

Ananda the Miracle Worker

By Richard Garnett

The holy Buddha, Sakhya Muni, on dispatching his apostles to proclaim his religion throughout the peninsula of India, failed not to provide them with salutary precepts for their guidance. He exhorted them to meekness, to compassion, to abstemiousness, to zeal in the promulgation of his doctrine, and added an injunction never before or since prescribed by the founder of any religion—namely, on no account to perform any miracle.

It is further related, that whereas the apostles experienced considerable difficulty in complying with the other instructions of their master, and sometimes actually failed therein, the prohibition to work miracles was never once transgressed by any of them, save only the pious Ananda, the history of whose first year's apostolate is recorded as follows.

Ananda repaired to the kingdom of Magadha, and instructed the inhabitants diligently in the law of Buddha. His doctrine being acceptable, and his speech persuasive, the people hearkened to him willingly, and began to forsake the Brahmins whom they had previously revered as spiritual guides. Perceiving this, Ananda became elated in spirit, and one day he exclaimed:

“How blessed is the apostle who propagates truth by the efficacy of reason and virtuous example, combined with eloquence, rather than error by imposture and devil-mongering, like those miserable Brahmins!”

As he uttered this vainglorious speech, the mountain of his merits was diminished by sixteen yojanas, and virtue and efficacy departed from him, insomuch that when he next addressed the multitude, they first mocked, then hooted, and finally pelted him.

When matters had reached this pass, Ananda lifted his eyes and discerned a number of Brahmins of the lower sort, busy about a boy who lay in a fit upon the ground. They had long been applying exorcisms and other approved methods with scant success, when the most sagacious among them suggested:

“Let us render the body of this patient an uncomfortable residence for the demon; peradventure he will then cease to abide therein.”

They were accordingly engaged in branding the sufferer with hot irons, filling his nostrils with smoke, and otherwise to the best of their ability disquieting the intrusive devil. Ananda's first thought was, “The lad is in a fit”; the second, “It were a pious deed to deliver him from his tormentors”; the third, “By good management this may extricate me from my present uncomfortable predicament, and redound to the glory of the most holy Buddha.”

Yielding to this temptation, he strode forward, chased away the Brahmins with an air of authority, and, uplifting his countenance to heaven, recited the appellations of seven devils. No effect ensuing, he repeated seven more, and so continued until, the fit having passed off in the course of nature, the patient's paroxysms ceased, he opened his eyes, and Ananda restored him to his relatives. But the people cried loudly, “A miracle! a miracle!” and when Ananda resumed his instructions, they gave heed to him, and numbers embraced the religion of Buddha. Whereupon Ananda exulted, and applauded himself for his dexterity and presence of mind, and said to himself:

“Surely the end sanctifies the means.”

As he propounded this heresy, the eminence of his merits was reduced to the dimensions of a mole-hill, and he ceased to be of account in the eyes of any of the saints, save only of Buddha, whose compassion is inexhaustible.

The fame of his achievement, nevertheless, was bruited about the whole country, and soon reached the ears of the king, who sent for him, and inquired if he had actually expelled the demon.

Ananda replied in the affirmative.

"I am indeed rejoiced," returned the king, "as thou now will without doubt proceed to heal *my* son, who has lain in a trance for twenty-nine days.

"Alas! dread sovereign," modestly returned Ananda, "how should the merits which barely suffice to effect the cure of a miserable Pariah avail to restore the offspring of an Elephant among Kings?"

"By what process are these merits acquired?" demanded the monarch.

"By the exercise of penance," responded Ananda, "in virtue of which the austere devotee quells the winds, allays the waters, expostulates convincingly with tigers, carries the moon in his sleeve, and otherwise performs all acts and deeds appropriate to the character of a peripatetic thaumaturgist."

"This being so," answered the king, "thy inability to heal my son manifestly arises from defect of merit, and defect of merit from defect of penance. I will therefore consign thee to the charge of my Brahmins, that they may aid thee to fill up the measure of that which is lacking."

