastery and stay there for at least seven days. Generally, they stay longer. Besides learning discipline and living in discipline there, they attain some literary education, at least that of the three Rs (Reading, Writing and Arithmetic). Again, by doing all the domestic work of the monastery, such as sweeping, fetching water, watering the trees of the monastery, etc., and by going a-begging, they are expected to learn

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<sup>1</sup> This pond is called Wingaba Kein, *i.e.*, Labyrinth pond, because there is a labyrinth there. It is a sacred pond wherein worshippers let loose, as an act of atonement, living fish purchased from the Bazar.

a deep lesson of humility and public service, however humble.<sup>1</sup>

## VII.

Burmese priests are known as Pongys or Phongys. They are generally connected with some monasteries. It is after a long stay, at least of 10 years, in a monastery that they acquired this position. Like the monks of mediæval Europe, the Phongys of Burma had, and still have, a great hand in the teaching work of the country. As said by Sir George Scott, "it is the teaching of the youths of the country that is the chief credit of the Pôngyi, and it is this that binds the people to the support of the monastic system."<sup>2</sup> Those boys who intend to be Phongys remain longer in the monasteries. Their first stage of the stay and initiation there, is that of *koyns* or novices. Those who stay longer, after passing through the period of novices, observe all monastic rules and regulations and qualify themselves with some higher literary attainments to become phongys. One may become and live as a phongy for some time, and then, if he likes, revert to laymanship. Thus, the Buddhist priesthood is not hereditary. Sir J. George Scott<sup>3</sup> says: "The longest stayer has the greatest honour. A visitor mendicant who has passed the greater number of Lents (*wa*) in the order will receive the salutations of the head of the monastery, even though he be a local abbot and the stranger no more than a wandering friar. It is this republican tendency of Buddhism which gives it so great a hold on the people. Rank does not confer upon the mendicant greater honour, nor does it release him from any of his obligations. The

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<sup>1</sup> This reminds us of what we read of Mediæval England of the 15th Century in "The Pastors and their England" by Mr. H. St. Bennett. The parents generally kept their children, at least for some time at the houses of friends or acquaintances, where they did all humble household work of sweeping, washing, fetching water, &c.

<sup>2</sup> Burma. A handbook of Practical Commercial and Political Information, p. 365.      <sup>3</sup> Ibid pp. 364-65.

most learned and famous Sadaw<sup>1</sup> must go forth every morning to beg his daily food. If he is very aged, and broken with ailments, he may be excused from the daily round, but every now and again he must totter forth to preserve the letter of the law and to show a proper example of humility. His dress is the same as that of the most recently admitted novice, and he holds honour, not because he controls the affairs of the assembly, but because he is so close to the attaining of Neikban, the Burmese form of Nirvana.”

It is no wonder that, as the monasteries and their monks, the phongys, have a large and principal hand in the education of the people, there were, according to the census of 1891, about 15,371 monasteries in Burma. We may say there were so many schools. The total number of the inmates of the monasteries—phongys, novices, accolytes came to 91,000. It is the founder of a monastery who appoints a phongy as the head of the institution. When that is not done, the monks themselves appoint one of them as the head.

The ceremonial day of a Phongy begins with that part of the early morning, when there is light enough to see the veins in the hand. They are awakened by the ringing of a bell which may be of metal or wood. They then wash and dress and, going before the image of Buddha, say their morning prayers. The prayer-room, which I saw in the monastery of Aletawyen at Rangoon, contained a number of things presented by laymen. A part of their prayers consists of confession and penitence. They repent for any omissions in the observance of the 257 precepts which they are enjoined to observe. It is their prayers known as *Patimauk* which contains a list of all the precepts which they have to observe.<sup>2</sup> This prayer book is known as

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<sup>1</sup> Sâdhu or monk.

<sup>2</sup> The *Patimauk* of the Buddhist is something like the *Patet* of the Parsees, which contains a kind of enumeration of sins and faults which a Parsee has to avoid. Just as the *Patimauk* contains a list of precepts

the Book of Enfranchisement. After the morning prayers, all the members of the monastery attend to their respective domestic work. The new members and novices sweep the monasteries, fetch water and do such household work as is required for the domestic purposes of the monastery. Then, there is the reading and learning of new lessons<sup>1</sup> by the novices and a little of meditation by the superior phongys. Then follows the work of going a-begging for food referred to above. A part of the food collected is placed as an offering before the image of Buddha in the monastery and the rest partaken by the phongys. The phongys, according to the strict letter of their laws, are prohibited from igniting fire in their monasteries for cooking, but the injunction is not strictly observed now by all.

