

NINE CENTURIES OF BUDDHISM.—I.

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Among the philosophical and religious creeds offered to mankind at the present time to replace Christianity as the road to universal happiness, Buddhism, with its modern offshoot, Theosophy, probably occupies the foremost place ; and it is hardly asserting too much to say that the addresses of Mr. Dharmapala were among the most interesting, attractive, and influential of all speeches delivered at the Chicago Parliament of Religions. The speaker, all alive as he was with fervent belief in his own system, and scathing in his denunciation of what we all know to be the vices of so-called Christendom, could not fail to impart to others a reflection of the fire which he felt glowing within his own breast. But a moment's thought will give us an opportunity of asking : "The Buddhist speaker found enough to blame among us ; would we find nothing to blame in Buddhist lands ?" This is, indeed, a natural question and a vital one, urgently demanding a plain answer. Unless both sides of the question are presented we cannot form a true judgment ; and the difficulty for the ordinary European lies in the impossibility for him to live in a Buddhist country and study the daily life of professing Buddhists. Several years' residence in Ladak have placed me in a position to do so, and I propose to note down some of the observations made, placing them for the purpose of easy comparison opposite to the theory of Buddhism as stated in Buddhist books.*

It cannot be said that Ladak is not a fair field for observation, on the ground that Buddhism has not had time to develop its full powers. The date of the introduction of Buddhism into Ladak is uncertain. The great Buddhist King Kanishka, a contemporary of Christ, claimed authority over Kashmir and Ladak, so that it is possible that Ladaki Buddhism and Christianity are of equal age. But Ladak is at present and has for centuries been in the closest religious connection with Lhasa. In order, therefore, to avoid any overstatement, we will assume that the conversion of Ladak was connected with that of Tibet. Buddhism was introduced there in the eighth century A.D., but probably did not become the ruling religion until the tenth century. Giving Buddhism the full advantage of any doubt, we shall not go wrong in assuming that Buddhism has been established in Ladak since about the year 1000 A.D. Buddhism has, therefore, had *nine centuries* to show what it is really capable of. A longer period than this will not be claimed by any religion as necessary to develop its powers.

Nor can it be urged that it is not fair to take for examination a country where the Mahayana form of Buddhism has been propagated. Such would

* I must apologize if this method appears somewhat learned. It seems to me to be necessary, if the reader is to fully understand the real state of affairs, and I trust that my remarks will not be quite devoid of interest, if only on account of the fact that they treat of Ladak, a country the social conditions of which have rarely been treated of by previous writers.