Ananda vainly strove to explain that the austerities to which he had referred were entirely of a spiritual and contemplative character. The Brahmins, enchanted to get a heretic into their clutches, immediately seized upon him, and conveyed him to one of their temples. They stripped him, and perceived with astonishment that not one single weal or scar was visible anywhere on his person. "Horror!" they exclaimed; "here is a man who expects to go to heaven in a whole skin!" To obviate this breach of etiquette, they laid him upon his face, and flagellated him until the obnoxious soundness of cuticle was entirely removed. They then departed promising to return next day and operate in a corresponding manner upon the anterior part of his person, after which, they jeeringly assured him, his merits would be in no respect less than those of the saintly Bhagiratha or of the regal Viswamitra himself.

Ananda lay half dead upon the floor of the temple when the sanctuary was illuminated by the apparition of a resplendent Glendoveer, who thus addressed him:

"Well, backsliding disciple, art thou yet convinced of thy folly?"

Ananda relished neither the imputation on his orthodoxy nor that on his wisdom. He replied, notwithstanding, with all meekness:

"Heaven forbid that I should repine at any variety of martyrdom that tends to the propagation of my master's faith."

"Wilt thou then first be healed, and moreover become the instrument of converting the entire realm of Magadha?"

"How shall this be accomplished?" demanded Ananda.

"By perseverance in the path of deceit and disobedience," returned the Glendoveer.

Ananda winced, but maintained silence in the expectation of more explicit directions.

"Know," pursued the spirit, "that the king's son will revive from his trance at the expiration of the thirtieth day, which takes place at noon to-morrow. Thou hast but to proceed at the fitting period to the couch whereon he is deposited, and, placing thy hand upon his heart, to command him to rise forthwith. His recovery will be ascribed to thy supernatural powers, and the

establishment of Buddha's religion will result. Before this it will be needful that I should perform an actual cure upon thy back, which is within the compass of my capacity. I only request thee to take notice, that thou wilt on this occasion be transgressing the precepts of thy master with thine eyes open. It is also meet to apprise thee that thy temporary extrication from thy present difficulties will only involve thee in others still more formidable."

"An incorporeal Glendoveer is no judge of the feelings of a flayed apostle," thought Ananda. "Heal me," he replied, "if thou canst, and reserve thy admonitions for a more convenient opportunity."

"So be it," returned the Glendoveer; and as he extended his hand over Ananda, the latter's back was clothed anew with skin, and his previous smart simultaneously allayed. The Glendoveer vanished at the same moment, saying, "when thou hast need of me, pronounce but the incantation, *Gnook Imdap Inam Mua*,¹ and I will immediately be by thy side."

The anger and amazement of the Brahmins may be conceived when, on returning equipped with fresh implements of flagellation, they discovered the salubrious condition of their victim. Their scourges would probably have undergone conversion into halters, had they not been accompanied by a royal officer, who took the really triumphant martyr under his protection, and carried him off to the palace. He was speedily conducted to the young prince's couch, whither a vast crowd attended him. The hour of noon not having yet arrived, Ananda discreetly protracted the time by a seasonable discourse on the impossibility of miracles, those only excepted which should be wrought by the professors of the faith of Buddha. He then descended from his pulpit, and precisely as the sun attained the zenith laid his hand upon the bosom of the young prince, who instantly revived, and completed a sentence touching the game of dice which had been interrupted by his catalepsy.

The people shouted, the courtiers went into ecstasies, the countenances of *the* Brahmins assumed an exceedingly sheepish expression. Even the king seemed impressed, and craved to be more particularly instructed in the law of Buddha. In complying with this request, Ananda, who had made marvellous progress in worldly wisdom during the last twenty-four hours, deemed it needless to dilate on the cardinal doctrines of his master the misery of existence, the need of redemption, the path to felicity, the prohibition to shed blood. He simply stated that the priests of Buddha were bound to perpetual poverty, and that under the new dispensation all ecclesiastical property would accrue to the temporal authorities.

"By the holy cow!" exclaimed the monarch, "this is something like a religion!"

