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AN EXPOSITION OF SOME BUDDHIST TEACHINGS ON NIRVANA

(CHIEFLY FROM THE MAHAYANA TEACHINGS)

The ultimate and highest Goal to which Buddhism leads is Nirvana, the full attainment of perfection.

Literally the word means "a blowing out as of a flame," or an extinguishing, and from this literal meaning there has grown up in the minds of many a false conception that Nirvana is annihilation, negation, or nothingness.

The truth behind this conception is to be found when one realizes exactly what is to be destroyed in the achievement of this exalted state. It is the annihilation and removal by sublimation or transmutation of anger, ill-will, passionate attachments to earthly pleasures, and the dullness and self-delusions of ignorance. These, in the attainment of Nirvana, must be utterly eradicated, necessitating a fortitude and perseverance of almost superhuman greatness.

The doctrine of Nirvana is closely associated with the condition of Samsara, from which it brings liberation. Samsara signifies the Ocean or Sea of Generation, the waters of transiency, of birth and death, and it is from this condition that an understanding and practice of the doctrine of Nirvana liberates by the destruction of the cause of bondage.

Samsara is termed unreal because it is perpetually changing. It is always becoming but never is. It typifies the continual agitation and mutation that pertain to all materiality. Samsara embraces the entire material world and all things possessing form and sense.

The doctrine of Nirvana did not originate in Buddhism, but was derived from Brahmanism, in which it is termed *Mukti* or *Moksha*. As a Goal to be achieved and won it has analogies in

many other systems: it is closely akin to union with TAO, and Christians designate it the Kingdom of Heaven, the peace that passeth understanding; for the Goal is one, though it has many names, and the paths leading to it are innumerable.

Throughout Buddhistic writings, as indeed in all sound teachings regarding Spiritual Realities, frequent use is made of analogy and paradox. It is impossible for mystical truths to be expressed literally, for language is inadequate for this purpose and can only represent them symbolically. By meditation and contemplation, however, it is possible to gain an understanding of the inner meaning which is thus symbolized.

This is important, for the whole subject of Nirvana is necessarily abstruse, although much of it is also simple in its practical application.

Nagarjuna, called by the Chinese Lung-Shu, the fourteenth Buddhist Patriarch and the author of the *Hundred Discourses*, which is one of the most profound of the Buddhist Sutras, writes in an illuminating manner concerning Nirvana. He affirms that it is "that which is neither destroyed nor attained, it is neither a thing destroyed nor a thing eternal, it is neither suppressed nor does it arise." He also states that it is realized only when all attempts at particularization cease, and that it is the avoidance of all imagination.

Nagarjuna further says: "Nirvana is beyond the limits of existence and non-existence. A being fancies that something exists and that Nirvana is the end of it, while in fact that something does not exist and therefore there can be neither its continuance nor its extinction. Nirvana really consists in the avoidance of the conception that something exists."

And again: "All manifested things have a cause and a condition, but Nirvana, in which birth and death have ceased, is uncaused and unconditioned and hence is not produced. Existence or non-existence cannot be predicated of what is not produced; so Nirvana is neither existence nor non-existence.

"Buddha said that desire for both existence and non-existence should be given up, but he did not say that desire for Nirvana should be given up. If Nirvana has the nature of existence or non-existence, then, according to Buddha, it must be given up; so existence and non-existence cannot be predicated of Nirvana."

Desire for Nirvana is the one desire that should not be given

up, and such is its mysterious and all-comprehensive nature, that to attain it is to achieve the goal of all desire.

Relating the innermost to the outermost Nagarjuna says: "Samsara is in no way to be distinguished from Nirvana; Nirvana is in no way to be distinguished from Samsara."

Suzuki writes: "Nirvana is not the annihilation of life but its enlightenment, it is not the nullification of human passions and aspirations, but their purification and ennoblement."

Buddhagosa defines Nirvana as: "Truth transcendental, difficult to be seen, without decay, eternal, indescribable, immortal, happy, peaceful, wonderful, holy, pure and an island of refuge."

Again in the *Visuddhimagga* he writes: "Nirvana brings peace of mind, has the taste of imperishableness and solace, and brings out a state of mind which is inexpressible, and in which differentiations disappear."

Nirvana is infinite, unborn, undecaying, a self-subsisting eternal unity. It is unindividualized, and in it all separation ceases. Yet by following the Noble Eightfold Path, a determined and selfless individual may attain it.

The only human beings who are not restricted by some form of delusion are those who have come to realize that to the fully enlightened consciousness Samsara is identical with Nirvana, that there is no real separation between the Self and the Dharmakaya, the Ultimate Reality, that Nirvana is a state beyond all external predicates, in which the knower and the known are one.

From the foregoing considerations it will be readily recognized that the realization of Nirvana is not easy, nor is it within the grasp of the intellectual weakling, the devotionally inert, or those lacking in volitional energy.

It is the steep ascent of the trained mind, or of a mind prepared to train itself in the necessary disciplines; it is a pathway of overflowing love for all men and their Divine Source; not an uncontrolled emotionalism, but a steady unquenchable flame burning in the heart; it is a way necessitating dauntless courage where perseverance and determination are tested to the utmost and where only the human will which finds its true freedom in the Divine Will can ultimately reach its Goal.

Nirvana is not to be gained necessarily by retirement from the world and the practice of rigid austerities, nor by the turning to an unnatural asceticism. The world of Samsara, with its mani-

fold impermanent beauties, is to be recognized for what it is, so that the devotee may live in the "whirlpool of birth and death" and yet be unmoved by its continual change. Though his body may live in this world, yet he is himself above it, looking down upon it from the vantage-point of an enlightened mind.

In his efforts to attain, the Bhikshu must understand the nature of the causes through which he has become bound to Samsara, as well as the means by which he may gain liberation.

The vehicles of the self for contacting, cognizing, and operating in the manifested world are called Skandhas or aggregates; they are the elements or attributes of man's finite nature, and though in themselves they are good and necessary they constitute, for those dominated by them, the five fetters of manifestation which must be removed before the higher stages of progress can even begin; but they are not to be neglected or considered valueless, since by learning to control and use them for their right purpose man rises above their limitations.