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which enjoin that such and such an act shall be done and such and such an act avoided, so the Patet of the Parsees contains a long list of acts which are considered as sinful and which must be avoided. At one time, a Parsee child, on being initiated into the fold, had to know and recite by heart the Patet containing the list of wrongful actions to be avoided. The recital is now replaced by the recital of a number of Ahunavars.

<sup>1</sup> The learning of new lessons by heart and the mechanical repetitions of the old ones, so that they may be permanently remembered, as described by Sir G. Scott, remind us of the Indian way of learning lessons. It reminds me specially of the Parsee method of old as learnt from my elders. The school of Hormasji Kamâl at Naosari was often referred to by men of the older generation as a typical school of that kind. The following is an amusing story of such a school. It is said, that Mr. Hormasji Kamâl held his classes in a building opposite to his dwelling house. Once, his wife shouted from the house when he was at the school : સાંભજોત્ય કે ? આને શું રાંધું ? "Do you hear? (That was the way of calling a husband whose name was not to be mentioned.) What am I to prepare for the meals to-day?" The school master was at the time giving a new lesson to his pupils and reciting certain parts of the prayer to be prepared by heart by the pupils. So, on hearing the question from his wife in the midst of his giving the lesson, he replied : ઝમારીઆં રાંધને *i.e.*, prepare *oriân* (a kind of dish). The pupils took these words to be the part of the lesson, and so all shouted ઝમારીઆં રાંધને, ઝમારીઆં રાંધને. (It is the usual practice of the pupils to repeat each sentence of the new lesson twice, so that it may be better committed to memory), *i.e.*, "Prepare *oriân*, prepare *oriân*." The teacher Mr. Hormasji Kamâl

A short prayer follows the meal and is followed by rest for some time. Then follows the work of teaching lessons to the boys and novices. The afternoon hours after four o'clock are spent in various ways according to their fancies. Some go out for a walk, others read or talk. But all must return to the monastery by sunset. The boarders, *i.e.*, the school-boys who live in the monastery and the novices or the would-be phongys recite the lessons they have learnt upto then by heart from the very beginning. They all go before the image of Buddha and say the evening prayer before going to bed. These prayers end with the mention of the period of the day, the day, the month, and the year by a member of the monastery.<sup>1</sup>

The Phongys lead a life of celibacy. We read the following

Celibacy. in Sir George Scott's *Burma* (p. 375) about the strictness of their relations with women :

“They may not take anything from a woman's hand ; they may not travel in the same cart or boat with her ; they must not even remain temporarily under the same roof with a woman, unless in the company of other members of the monastery ; they may not so much as look upon the face of a woman. When portions of the Law are read in the monastery or the rest-house on Duty days—every seventh day during the month—the monks must hold their large fans before the eyes, to guard against unwitting sin ; and the same must be done when they walk abroad, lest haply they should see a female face. The Book of the Law says that, even if a Phongy's mother should fall in the ditch, he must not give her his hand to pull her out. He may hold out a stick or let her seize the

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got enraged at this misunderstanding on the part of his pupil and abused him saying “*અપરે તુને નહીં કહેતો.*” *i.e.*, Shut up (Here followed an abusive epithet. I do not say these words (*viz.*, the words for giving instructions for meals) to you.” The pupils again taking these words to be a part of the lessons, repeated the words of abuse. This further irritated the teacher.

<sup>1</sup> This recital of the hour, day and month remind us of the prayer among the Parsees of *roz nek nam* which ends all Parsee prayers.

them of his robe—and even then, he must figure to himself that he is pulling at a log of wood.”

All these restrictions and prohibitions remind us of what we read of some of the Christian monasteries of Eastern Europe and Western Asia. They prohibited the entrance of women within their precincts. They prohibited the entrance, not only of women, but also of all animals of the female sex. They would permit cocks or bulls or dogs or goats to come in, but not hens or cows or bitches or she-goats. It is said of a Christian monk, that he thought himself polluted and unclean, if he, even accidentally, happened to touch a woman. Even touching the fringe of her dress was pollution. It is said of a monk Abba Paulus, that he would not even look at the clothes of women. At one time, he had to cross a stream with his mother on his shoulder. So, he covered her with a number of pieces of cloth to avoid direct contact with her dress. It is said of a Christian monk of Egypt, named Prior, that for 50 years, he had seen no woman, not even the women of his family. Once, when he, at the orders of his superiors, went to his sister, he kept his eyes shut, so that he may not see a woman and be unclean.

Though such a strict abstinence from women is enjoined, there is a separate class of women who have taken themselves to a religious life without resorting to all the requisites of a monastic institution. They are somewhat like Christian nuns. We do not know much of any restrictions of the above kind among Buddhist nuns to avoid being seen by men, but we know, that among Christian nuns, there were such restrictions. For example, it is said of a Christian nun, that when she fell ill and her brother wanted to go and see her, she prevented him from coming before her, saying, that she did not like the soul of her brother being any way polluted or made unclean by the sight of a woman. It is said of a young nun of Alexandria, that she had very beautiful brilliant eyes which were very much admired by a young man, who, like a madman, went after

her, wherever she went, to see her. Taking the view, that she must not be the cause of making unclean the soul of the young man, she rather blinded her own eyes, thinking that thereby, she saved the soul of the man who would then no longer care to look to her.