The words were scarcely out of the royal lips ere the courtiers professed themselves converts. The multitude followed their example. The Brahminical church was promptly disestablished and disendowed, and more injustice was committed in the name of the new and purified religion in one day than the old corrupt one had occasioned in a hundred years.

Ananda had the satisfaction of feeling able to forgive his adversaries, and of valuing himself accordingly; and to complete his felicity, he was received in the palace and entrusted with the education of the king's son, which he strove to conduct agreeably to the precepts of Buddha. This was a task of some delicacy, as it involved interference with the princely youth's favourite amusement, which had previously consisted in torturing small reptiles.

After a short interval Ananda was again summoned to the monarch's presence. He found his majesty in the company of two most ferocious ruffians, one of whom bore a huge axe, and the other an enormous pair of pincers.

"My chief executioner and my chief tormentor," said the king.

¹ The mystic formula of the Buddhists, read backwards.

Ananda expressed his gratification at becoming acquainted with such exalted functionaries.

“Thou must know, most holy man,” resumed the king, “that need has again risen for the exercise of fortitude and self-denial on thy part. A powerful enemy has invaded my dominions, and has impiously presumed to discomfit my troops. Well might I feel dismayed, were it not for the consolations of religion; but my trust is in thee, O my spiritual father! It is urgent that thou shouldst accumulate the largest amount of merit with the least delay possible. I am unable to invoke the ministrations of thy old friends the Brahmins to this end, they being, as thou knowest, in disgrace, but I have summoned these trusty and experienced counsellors in their room. I find them not wholly in accord. My chief tormentor, being a man of mild temper and humane disposition, considers that it might at first suffice to employ gentle measures, such, for example, as suspending thee head downwards in the smoke of a wood fire, and filling thy nostrils with red pepper. My chief executioner, taking, peradventure, a too professional view of the subject, deems it best to resort at once to crucifixion or impalement. I would gladly know thy thoughts on the matter.”

Ananda expressed, as well as his terror would suffer him, his entire disapproval of both the courses recommended by the royal advisers.

“Well,” said the king, with an air of resignation, “if we cannot agree upon either, it follows that we must try both. We will meet for that purpose to-morrow morning at the second hour. Go in peace!”

Ananda went, but not in peace. His alarm would have well-nigh deprived him of his faculties if he had not remembered the promise made him by his former deliverer. On reaching a secluded spot he pronounced the mystic formula, and immediately became aware of the presence, not of a radiant Glendoveer, but of a holy man, whose head was strewn with ashes, and his body anointed with cow-dung.

“Thy occasion,” said the Fakir, “brooks no delay. Thou must immediately accompany me, and assume the garb of a Jogi.”

Ananda rebelled excessively in his heart, for he had imbibed from the mild and sage Buddha a befitting contempt for these grotesque and cadaverous fanatics. The emergency, however, left him no resource, and he followed his guide to a charnel house, which the latter had selected as his domicile. There, with many lamentations over the smoothness of his hair and the brevity of his nails, the Jogi besprinkled and besmeared Ananda agreeably to his own pattern, and scored him with chalk and ochre until the peaceful apostle of the gentlest of creeds resembled a Bengal tiger. He then hung a chaplet of infants' skulls about his neck, placed the skull of a malefactor in one of his hands and the thigh-bone of a necromancer in the other, and at nightfall conducted him into the adjacent cemetery, where, seating him on the ashes of a recent funeral pile, he bade him drum upon the skull with the thigh-bone, and repeat after himself the incantations which he began to scream out towards the western part of the firmament. These charms were apparently possessed of singular efficacy, for scarcely were they commenced ere a hideous tempest arose, rain descended in torrents, phosphoric flashes darted across the sky, wolves and hymas thronged howling from their dens, and gigantic goblins, arising from the earth, extended their fleshless arms towards Ananda, and strove to drag him from his seat. Urged by frantic terror, and the example and exhortations of his companion, he battered banged, and vociferated, until on the very verge of exhaustion: when, as if by enchantment, the tempest ceased, the spectres disappeared, and joyous shouts and a burst of music announced the occurrence of something auspicious in the adjoining city.