The first of the Skandhas is *Rupa*, which is form or body, the material basis of the personality and the organs of sense.

The second Skandha is *Vedana* or sensation which results from the contact of the senses with the external world.

The third Skandha is *Samjna*, which is sense-perception and the image-making faculty; it is the means by which the images of particular objects may be formed and their characteristic qualities cognized.

The fourth Skandha is *Samkara*, which has reference to the lower aspect of the mind, actions, or deeds. By it all conscious activities may be modified so that they conform either to natural, human, or supernatural laws, according to individual disposition and capacity.

The fifth and last of the Skandhas is *Vijnana*, which is the power to know, or mentality. This being the highest is most important of all. It can be considered as including in terms of itself all the gnostic powers.

When, however, *Vijnana* is used solely for gaining knowledge of external things for their own sake, it results in a barren intellectualism and becomes the source of the greatest bondage. The insatiable desires of the restless mind continually forge fresh links which chain the self to the ever-revolving wheel of mundane life.

The cause through which the self becomes bound through the Skandhas to Samsara is called Karma or action, the law of cause and effect. Every effect must have a cause which determines its nature. All thoughts, desires, and actions are causal and, when directed towards that which is transient and particular, bind to Samsara; when, however, they are directed towards the Ideal, Eternal and Noumenal they lead to the realization of Nirvana.

The wheel of life carries with it the karmic destiny resulting from all previous thoughts and acts, and even as the potter's wheel continues to revolve for a little time after the vase is finished, so past Karma is not immediately worked out in its exterior form even when some measure of achievement has been accomplished. It is the mind which frees. As is written in the Lankavatara Sutra: "Those who do not understand the teachings of the Tathagatas of the past, present, and future, concerning the external world, which is of Mind Itself, cling to the notion that there is a world outside what is seen of the Mind, and go on rolling themselves along the wheel of birth and death."*

Man is essentially free, but he is not consciously so until he attains and applies the knowledge which liberates him. True freedom is first glimpsed when the mind of man turns to unite itself with Divine Mind; when it is no longer directed exclusively towards those things which change and pass. Rooted in the changeless, man is no longer bound to the wheel of birth and death, and as he progresses his acts become more and more super-karmic and thus the obstacles to his attainment of Nirvana are gradually removed.

The attainment of Nirvana may be accomplished through the following of the Noble Eightfold Path, the formulation of which is attributed to Buddha himself. It is the Path which leads to Enlightenment Supreme. It aims at a complete though gradual transformation of character through the formation of ordinate habits of thought, desire, and action on every plane.

The order in which the steps on the path are enumerated differs slightly in various presentations, and they may also vary in the order in which they are taken in life; but all are important and none of them may be neglected. All must be taken before the Goal can be won.

* Suzuki's translation, p. 55.

1. Right Knowledge or *Samyagdrichti* is the first step on the Noble Eightfold Path. It is the ability or capacity to discern truth: the beginning from which all the subsequent steps have their origin. Buddha, recognizing the need for right knowledge as a guide to all activities, placed it at the very outset as the most essential requisite.

Without it none of the Skandhas can be properly controlled, nor can any of the activities of life be intelligently performed.

2. Right Aims and Aspirations or *Samyaksamkalpa* is the second step on the Noble Eightfold Path. It has especially to do with the choice of actions, the determination of thoughts and their purity. One of the characters used by Chinese Buddhists in the name of this second step signifies, in its original connotation, the flight of the mind.

Acts are first present in the consciousness as desires or aspirations, and thought must precede all intelligent operations; Buddhism therefore recognizes the great importance of aspiration, especially when turned towards benevolence, kindness, and the universal love of mankind.

3. Right Speech or *Samyagvak* is the third step on the Noble Eightfold Path. It is the abstinence from the four evils of the tongue: lying, slander, abuse, and idle gossip. These should have no place in the life of the Bhikshu who seeks perfection, and should be replaced by their opposites: unvarying truth, just praise, words of kindness, and silence unless something may be said which is better than silence.

4. Right Actions, or Conduct, or *Samyagvyayama* is the fourth step on the Noble Eightfold Path. It has to do with the observance of the Five Precepts of Buddha: to refrain from taking life, stealing, impurity, lying, and the use of intoxicants; as well as with the moral life generally.

In Chinese Buddhism stress is laid on the creative aspect of this step. The characters which designate it signify Right Essential Advancement, or the growth of the germ, as especially applied to the spiritual life of the devotee.

5. Right Vocation or *Samyagadjiva* is the fifth step on the Noble Eightfold Path. It is concerned with the correct work or right means of gaining the livelihood.

The Buddhist Bhikshus and Monks who have taken the vow of poverty are often required by the regulations of their Order

to beg for their food; they explain that this makes it possible for others to perform the valuable and beneficial act of giving. The vocations of men, according to the Buddhist Canon, should preclude those which are harmful, but those vocations are considered most worthy which confer the greatest blessings upon the whole human race, and of these the religious life and the attainment of Nirvana are placed first, since by Buddhahood all men are everlastingly blessed.

6. Right Endeavour or Effort or *Samyakkarmanta* is the sixth step on the Noble Eightfold Path. It is especially concerned with the right ordering of life in conformity with Dharma, the Divine Law, with the practice of honesty and virtue, and with the observance of perfect purity. Right Effort contains also the teachings of the Six Paramitas or virtues of perfection: (1) *Dana*—charity; (2) *Sila*—morality; (3) *Kchanti*—patience; (4) *Virya*—zeal; (5) *Dhyana*—concentration; and (6) *Pradjna*—wisdom.

7. Right Thought or Meditation or *Samyaksamriti* is the seventh step on the Noble Eightfold Path. Much of the Buddhistic training concentrates upon this step and it is considered of the most vital importance. Bhikshus, who are attached to the life of the senses and inordinately attracted by the beauty of material things, are set the task of meditating upon the body in death, following all the stages of its decay and dissolution, and by dwelling in the Real, disassociating themselves from that which changes. For those who are further advanced in the art there are meditations upon the impermanence of Samsara and the personal self, the ideal state of Nirvana, and the virtues to be acquired from its realization.

