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Box 08, Folder 08 - (Indian Twilight?) "Buddhism" (E.M.S.) (Final and Draft)

Edwin Mortimer Standing

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My dear Everybody,

I am sending this last letter in the form of a sort of essay - because it sums up a lot of the discussions I have had with various persons out here since coming to India. In fact one of the reasons why I came out here, in the first place, was because I was so interested in Indian philosophy and the idea of Re-incarnation, and here are my findings.

CHRISTIAN HEAVEN AND BUDDHIST NIRVANA COMPARED

I have been meditating a great deal lately on this ever present theory of re-incarnation. In fact if one lives out here one can not avoid it; it is a part of the very air we breath. That, after you are dead, you should come back again, either as another person or perhaps as an animal, is something which is taken for-granted by practically everybody in India - except the Mahommedans. It does not seem to occur to one person in a thousand; nor does it ever seem to strike people as possible that the whole idea is fake, - a huge omnipresent error. It rather reminds one of the way in which everybody in the Middle Ages, even the most intellegent people like Dante and St. Thomas Aquinas all believed that the earth was flat, and that it was the center of the universe. Yet at the time and for many centuries nobody was conscious of this huge and universal error. So I think it is in India to-day. From their earliest years people grow up in it; and come to take it forgranted - like the atmosphere we breath and it becomes a part of their mental make up. This happens with even the most intelligent and practical like Ghandi and Nehru. Yet, as I hope to show, this doctrine of re-incarnation, which is at the back of this Buddhist idea of Norvana, is really an unformed assumption, a mere abstract speculation but a matter of supreme practical importance; for it affects the whole culture, civilization and social structure of Oriental life. In fact, when you live in the country you find yourself constantly coming up against unexpected

habits and traditions which can ultimately be traced down to this idea of metempsychosis, or re-incarnation. One even finds it begins to uncsciously to affect ones own way of thinking - as you might notice in those doggeral rhymes that come in letter - page . It will help to make the matter clearer if we compare the Christian point of view with that of the Buddhist or Hindu, for in doing so we shall find certain contrasts stand out ever more clearly. Let us begin by trying to find out what there is in common between the Eastern and Western philosophies. In the first place the Christian heaven and the Buddhist Nirvana both represent, generally speaking, a state of experience which have to do with the future. There are the ultimate destinations to which the individual soul aspires. They are places of rest and respose, where the "wicked cease from troubling and the weary are at rest", where all the difficulties, evils, sufferings, and difficulties of this life are done away with. About each state there is an element of finality: once having reached it we shall remain in it with no wish (and perhaps no possibility) to return

To come down to another point of similarity, and that a striking one, between the Eastern and the Western points of view. It is this, that the attainment of Heaven or the state of Nirvana is related to the manner in which we live and act in this present world. Indeed we might go so far as to say that it directly dependent on our actions here and now. The Gospel tells us that "as a man sows so shall he reap", and the Hindu doctrine of Karma is very similar in this respect. This teaching affirms that if your actions are good they will bring you good Karma (or results) in the next life and vice versa. Thus what ever your actions are they will rebound back to you through the working out of Karma. Let us suppose, for example, we have a man who in one of his behaved in an evil and cruel manner, like that of a crocodile, will, in the next life come back as a crocodile. Perhaps you may remember the passage in Shakespeares the Merchant of Venise, which bears

on this point: it comes in the famous Court Scene.

Gratiano says to Shylock:-

"Thou almost makes me waver in my faith,
To hold opinion with Phtheg as,
That souls of animals infuse themselves
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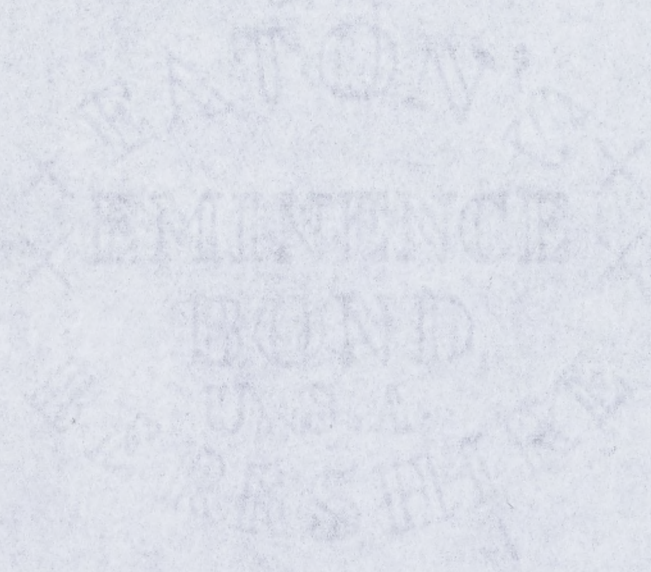
In the Christian view the whole question is much simpler, for as the Bible tells us "Man is born to live and die once and after comes the judgement". We are left in no doubt about the judgment coming: it is made clear by Christ in his teachings and in a number of his parables. At the end of the world, for instance the goat will be separated from the sheep; in the parable of the fishing net the angels will come at the end of the world and separate the good fish from the bad, and the latter will be thrown away.

The theory of re-incarnation appeals to many persons and this applies to numbers of Europeans as well as Orientals because it seems to explain and justify the vastly different circumstances into which people are born, as they come into this world. It would seem to explain for example this baby should be born and brought up in a good cultured family in a well organized enviorment, and that in the slums of a grea city, or this other born a cripple. The Hindu would say this was because he was receiving in this new life what he had merited in the life which had gone on before.

Incidentally, it is rather interesting to note that some of the Jews at the time of Christ seemed to have believed in re-incarnation. For on one occasion, when Christ and his diciples were passing a beggar who was born blind one of the diciples put the question to Our Lord, "Why was this man born blind, on account of his own sins They must have been committed in a former life. But Our Lord did not accept either one or the other suggestion and replied "Neither, but that the glory of God should be made manifest". And thereupon proceeded to heal the unfortunate beggar.

Christianity admits that the misfortunes and sufferings that beset us in this life in general are often the result of someones sins, even if it is only Adams Original Sin.

~~Christianity maintains, on the one hand that the sins of one person or a group of persons can have a devastating effect on the lives of others, it no less clearly affirms that the good actions of persons or groups of persons can have a beneficial effect on the lives of others. In the Hindu religion, with its ridged working out of the Law of Karma leaves no room - in spite of appearances to the contrary for this inter-relation between the destinies of individuals or groups.~~



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Handwritten notes at the bottom of the page, including "But it is also" and "founded".

Has Practical Repercussions Heading
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Christian View Sample (Heading)

inset

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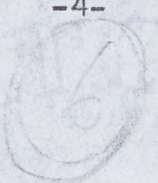
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But though Christianity admits this it no less clearly affirms that the good actions of others can have a beneficial effect on ones life. In the Hindu religion on the other hand with its rigid working out of the Law of Karma in each individual life there is no room left - in spite of appearances to the contrary - for any such inter-relationship between the destinies of individuals or groups. *To this point we shall return later.*