“The hostile king is dead,” said the Jogi; “and his army has dispersed. This will be attributed to thy incantations. They are coming in quest of thee even now. Farewell until thou again hast need of me.”

The Jogi disappeared, the tramp of a procession became audible, and soon torches glared feebly through the damp, cheerless dawn. The monarch descended from his state elephant, and, prostrating himself before Ananda, exclaimed:

“Inestimable man! why didst thou not disclose that thou wert a Jogi? Never more shall I feel the least apprehension of any of my enemies, so long as thou continuest an inmate of this cemetery.”

A family of jackals were unceremoniously dislodged from a disused sepulchre, which was allotted to Ananda for his future residence. The king permitted no alteration in his costume, and took care that the food doled out to him should have no tendency to impair his sanctity, which speedily gave promise of attaining a very high pitch. His hair had already become as matted and his nails as long as the Jogi could have desired, when he received a visit from another royal messenger. The Rajah, so ran the regal missive, had been suddenly and mysteriously attacked by a dangerous malady, but confidently anticipated relief from Ananda’s merits and incantations.

Ananda resumed his thigh-bone and his skull, and ruefully began to thump the latter with the former, in dismal expectation of the things that were to come. But the spell seemed to have lost its potency. Nothing more unearthly than a bat presented itself, and Ananda was beginning to think that he might as well desist when his reflections were diverted by the apparition of a tall and grave personage, wearing a sad-coloured robe, and carrying a long wand, who stood by his side as suddenly as though just risen from the earth.

“The caldron is ready,” said the stranger.

“What caldron?” demanded Ananda.

“That wherein thou art about to be immersed.”

“I immersed in a caldron! wherefore?”

“Thy spells,” returned his interlocutor, “having hitherto failed to afford his majesty the slightest relief, and his experience of their efficacy on a former occasion forbidding him to suppose that they can be inoperative, he is naturally led to ascribe to their pernicious influence that aggravation of pain of which he has for some time past unfortunately been sensible. I have confirmed him in this conjecture, esteeming it for the interest of science that his anger should fall upon an impudent impostor like thee rather than on a discreet and learned physician like myself. He has consequently directed the principal caldron to be kept boiling all night, intending to immerse thee therein at daybreak, unless he should in the meantime derive some benefit from thy conjurations.”

“Heavens!” exclaimed Ananda, “whither shall I fly?”

“Nowhere beyond this cemetery,” returned the physician, “inasmuch as it is entirely surrounded by the royal forces.”

“Wherein, then,” demanded the agonised apostle, “doth the path of safety lie?”

“In this phial,” answered the physician. “It contains a subtle poison. Demand to be led before the king. Affirm that thou hast received a sovereign medicine from the hands of benignant spirits. He will drink it and perish, and thou wilt be richly rewarded by his successor.”

“Avaunt, tempter!” cried Ananda, hurling the phial indignantly away. “I defy thee! and will have recourse to my old deliverer— *Gnook Imdap Inam Mua!*”

But the charm appeared to fail of its effect. No figure was visible to his gaze, save that of the physician, who seemed to regard him with an expression of pity as he gathered up his robes and melted rather than glided into the encompassing darkness.

Ananda remained, contending with himself. Countless times was he on the point of calling after the physician and imploring him to return with a potion of like properties to the one rejected, but something seemed always to rise in his throat and impede his utterance, until, worn out by agitation, he fell asleep and dreamed this dream.

He thought he stood at the vast and gloomy entrance of Patala.² The lugubrious spot wore a holiday appearance; everything seemed to denote a diabolical gala. Swarms of demons of all shapes and sizes beset the portal, contemplating what appeared to be preparations for an illumination. Strings of coloured lamps were in course of disposition in wreaths and festoons by legions of frolicsome imps, chattering, laughing, and swinging by their tails like so many monkeys. The operation was directed from below by superior fiends of great apparent gravity and respectability. These bore wands of office, tipped with yellow flames, wherewith they singed the tails of the imps when such discipline appeared to them to be requisite. Ananda could not refrain from asking the reason of these festive preparations.