8. Right Contemplation, Ecstasy or Rapture or *Samyaksamadhi* is the eighth and last step on the Noble Eightfold Path. It implies the mastery of abstract contemplation and tranquillity. The seventh stage is more especially concerned with the activities of the reasoning mind, but in this eighth stage all processes of thought are overpassed. This does not mean the cessation of consciousness, for the mind here attains its most intense activity through an unalloyed singleness of purpose.

The four exalted mental states called *Samadhi* or *Dhyana* are generally placed under this eighth step on the Noble Eightfold Path as its subdivisions. They correspond not only to the four *Arupa* or Formless Heavens, but also to the four aspects of

Nirvana itself, to which they may lead. Devotees are, however, warned that they must not drink too deeply of the bliss of Samadhi and become engulfed in it and thus fail to pass on to the ultimate attainment of Nirvana and Buddhahood.

I. The First State is that in which the mind turns inward towards its own innate purity. It is accompanied by a sacred serenity and perfect peace. The attachments to the five Skandhas are removed: inordinate desires are dead. It is characterized by poise and is entirely devoid of restlessness. It is superspatial.

II. The Second State is one of self-abnegation. The mind freed from external sensations and the distractions of multiplicity dwells within its own unity, and from this centre achieves boundless cognition.

III. The Third State is that of complete dominance over objective existence and all things subject to time and space. The consciousness is crystal clear. It is a state of superexistence.

IV. The Fourth State is that which transcends both pleasure and pain, perceiving both to be unreal. With this pure insight the devotee dwells above all pairs of opposites, comprehending them in their causes. Thus the consciousness becomes, paradoxically, sorrowless and joyless, for sorrow and joy as separate states are neither absent nor present in the mind which is perfectly serene.

Advantageous as may be the study of methods of attainment, their most vital value is obviously in the endeavour to put them into actual practice in daily life.

In *The Questions of King Milinda** is recorded a very helpful and suggestive description of Nirvana: "And therewith does the mind of the devotee leap forward into that state in which there is no becoming, and then has he found peace, then does he exalt and rejoice at the thought 'A refuge have I found at last!' And he strives with might and main along that path, searches it out, accustoms himself thoroughly to it; to that end does he make firm his self-possession, to that end does he hold fast in effort, to that end does he remain steadfast in love towards all beings in all the worlds; and still to that does he direct his mind again and again, until, rising far above all that is transitory, he gains the Real. And when he has gained that, the man who has ordered his life aright has realized Nirvana."

* "Sacred Books of the East."

Of all the Goals that men have set before themselves Nirvana—and that which corresponds to it in other systems—is the most inclusive. It is bliss without a vestige of pain; it is the abode of the most perfect purity, in it all desires are completely satisfied in the Ideal, for transmutation is complete; it is eternal, and those who come to know it are no longer restricted by any bondage: in their selfless service they achieve Buddha Consciousness.

While it is true that there is only one Nirvana, it may be said to have four aspects.

1. *Ultimate Nirvana*. This is the pure original aspect of Nirvana as the Dharmakaya, the Ultimate Reality. It is perfect and immaculate. It embraces all and yet is unitive. It is immanent within all human beings and is therefore the guarantee of the ultimate attainment of all.

Only a Buddha may fully comprehend its transcendent reality.

2. *Upadhivesa Nirvana* is that aspect which is said to have remains or residue. Those who have attained it, although still susceptible to birth and death and under the restrictions of Karma, or the bondage of previous acts, are freed from egoistic desires and ambitions and from emotional and mental restrictions. It is said to be attainable during this lifetime on earth.

3. *Anupadhivesa Nirvana* is that aspect which is said to have no residue. It is the complete and perfect release from the restrictions of birth and death. In those who have attained it the roots and aspects of Karma have been entirely destroyed; they have become united in the Dharmakaya and participate in its bliss.

4. *Apratishbitha Nirvana* is that aspect or state which is said to have no abode, "like the mystical circle with its centre everywhere and its circumference nowhere." The Enlightened Ones who have reached this state do not rest in the bliss of their own attainments but devote themselves everlastingly to the upliftment of their fellows. They are all-knowing and all-loving, being free from the lower dualism of love and hate, for egoism and ignorance have been utterly annihilated. Karmic seeds of defilement are no longer sown but each thought and act is a benediction. It is a freedom from birth and death wherein the self may yet voluntarily return to apparent bondage for the good of humanity. It is union with the Ultimate Reality.

This last aspect, being the highest, includes all others, and

from it the comprehensiveness, depth, and sublimity of the Mystical Doctrine of Nirvana may be seen.

It is not simply the annihilation of sorrow and pain, nor the escape from the limitations of Samsara, neither is it merely the attainment of a state of bliss unaffected by the turmoil and imperfections of the ocean of transiency.

It is all these but also much more, for it represents the state of Perfection realized in its essential nature and manifested in the universal love and service of all beings.

BUDDHIST JEWELS

FROM THE DHAMMAPADA

These wise people, meditative, persevering, ever full of strength, attain to Nirvana, the highest bliss.

v. 23.

There is no fire like lust, there is no sin like hate, there is no misery like (attachment to) the skandhas, there is no happiness like peace. Desire is the worst disease, the samskaras (inordinate dispositions) the worst suffering: knowing this as it really is, leads to Nirvana, the highest bliss.

vv. 202, 203.

There is no meditation without wisdom, no wisdom without meditation; he who has both wisdom and meditation is near to Nirvana.

v. 372.

The wise man, practising the Precepts, seeing the power of this truth, should immediately begin to travel the Path leading to Nirvana.

v. 289.

Behold now, brethren, I exhort you, Decay is inherent in all component things, but the Truth will remain for ever! Work out your salvation with diligence.

Last Words of Buddha.

RICHARD ROLLE

Richard Rolle, who lived during the first half of the fourteenth century, has a special significance in the history of mysticism in England, for he was the first among English mystics to commit his experiences and teachings to writing, and his English works are among the first original compositions and the first prose writings in mediaeval English.* His writings were spontaneous and outspoken, methodically systematized, and eminently practical, and of value to all who desired to live rightly. He was a reformer, and is considered to be the spiritual ancestor of Wycliffe; but, unlike him, Rolle remained within the Church and never departed from the letter or the spirit of its teachings.