### VIII.

All true Buddhists had to observe some necessary commandments, which, as it were, formed the cardinal virtues of Buddhism. The five commandments which the phongys have to observe most strictly with all the Burmese Buddhists are :—

1. Thou shalt not kill.
2. Thou shalt not commit adultery.
3. Thou shalt not steal.
4. Thou shalt not lie.
5. Thou shalt not drink any intoxicating drink.

Besides these five general commandments to be observed by all Buddhists, the phongys have to observe the following five :—

1. Not to eat after midday.
2. Not to dance or sing.
3. Not to apply powder on the face, or put on any decorations of that kind, such as flowers, etc., on the head, etc.
4. Not to sit, stand or sleep over seats higher than about 3 feet.
5. Not to touch money.

Besides these, there are about 227 precepts to be observed by phongys. The greater the number observed, the better the phongy. Some of these are the following :—

1. Not to sit on soft carpets.
2. Not to put on slippers in towns or villages. Exception is made in case of illness.

3. Not to hold an umbrella. But if some laymen hold it over them, that is permissible.

4. Not to live with parents, and to give up all worldly things

They are required to avoid luxuries as much as possible. I will speak here at some length about some of these restrictions.

(a) The Phongys are required to avoid all luxuries. They must not sleep over cots which are higher than three feet. The cots lesser than three feet in height are presented to them by laymen. The laymen who can afford, are required to perform the funeral ceremonies, before the disposal of the body of their dead dear ones, on a new cot. This cot, they never keep at home for any use, but reject it and present it to the adjoining monasteries, where the phongys use them.<sup>1</sup> I saw several fine cots in a temple, pointed out to me as a Confession temple where the laymen confessed their sins. This temple is attached to the above said monastery of Aletawyen in Rangoon. When the monasteries have more such cots than the phongys require for their use, the latter barter them in the market for other things which they require for their use, the use of money being prohibited.

(b) They must not touch money. At times, when unavoidably required to be given, it may be given in the hands of the monastery servants.<sup>2</sup> When the phongys require some

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<sup>1</sup> Compare with this, the custom, which though very rare, is now creeping in among some rich Parsees, wherein some people use marble slabs from over the tables of their drawing rooms for placing upon them the bodies of their dead dear ones, before the removal to the Towers. Some use the slabs again after washing them, but some reject them.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. The custom among the Sadhus of a particular class, who never receive money as alms from us in their own hands, but ask us to place it before them on the ground from where their disciples lift it up. *Vide* my Paper on the Pilgrimage of Nasik read before the Society (to be published in Vol. XII, No. 4). Of. Also the ritual of the Freemasons wherein the new initiate is required to part with all his money in coin before being initiated into the craft.



necessities for their own use, they purchase them from the Bazar, not by giving money but by barter. They give to the sellers things which they have received as alms from laymen.

(c) They must not have their meals at any hour of the day. They must have their one or two meals, only between sunrise and midday. Only the drinking of water is permitted during the other hours of the day. The offerings of food, etc., to be made before the image of Buddha in houses and monasteries must be also made between these two hours, the sunrise and midday; only an offering of water can be made in the evening.<sup>1</sup>

(d) The use of money being prohibited, they are required to live only on alms. They must not cook any food in the monasteries. Their disciples or the novices in the monasteries go a-begging for food in the streets. It is not an ordinary begging but a respectable way of begging. The disciples or novices go and stand before the houses of laymen with their begging bowls or rather a particular kind of begging-utensils and the faithful know what they have come for. They give some cooked food. Such dumb or implied visits to some few houses, suffice for the morning or forenoon meals of the phongys attached to the monasteries. Sufficient is given to them for the day. We see such disciples or novices with their begging bowls in the early forenoon hours in the streets of Rangoon or Mandalay. At times, devout laymen send, of their own accord, such cooked food to the monasteries for the phongys. When I visited at Rangoon, in the morning of 11th February 1922, the above-said monastery of Aletawyen, I had the pleasure

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. The custom among the Parsee priesthood, whereby the Návárs or the new initiates into priesthood are required to eat only during the day hours, between the sunrise and sunset. Even the priests who officiated in some higher Liturgical services, such as the Nirang-din, were required to eat only during these day hours. Even the drinking of water was prohibited during the night hours.

of seeing three phongys having a very sumptuous meal at about 11-30 a.m. The meal seemed to have come from a well-to-do man. It was made up of many dishes which the phongys had spread before them on the floor. They served themselves in their own plates with spoons. The phongys finished their meals with fruit and fine tea without milk and sugar. The quantity was more than enough for them, and I was told, that the remainder was to be partaken afterwards by the disciples and novices. They say, that at times, the Burmese, send for and feed the phongys on particular solemn occasions at their own houses.<sup>1</sup> The phongys are not only fed by the laymen but are also presented or supplied with various kinds of utensils. We saw in the above monastery some beautiful bowls which, we were told, were presented by devout Burmese on solemn occasions of commemoration in honour of the dead.

