

city inherits dissolution. How, then, could it be possible that any human being, yea, even a supreme Buddha, should not be dissolved?"

Ladaki, in common with all Tibetan Buddhists, however, are wiser than the Buddha, and their "avatar" system is in direct contradiction to his doctrine. The avatars are saints who might at any time enter into Nirvana, but who decline to do so, as they would thus be deprived of the possibility of "furthering the welfare of wandering beings." On death they therefore promptly reincarnate themselves in some child and resume their position at the head of their monastery. The most important and celebrated of these avatars are the Dalai Lama of Lhasa and the Panchen Lama of Trashilhunpo, in Central Tibet; but every monastery of importance has its own avatar—usually the founder of the institution. The superiority of these avatars over the supreme Buddha is evident. Gautama taught and then extinguished himself forever in Nirvana. He was, therefore, at bottom a very selfish being, while the Tibetan saints in their compassion are willing continually to refuse the repose of Nirvana and to reenter this world of trouble. The above-mentioned Mila Raspa explicitly says that the doctrine of Southern Buddhists is really very selfish, and that the Tibetan form is far higher. Of course the avatars will have to disappear at the end of the present kalpa or world age, when everything comes to dissolution. Strictly speaking, therefore, they also are finite; but as the end may not come for billions of billions of years, they are for all practical purposes immortal, and the forty-five years of the Buddha's career make a very poor show when compared to this boundless perseverance in loving compassion.

The infinite absurdities connected with this system cannot be described here, but two special cases deserve mention.

The head monastery of the red lama sects in Ladak, Hemis, had been for many years unlucky with its avatars. A number of them in succession died young, before their education in Tibet had been completed. In despair a young avatar was finally bought for 1000 rupees from the yellow sect and solemnly enthroned in Hemis in 1891. This story was several times repeated to me, and not till they noticed that it was used to point out the absurdity of their whole belief did the people turn round. Now, of course, it is as stoutly denied as it was asserted then.

In the autumn of 1892 there was a small-pox epidemic in Ladak which carried off a large number of people. In the following spring small-pox occurred only in a single village and in the Trikse monastery, the avatar of which died. The explanation given me by a lama was that he had voluntarily died as an offering in order to stay the small-pox. But why did he, then, not die in the previous year, when the small-pox was really bad? His death at the time it took place was remarkably *post festum*. Moreover, the avatar of the Spituk monastery had caused himself to be vaccinated, evidently to avoid death; he must therefore be less compassionate than his colleague at Trikse. Yet both are alike absolutely devoid of all sin and love of life,