The popularity of his works in his own day is shown by their comparatively wide distribution on the Continent as well as in England, and in this connection it must be remembered that he lived half a century before the invention of printing. His influence is also evident in the writings of the small group of his immediate successors in the second half of the fourteenth century, Walter Hilton, Juliana of Norwich, and the anonymous author of *The Cloud of Unknowing*.

Rolle's own works show the influence of the great mystics of the thirteenth century, especially that of St. Bernard of Clairvaux, Richard of St. Victor, and St. Bonaventura, who was the biographer of St. Francis of Assisi and the close friend of St. Thomas Aquinas.

At the beginning of the fourteenth century England, in common with other European countries, was passing through a period of great disorganization and suffering. She was at war with Scotland and with France, civil war was in progress, private feuds and general lawlessness were common, and the tyrannous extortion practised in order to raise revenues for the wars contributed to the natural consequences of widespread poverty, pestilence, and famine.

In the Church as a whole the conditions were no less deplorable: internal dissension, greed, and corruption prevailed, in

* Margery Kempe, an anchoress, wrote about 1290, but only a fragment of one of her works is extant.

spite of the efforts of many who were true to the spirit of the Church's teachings. The clergy resented the severe taxation levied by the Papal Legates, yet many in their turn exacted heavy dues from their people, gathered wealth, and neglected their flocks.

In the sphere of reform two main tendencies were apparent: on the one hand a breaking away from the authority of the Pope, and on the other an increased emphasis within the Church itself upon the need for the individual search after God, with an intensification of mysticism.

Before the time of Richard Rolle Latin had been the language of scholars, and French that of cultured society. Richard, who was both scholar and mystic, wrote partly in Latin, in a style that was very alliterative and rather obscure, and also in the English of his native district. The style of his English works in their original form is individual and arresting, having a natural rhythm, and the prose is interspersed with lyrics; but much of the beauty of rhyme and rhythm is lost when words now in disuse are replaced by their equivalents in modern speech.

Contemporary with him in other European countries were Eckhardt (1260-1329), Tauler (1300-61), Suso (1300-65), and the writer of the *Theologica Germanica* (written in 1350), in Germany; Ruysbroeck (1293-1381) in Belgium; Ramon Lull (1235-1315) in Majorca; and Angela di Foligno (1248-1309) and Jacopone da Tode (died in 1306) in Italy. St. Catherine of Siena was born a few years before Rolle's death.

An account of the chief events of his life is given in *The Office of St. Richard, Hermit*, composed in his memory in anticipation of his canonization. In some of his own early writings personal details are given which throw light upon his character and temperament, his difficulties, and the conditions in which he lived. He was born, probably about 1290, at Thornton-le-Dale in Yorkshire. His parents were worthy people, who, though poor, were "by their efforts" able to send him to school, where no doubt his ability attracted attention, for at the usual age, about thirteen, he was enabled to enter Oxford University under the patronage of Thomas Neville, a young man of noble family who afterwards became Archdeacon of Durham.

The university course extended over seven years. After the first three years a student was expected to attend the philosophical

and theological disputations for a year before himself taking part. At Oxford many foreign teachers, scholars, and students congregated as well as members of different religious orders, and a student would have ample opportunity for hearing all varieties of opinion, and for the study of the available writings on all subjects.

While Richard was at Oxford the warm-hearted Franciscan leader, Ockham, was giving out his teaching of Nominalism, which, although one-sided and extreme in many respects, yet emphasized the reality of the natural world and the value of experience, in opposition to the prevalent decadent scholasticism which had fallen far below the heights reached in the previous century by its two most brilliant exponents, St. Thomas Aquinas and Albertus Magnus.

The teaching of Ockham and his followers tended towards mysticism, for they held that the soul had a faculty adapted for the apprehension of spiritual reality as distinct from that required for the discussion of metaphysical subtleties. These theories may have influenced Rolle, who refers to himself as "modern," and consequently unacceptable to the authorities of the day.

The Office relates that Richard made great progress in his studies, but concentrated more upon theology than upon secular subjects. His writings show that he was familiar with the works of the Fathers and of the chief European mystical writers. From his own statements it is clear that he greatly disliked and distrusted the metaphysical quarrels and sophistical speculations of the schools, with their neglect of the essential principles of truth. He seems to have been impulsive and friendly by nature, and likely to join willingly in the pursuits of his fellows. In the *Fire of Love* he refers to his youthful days when he was "gladdened by worldly softness," and was "prospering unhappily."

In his nineteenth year he abruptly fled from university life and became a solitary. No immediate cause can be traced for this step, but according to *The Office*, "Considering that the time of mortal life is uncertain and its end greatly to be dreaded, especially by those who either give themselves to fleshly lusts, or only labour that they may acquire riches (and for these things devote themselves to guile and deceit, yet they deceive themselves most of all), by God's Grace he took thought betimes for himself, being mindful of his latter end, lest he should be caught in the

snare of sinners." And in the *Fire of Love* he tells of the Grace of God which "restrained the desire for mortal form, and turned it into a longing for a spiritual embrace, and lifting my soul from low things bore it to heaven, so that I might truly burn with desire for everlasting happiness." Suddenly returning home he entreated his sister, who dearly loved him, to bring to a wood near by two of her dresses, a grey and a white, and his father's old rain-hood. Taking these he cut out the sleeves from the grey and put it on over the white, then wearing the hood in the manner of a hermit he showed himself to his sister. In amazement she cried out loudly, "My brother is mad!" But he, alarmed lest others should come, ran off through the wood. Towards evening, coming to a church, he entered it to pray, and remained until Evensong, when the Lady of the Manor, entering for Vespers, found him, lost in prayer, kneeling in her place. She restrained her servants from rousing him, and after the service he was recognized by her sons who had known him at Oxford. Next morning he attended Matins, and having asked for the priest's blessing and for permission to preach, he exhorted the congregation with "such virtue and power that it moved them to tears." After Mass the Squire, John de Dalton, invited him to dinner, and Richard went to the Manor, but such was his humility and shyness that he would not at first enter the hall, but was found in a "mean and old room." After the meal he reluctantly admitted that he was the son of William Rolle, a loved and respected friend of John de Dalton. Finally, satisfied as to his firmness and sincerity of purpose, the Squire gave him clothing suitable for a hermit, and the use of a small room as a cell, where Richard lived for some years under his protection.