“They are in honour,” responded the demon interrogator, “of the pious Ananda, one of the apostles of the Lord Buddha, whose advent is hourly expected among us with much eagerness and satisfaction.”

The horrified Ananda with much difficulty mustered resolution to inquire on what account the apostle in question was necessitated to take up his abode in the infernal regions.

“On account of poisoning,” returned the fiend laconically.

Ananda was about to seek further explanations, when his attention was arrested by a violent altercation between two of the supervising demons.

“Kammuragha, evidently,” croaked one.

“Damburanana, of course,” snarled the other.

“May I,” inquired Ananda of the fiend he had before addressed, “presume to ask the signification of Kammuragha and Damburanana?”

“They are two hells,” replied the demon. “In Kammuragha the occupant is plunged into melted pitch and fed with melted lead. In Damburanana he is plunged into melted lead and fed with melted pitch. My colleagues are debating which is the more appropriate to the demerits of our guest Ananda.”

Ere Ananda had had time to digest this announcement a youthful imp descended from above with agility, and, making a profound reverence, presented himself before the disputants.

“Venerable demons,” interposed he, “might my insignificance venture to suggest that we cannot well testify too much honour for our visitor Ananda, seeing that he is the only apostle of Buddha with whose company we are likely ever to be indulged? Wherefore I would propose that neither Kammuragha nor Damburanana be assigned for his residence, but that the amenities of all the two hundred and forty-four thousand hells be combined in a new one, constructed especially for his reception.”

The imp having thus spoken, the senior demons were amazed at his precocity, and performed a *pradakshina*, exclaiming, “Truly thou art a highly superior young devil!” They then departed to prepare the new infernal chamber, agreeably to his recipe.

Ananda awoke, shuddering with terror.

² The Hindoo Pandemonium.

“Why,” he exclaimed, “why was I ever an apostle? O Buddha! Buddha! how hard are the paths of saintliness! How prone to error are the well-meaning! How huge is the absurdity of spiritual pride!”

“Thou hast discovered that, my son?” said a gentle voice in his vicinity.

He turned and beheld the divine Buddha, radiant with a mild and benignant light. A cloud seemed rolled away from his vision, and he recognised in his master the Glendoveer, the Jogi, and the Physician.

“O holy teacher!” exclaimed he in extreme perturbation, “whither shall I turn? My sin forbids me to approach thee.”

“Not on account of thy sin art thou forbidden, my son,” returned Buddha, “but on account of the ridiculous and unsavoury plight to which thy knavery and disobedience have reduced thee. I have now appeared to remind thee that this day all my apostles meet on Mount Vindhya to render an account of their mission, and to inquire whether I am to deliver thine in thy stead, or whether thou art minded to proclaim it thyself.”

“I will render it with my own lips,” resolutely exclaimed Ananda. “It is meet that I should bear the humiliation of acknowledging my folly.”

“Thou hast said well, my son,” replied Buddha, “and in return I will permit thee to discard the attire, if such it may be termed, of a Jogi, and to appear in our assembly wearing the yellow robe as beseems my disciple. Nay, I will even infringe my own rule on thy behalf, and perform a not inconsiderable miracle by immediately transporting thee to the summit of Vindhya, where the faithful are already beginning to assemble. Thou wouldst otherwise incur much risk of being torn to pieces by the multitude, who, as the shouts now approaching may instruct thee, are beginning to extirpate my religion at the instigation of the new king, thy hopeful pupil. The old king is dead, poisoned by the Brahmins.”

“O master! master!” exclaimed Ananda, weeping bitterly, “and is all the work undone, and all by my fault and folly?”

“That which is built on fraud and imposture can by no means endure,” returned Buddha, “be it the very truth of Heaven. Be comforted; thou shalt proclaim my doctrine to better purpose in other lands. Thou hast this time but a sorry account to render of thy stewardship; yet thou mayest truly declare that thou hast obeyed my precept in the letter, if not in the spirit, since none can assert that thou hast ever wrought any miracle.”