Food-begging is considered to be "the most conspicuous duty of the day" for the members of a monastery. Sir G. Scott thus speaks of the duty: "With the superior at their head, the whole brotherhood sets forth in Indian file to beg the daily food. The manner of walking is prescribed. They must walk down the middle of the street, through all the village or quarter of the town, slowly, with measured steps, looking neither to right nor to left, their hands clasped under the begging-bowl, and their eyes fixed on the ground 6 feet in front of them. No halt is made, except when some one comes out to pour an offering of rice or vegetables or fruit into the alms-bowl. No

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1 Cf. The feeding of Brahmins among the Hindus and that of Mobads among the Parsees. The feeding of Parsee priests is spoken of as *naniâ Khavâdvâ*, i.e., to feed the *naniâs*—*naniâs* being generally those priests who observe the *nân* (Sans. *Snân*) or *Bareshnûm* and officiate at the inner or higher liturgical services of the Fire-temple.

2 Cf. The similar custom in India among the Hindus and Parsees. Among the latter, such vessels are spoken of as *siâv nâ vâsan*, i.e. vessels accompanying the *siâv* or the suit of dress consecrated in honour of the dead.

word or look rewards the most generous giver. No thanks are needed, for it is the religious who confer the favour. The charitable gain merit according to their giving, and if the monks did not come, an opportunity of gaining merit towards a future existence would be lost. The begging round usually lasts for an hour or an hour and a half. Some of the more austere return after enough has been put into their *thabeik* to sustain life. Others go on so as to give the quickest possible opportunities of gaining merit to those plodding along the upward path. If their begging bowls are filled too soon, they empty them carefully at the side of the road. No merit is lost to the giver in this way. Their charity has been proved, and the dogs and birds of the air, who may be the human beings of future centuries, eat the offering" (p. 369).

The phongys eat food cooked by anybody, whether a phongy or a layman, whether a Buddhist or Christian, Mahomedan or Hindu, but they do not interdine, *i.e.*, dine with non phongys. They may go as guests to anybody's house, but, even when there, they must dine only between sunrise and midday. Even as guests, they do not dine on the same table with non-phongys or laymen.

In upper Burma, there are two *gaings* or classes of phongys, one Shwegyin *gaing* and other Thudama *gaing*. My informant Mg.<sup>1</sup> Po Lok of Pegu (Pension quarter) told me, that they were like the Roman Catholics and Protestants of Christianity. The former never smoke. They may chew betel nuts in the morning upto midday. The latter smoke and chew betel nuts during the whole of the day. The former do not carry umbrellas and do not put on slippers in the towns. The latter do not observe this restriction. Both these classes do not eat with each other but eat food cooked by each other. They may eat on the same table.

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<sup>1</sup> Mg. is the contracted form of Maug and corresponds to M. (Monsier) of the French and Mr. of the English.

In Lower Burma also, there are two classes of Phongys like those of the upper Burma. One is known as Dwaya and the other as Kan. The Dwayas of Lower Burma correspond to the Shwegyin of upper Burma and the Kan to the Thudama gaing. Those of the Upper classes in both Burmas, viz., the Shwegyin and the Dwaya, when they go to the houses of laymen, do not pray together with the Phongys of the other classes—the Thudama gaing and the Kan, whom they consider to be somewhat inferior.

Like the Pater noster of the Christians or the Ahunavar of the Zoroastrians, they have a short prayer formula which is considered very sacred and often repeated. Mr. Po Lok thus rendered it for me :

“ I promise that I will not kill and I will keep that precept (or promise).

I promise that I will not steal and I will keep that precept.

I promise that I will not commit adultery and I will keep that precept.

I promise that I will not have any liquid or solid that is an intoxicant and I will keep that promise.”

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## A VISIT TO NASIK ON THE OPENING DAYS OF THE PRESENT SINHAST PILGRIMAGE.<sup>1</sup>

(Read on 27th. August, 1920.)

### I.

At times, I like to be in the midst of crowds, because crowds give us good opportunities of studying Human Nature and the different phases of

Introduction.

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<sup>1</sup> This paper was unavoidably kept back from publication at the proper time.