Although he had chosen the comparative freedom of a hermit's life with its self-imposed discipline, and no other obligations but those incumbent upon all good Christians, he lived in strict austerity and seclusion, giving himself to prayer and meditation. In the *Melum Contemplavorum* he refers to his sufferings of mind and body, the unjust criticisms and abuse of his detractors, his temptations and inner conflict; and he vigorously denounces the scandalous conditions which prevailed in the Church. His impetuous self-defence and condemnation of his slanderers, and his joyless struggle against an undue desire for the material things which surrounded him, are in strong contrast to the serenity and

self-abnegation of his later writings. He was impulsive, sensitive, uncompromising, and fearless, and he evidently had many enemies among those who did not understand his nature and purpose. Whilst living with the Daltons he must have met many different types of people, for the place was a halting-point for persons of authority on the way to and from Scotland. He probably also had access to most of the books then available. This was the penitential period of his life of which *The Office* says:

“He purchased here the heavenly life, he bore the torments of the flesh, he gave himself to penitence. Love he made the theme of his teaching, and heavenly discipline, turning his heart to a torch. He studies, reads, writes, and prays: by his deeds he wholly gives himself to God.”*

And from this time onwards he continued to write and teach.

It is not known when he left the Daltons, but a period of wandering followed. It may be of this time that he wrote in the words:

“Finally, dwelling among the rich, rotten rags hardly covered me, and in my nakedness I was annoyed with the bites of flies which no comfortable covering prevented from walking over me, and my skin became rough with ingrained dirt; and yet in warm weather I was tormented by the heat among men who were enjoying all the shade they desired, and my teeth shattered with the cold while they were indulging in rich adornments and superfluities; although nevertheless they loved not the Giver of these things.”

Yet as a result of such experiences he could exclaim:

“I give glad praise to my Lawgiver, and with joy, without sadness or langour, I lift up my soul to the Light because now I have no power at all; nor have I anything which I receive except what others beg for the poor; and I do not get food when I want, but as men are willing to give it to me. I am not ashamed to be abased by the powerful.”

He never recommended abstinence for its own sake. In the *Emendatione Vitae* he writes:

“Truly abstinence by itself is not holiness, but if it be discreet it helps us to be holy. If it be indiscreet it hinders holiness because it

* The quotations from the Latin works are from the translations of Richard Misyn (made 1434-36), and amended by F. M. Comper, as also are most of the quotations from the English works.

destroys discipline, without which virtues are turned to vice. If a man would be singular in abstinence he ought to eschew the sight of men and their praising, that he be not proud for nought and so lose all."

Again he writes :

"It behoves him truly to be strong that will manfully use the love of God. The flesh being enfeebled with great disease oft-times a man cannot pray, and then so much the less can he lift himself to high things with hot desire."

He was not dismayed by his slanderers, but turned their actions to his own benefit.

"This have I known, that the more men have raved against me with words of backbiting, so much the more I have grown in spiritual profit. Forsooth the worst backbiters I have had were those whom I trusted before as faithful friends. Yet I ceased not for their words from those things that were profitable for my soul; truly I used more study, and ever found God more favourable."

Between 1320 and 1326 he is recorded as a student at the Sorbonne in Paris, where he may have taken the degree of Doctor of Divinity. During this period he probably lived the life of a hermit as far as possible. About two years and eight months after his "conversion" he experienced the first consciousness of the Divine Touch, and this he refers to as the

"opening of the heavenly door, so that the Face being shown, the eyes of the heart might behold and see by what way they must seek my Love and unto Him continually desire."

Then he continues :

"The door yet biding open, nearly a year passed until the time in which the heat of everlasting Love was verily felt in my heart."

To that period of the "open door" Rolle's description of the aspiring soul seems to apply :

"He that desires to love Christ truly, not only with heaviness, but with a joy unmeasured, he casts away all things that may hinder him. Whatever he can do seems little to him so that he may love God. He flees from vices and looks not to worldly solace, but surely and wholly directed to God, he has nearly forgotten his sensuality. He is gathered all inward and lifted up into Christ so that when he seems to men as if heavy he is wonderfully glad."

And to this condition the lyric refers which begins:

“In Love wound Thou my thought
 And lift my heart to Thee.
 My soul Thou dear hast bought;
 Thy lover make it be.
 Thee I covet,
 This world nought,
 And from it I flee.
 Thou art That I have sought:
 Thy face when may I see?”

Of the first experiences of the Heat or Fire of Love, and of the Spiritual Song, he writes:

“I was sitting forsooth in a chapel, and while greatly delighted with the sweetness of prayer or meditation suddenly I felt within me a merry and unknown heat. But first I wavered, for a long time doubting what it could be. I was sure that it was not from a creature but from my Maker, because I found it grow hotter and more glad.

“Truly in this unhopd-for and sweet-smelling heat half a year, three months, and some weeks have outrun until the inshedding and receiving of the heavenly and spiritual sound, the which belongs to the songs of everlasting praise and the sweetness of unseen melody; because it may not be known or heard but of him who receives it, when it behoves to be liberated from earth.

“Whiles truly I sat in this same chapel, and in the night, before supper, as I could I sang psalms, I beheld above me the sound, as it were, of readers, or rather singers. Whilst also I took heed, praying to heaven with my whole desire, suddenly, I wot not in what manner, I felt in me the sound of song, and received the most liking heavenly melody which dwelt with me in my mind. For my thought was forsooth changed to a continual song of mirth, and I had, as it were, praises in my meditation, and in my prayers and psalms-saying I uttered the same sound: and henceforth for plenteousness of inward sweetness I burst out singing what before I said, but forsooth privily, because alone with my Maker.

“Continually with joy I give thanks because He has made my soul in clearness of conscience like to singers clearly burning in endless love.

“And whilst she loves and seethes in burning, the changed mind, resting, and being warmed by heat, and greatly enlarged by desire and the true beauty of lovely virtue, blossoms without vice or strife in the sight of our Maker.

“Behold, Brethren, I have told you how I came to the burning of Love, not that ye should praise me, but that ye should glorify my God of Whom I received every good deed I had; and that ye, thinking that all things under the sun are vanity, may be stirred to follow, not to backbite.”

There were many, however, who did not understand the nature of that hidden and silent fount of song which made Richard unwilling to listen to outward music, and who taunted and criticized him, demanding that he should sing in the masses as others did. But, says he:

“I let them speak, and did that which was to do after the estate in which God had set me.”

After this time he wrote less about himself, and only referred to his own experiences in order to encourage his disciples in love and perseverance. His deep realization of the needs of ordinary men and women led him to write certain practical treatises in English, and to make translations in which he tried to keep as close to the spirit and meaning of the original as possible. In the introduction to his English Psalter he writes:

“In this work I seek no strange English, but the simplest and most common, and such as is most like to the Latin, so that those who know no Latin may through the English come to know many Latin words. In the translation I follow the letter as much as I may, and where I can find no English equivalent I follow the meaning of the words so that those who read it need not fear error. In expounding I follow holy doctors, for it may come into some envious man’s hand who, speaking in ignorance, will say that I knew not what I was saying, and so do harm to himself and others if he despise a work which is profitable to him and to others.”

Rolle did not exclusively follow the solitary and contemplative life, but sometimes moved from place to place, taking shelter where it was offered, and teaching, healing, and assisting those who sought him. He was adviser to many in religious orders, and also to other hermits. The last years of his life were spent at Hampole, where he continued to write, and also acted as counsellor to the Cistercian nuns and to certain recluses, for one of whom, Margaret of Kirkby, he translated the Psalter into English with a commentary, and also wrote the *Form of Living*. For another nun he wrote *The Commandment of Love to God*.

In 1349 the whole of Yorkshire was devastated by the plague, and it is supposed that Richard died at this time. *The Office* gives a statement of his death, but no details. It closes with a record of the miracles done by him during his life, and those which

were connected with his name and place of burial after his death.

His chief Latin works include the *Canticum Amoris* (Song of Love), *Judica Me Deus* (Judge me O God), *Melum Contemplavorum Ardentium in Amore Dei* (Song of the Contemplatives burning in the Love of God), *Regula Hermitarum* (Rules for Hermits), *Liber de Amore Dei contra Amatoris Mundi* (The Book of the Love of God in answer to the Lover of the World), *Incendium Amoris* (The Fire of Love), *Emendatio Vitae* (The Amending of Life), and also expositions of the Creed, the Athanasian Symbol, and the Paternoster for the Laity, Instructions for priests on the hearing of confessions, and scriptural commentaries, including one on the Psalter written for scholars rather than for the unlearned, and based on the Commentary of St. Augustine.

His English works are, *The Form of Living*, *The Commandment of Love to God*, *Meditation on the Passion of Our Lord* (based on his translation of Bonaventura's *De Mysteriis Passionis*), *Commentary on the Psalter*, and certain tracts and short prose pieces of which one of the most beautiful is usually named the *Ego Dormio*, after the words, "I sleep, but my heart waketh."

The teachings of Richard Rolle are in general directed towards the art of right living, and he presents in order the sequence of stages in the mystical ascent, the summit of which is the contemplation of God. In the *Fire of Love* he tells of his longing that others might share in the sweetness of Divine Love, and explains his aim in the words:

"I offer this book not to philosophers nor wise men of this world, nor to great divines lapped in infinite questions, but unto the simple and untaught, more busy to learn to love God than to know many things; for truly not disputing but working is to be known and loved. For I trow these things here contained may not be understood of these questionaries, in all science most high in wisdom, but in the Love of God most low.

"And since I here stir all manner of folk to love, and am busy to show the hottest and supernatural desire of Love, this book shall bear the name *Burning of Love*."

He begins by pointing out that God and the things of heaven are most greatly to be loved, and that the first step towards this love is to turn from "all love of earthly things that ends not in God." But none can expect to reach suddenly the height of

devotion which, when attained, is an eternal heritage. As he writes of this "sweetness which shall not waste" he breaks into song :

"O honey-sweet Heat, than all delight sweeter, than all riches more delectable,
 O my God! O my Love! into me glide, with Thy Charity pierced, with Thy Beauty wounded."

And again :

"Hail, therefore, O lovely Everlasting Love, that raisest us from these low things and presentest us with so frequent ravishings to the sight of God's Majesty! Come unto me, my Beloved! All that I had I gave for Thee, and all that I should have for Thee I have forsaken that Thou in my soul mightest have a mansion for to comfort it. . . . So grant me grace to love Thee and in Thee to rest, that in Thy Kingdom I may be worthy for to see Thee without end."

He shows the danger of pride and the way of humility :

"No man should dare to presume nor raise himself up by pride when he is despised to his reproach nor when insults are cast at him; nor defend himself, nor for ill words give ill again; but all things, praise as well as reproof, bear evenly.

"Truly, he who is stirred with busy love and is continually with Jesu in thought, full soon perceives his own faults, the which correcting, henceforward he is wary of them. . . . Be our souls therefore strong in the taking of hard labours for God."

He considered that the truths of Christianity should be cherished with understanding, and accordingly he discusses the chief dogmas of the faith, as, for example, the nature of the Holy Trinity; but he discourages unprofitable speculation.

"He truly knows God perfectly that feels Him incomprehensible and unable to be known. . . . In this present life we know in part and we understand in part."

But the perfect knowledge of God is paradoxically both possible and impossible, and he continues :

"Also it is to be praised to know God perfectly; that is to say, He being unable to be fully conceived, knowing Him to love Him, loving Him to sing in Him, singing to rest in Him, and by inward rest to come to endless rest."

He recommends the avoidance of excess :

“The holy lover of God shows himself neither too merry nor full heavy in this habitation of exile, but he has cheerfulness with ripeness. . . . Have mind also that in all discomforts and poverty thou never grumble nor speak foolishly nor frowardly, but in all things give thanks to God. Thereby truly shalt thou be lifted up more joyfully to the kingdom of the saints.”

In writing of the importance of prayer and meditation he frequently breaks out into prayer, as when he cries in humility and longing :

“O my God, to Whom I offer devotion without feigning, wilt Thou not think on me in Thy mercy? A wretch am I, therefore I need Thy Mercy.”

His meditations on the Love of Christ are mingled with songs of love. The whole book, indeed, is a great song of love.

The Amending of Life is a shorter work full of practical guidance expressed in simple terms. It is arranged in twelve sections which are subdivided where necessary, the whole forming a well-ordered sequence. He begins with the need for conversion, and after discussing the immediate results which follow from it, he deals with the cleansing and re-ordering of the life in thought, word, and deed, which is made possible by conformity with the Will of God. Thence he passes on to the consideration of prayer, meditation, and reading, which lead to a new life of purity, and a love which finds its consummation in the contemplation of God.

In the section on the Love of God his own burning devotion shows itself, as in the beautiful passage :

“O Love Everlasting, inflame my soul to love God, so that nothing may burn in me but His embraces. Shed Thyself into my soul. Come into my heart and fill it with Thy clearest sweetness. Drown my mind with the hot wine of Thy sweet Love, that forgetful of all ills and all scornful visions and imaginations, and having only Thee, I may be glad and rejoice in Jesu my God. . . . O sweet and true Joy, I pray Thee come! Come, O sweet and most desired! Come my Love That art all my comfort! Glide down into a soul longing for Thee and after Thee with sweet heat!”

Three degrees of love of Christ are described. The first is love *insuperable* which cannot be overcome by any other desire,

and to which all labour is light. The second is love *inseparable*, when the mind, kindled with great love, "cleaves to Christ with undeparted thought. Forsooth it suffers Him not to depart from the mind a minute." This love is also called *high* and *everlasting*. The third is *singular* love.

"It is one thing to be high and another to be alone; as it is one thing to be present, and another to have no fellow. . . . Therefore love ascends to the singular degree when nothing but Jesu may suffice it. In His desire she abides, after Him she sighs, in Him she burns, she rests in His warmth. Whatever the self offers her beside is straight-way cast back and suddenly despised if it serve not His desire, and accord not with His Will."

The Form of Living, written for Margaret of Kirkby, his disciple, is a methodical, straightforward treatise in twelve short chapters. It covers the same ground as *The Amendment of Life*, but deals more briefly with the preliminary stages of amendment, and at greater length with the contemplative life. Here is brought out the great importance and value which he attached to devotion to the Name of Jesus, and the same three stages of contemplation, with its three degrees of love, are described as in the longer treatise.

The lyrics, which suddenly flow forth in the midst of the prose as from a deep spring of love, are characteristic and self-revelatory. In *The Form of Living* he writes :

"A song of love that thou mayest in thy longing sing in thy heart to the Lord Jesus when thou desirest His coming and thy going.

"When wilt Thou come to comfort me and bring me out of care,
And give me Thee that I may see and have Thee evermare?
Thy Love is ever sweetest of all that ever were,
My heart when shall it burst for love, then languish nevermare?
For on Thy Love my mind is set, and hence would I fain fare.
I stand in the still dawning before Thy Loveliness;
In love-longing it draws me until my death-day,
This bond of sweet burning, for it holds me aye
From place and from pleasure, until that I may
Have sight of my Sweeting Who wends never away.
In Thy Wealth be our waking, without hurt of night;
My love is lasting, and longs for that sight."

Although he wrote much of the Love of God and the joys of the contemplative life, Rolle did not concentrate solely on the devotional side of mysticism to the neglect of the mind, nor did

he desire his followers to do so, and in his careful expositions of the Scripture, the Creed, and the Lord's Prayer, he trained them to understand the Church's teachings.

Notwithstanding his great and original genius and the unique work which he accomplished both in person and through his writings, in shaping the thought of the next generations, and reinstating the Love of Christ and the inner life of the soul in their right relation to humanity, he was ignored by contemporary religious leaders and scholars. There is no mention of his name in the annals of the time, and after a brief period of popularity his works sank into obscurity for many centuries. He had worked without thought of recognition, and though to some his life might have seemed a failure, yet he had realized the ideal of the saint, and his work, like all other dedicated and holy work, lives, and will continue to influence mankind.

JEWEL

The Absolute Beauty is the Divine Majesty endued with power and bounty. Every beauty and perfection manifested in the spheres of operation of the various grades of beings is a ray of His perfect beauty reflected therein. It is from these rays that exalted Souls have received their impress of beauty and their quality of perfection. Wherever intelligence is found it is the fruit of the Divine Intelligence. In a word, all are attributes of Deity which have descended from the zenith of the universal and absolute to the nadir of the particular and relative, to the end that thou mayest direct thy course from the part towards the Whole, and from the relative deduce the Absolute, and not imagine the part to be separate from the Whole, nor be so engrossed with what is merely relative as to cut thyself off from the Absolute.

—*Jami.*

SENTENCES OF BARDISM

Here are the Sentences of Bardism, from the Book of Ieuan, the son of Hywel Swrdwal.*

1. That does not but exist, from which a greater amount of good than of evil can be produced; since it cannot be otherwise in virtue of God's power, wisdom, and love.

2. The existence of that which does good to some, and does no harm to others, is safe; since there is more utility from it than if it had not existed; and God will not permit possible good to be lost.

3. Of that which is neither good nor bad, neither the existence nor non-existence is safe for man, for nothing in reason is known of it. Others say, that it is the material of everything. However, there is only God that knows its good and evil, its utility and inutility, and whether the good or evil be the greater.

4. Where a great good to all, without harm to any one, can be comprehended, it cannot be but that it is in existence, since otherwise the three principal attributes of God, namely, knowledge, wisdom, and mercy, would not stand without being opposed by distress and necessity: therefore Bardism is true.

5. Truth cannot be had from that in which every truth cannot consist, and which will not consist in every truth, for truth cannot be had from what will contradict or withstand that which is true.

6. It is true that, according to justice, there should be the best of all things.

7. It is true that, according to love, there should be the best of all things.

8. It is true that, according to power, there should be the best of all things.

9. It is true that, according to wisdom and knowledge, there should be the best of all things.

10. It is true that there cannot be in God other than all knowledge, all wisdom, all power, all love, and all justice, without restraint, without measure, without cessation, without end. Therefore, in respect of the power of God, it cannot but be that

* Ieuan ab Hywel Swrdwal was an eminent poet, who flourished from about 1450 to 1480.

the best of all things are in existence; and it cannot be otherwise in respect of His knowledge; and it cannot but be, in respect of His love, justice, and wisdom, that the best of all things are in existence.

11. It is true that God can accomplish the best of all things; on that account, it cannot but be that the best of all things are in existence.

12. According to justice, there should be ability in justice; therefore, in respect of justice there cannot but be that ability belongs to justice.

13. In respect of knowledge, there ought to be power in knowledge, and in knowing what is best; therefore there is power in knowing what is best.

14. According to love, there should be what is most merciful; therefore, by the love of God, what is most merciful is in existence in every essence.

15. God, in respect of His power, wisdom, knowledge, and love, can produce the best of all things, the most just of all things, and the most kind of all things; therefore, it cannot but be that the best of all things are in existence.

16. It cannot but be that the extreme limits of goodness, and of what is good, are in God; on that account, there cannot but be that the extreme of all goodness, and all that is good, is, and may be found, from God, and by God, through His infinite grace and love.

17. There cannot be a God that does not possess all power, all love, all wisdom, all knowledge, all justice, and all goodness. And it cannot but be that whatever those who possess these things do, is found to be without distress, without necessity.

And thus it ends.

SELECTIONS FROM THE SERMONS
TO THE NOVICES REGULAR

By THOMAS A KEMPIS

If you knew their least joy, you would fly to the things that please God, and would hasten to the choir where things divine and heavenly are discoursed by day and by night.

Never shall the servant of God possibly be overcome or weighed down by the toil of time who always bears in mind eternal goods.

When the heart of man is withdrawn from the sovereign good, it is driven hither and thither by various desires.

Our life and religion consist in daily combat, to struggle against bad habits, therefore it is not wonderful if sometimes we slip and are wounded, if lightly we offend and are offended in deeds of our own and others; we are men not angels: mortal and frail, exiles we are and pilgrims, inconstant, not yet perfect in grace or blessed in glory. This thought ought to, by our weakness, lead us to trust in the divine mercy and loving kindness without which we are unable to commence or accomplish anything, "For without Me ye can do nothing."

If thou fallest easily, take care to rise the more speedily.

Many after a grievous fall, repenting, quickly arose the stronger.

Our own weakness very greatly weighs us down, but the divine inspiration raises up them that faint and strengthens unto well-doing, and He lovingly disposes for our salvation that we may be able to bear whatever unexpected things befall us.

Peace and perfect repose are in Heaven, not on earth, for here all things are in movement and fear and frequent distress; therefore let each then patiently bear whatever God shall permit and thus he shall have peace; let him learn to suffer reproach and humbly crave pardon for all offences and God will freely forgive him all.

He who made us will not abandon us.

Who shall be able fully to ponder and fathom the abyss of the judgements of God upon the sons of men?

If we were truly humble and willing to balance strictly the weight of our sins, we should find nothing unbearable, we should say we scarcely received one for a thousand. For it behoved Christ to suffer, Who nevertheless did no sin, how much more us who daily in many things offend.

For God suffers many tribulations to fall for the cleansing of sins, for the increase of merits, for a greater warning, and for the strengthening of our weakness by the virtue of patience.

Call to mind in your tribulations the favours of God, and His wonderful works from the beginning of creation even to the consummation of the world.

If any inexperienced desire to have wisdom, let him turn himself to inner things, let him examine his shortcomings, let him search his conscience every day, lament his guilt, covet to possess nothing in this world, that he may have a heart ever free.

While little vices lie hid, the remedies should be applied in due time lest the thorns grow up and choke the seed.

If any man desire to restrain his heart from wandering let him take up a good meditation, not uplift himself in property, in adversity keep patience, and freely commit to God all things that are to come to him. Let him also specially ponder this, how he can possess union with God; who seeks a dwelling place in a reposeful heart. Let him say, "My eyes are ever towards the Lord," and as often as from some frailty or some need he be hindered from the Supreme Good let him begin afresh and speedily rise by prayer, repent that he neglected the Creator for the creature, to Whom according to his powers he ought to aspire with all his affections and constantly cleave.

The body receives pleasures from sweet odours and is refreshed by the remedy of food; but the soul is nourished, strengthened, and rejoiced by true virtues and holy meditations; but the more perfect the studies one pursues, and the more noble the masters one follows, the more clearly he learns and the more speedily he arrives at the summit of blessedness.

Blessed is he in whose heart the law of God reposes, whose steps within and without are ever directed in accordance with divine teaching.

Give heed, beloved brethren, to the presence of Christ in every place whithersoever ye gather together, whether to pray or to labour.

Carefully in every time and place walk in the sight of God.

Let us bear with ourselves patiently as all the saints who say, "We have passed through fire and water; and Thou hast brought us out into an everlasting refreshment."

If thou canst not praise worthily, do what thou canst, give what thou hast, for the pious intention will refresh thee until thou becomest more rich to render better service.

When rough winds arise let us not yield, but set our hands to the oars, let us seize our spiritual weapons, lift our saddened soul, begin anew, and strive to struggle much more strongly than we have done, for the harder the fight, the more glorious the crown, the more frequent the annoyance of the sufferer, the more praiseworthy the virtue of him that is patient.

Our peace and repose of a good life consist in much patience according to the life of Christ, and example of the Saints, and not in a long flight by waterless ways. To obey the divine commands is the most assured salvation of the soul; let us therefore not flee from the toils and hardships that arise, but let us stand firm, strive manfully, obey readily, pray frequently, toil diligently, keep silence willingly.

Let each set his soul to patience if he would have peace of heart.

When we seek the honour and glory of God, and render thanks to Him simply and wholly for all the good things bestowed upon us, then we rise above with the Angels of Heaven who at the birth of Christ sang glory to God in the highest.

SEED THOUGHT

As for knowledge, I bear her no grudge; I take joy in the pursuit of her. But the other things (Ideals) are great and shining. Oh, for Life to flow towards that which is beautiful, till man, through both light and darkness, should be at peace and reverent, and casting from him laws that are outside Justice, give glory to the Gods.

—Dante.