

4.

DEAR SIR,—With reference to the interesting article by Surgeon-Major Waddell, dealing with the ancient conception of life under the figure of a wheel, of which each re-birth is a revolution, I should like to point out that this fancy finds an echo more than once in Hellenic literature. In the Orphic theogony we come across the notion of re-birth considered as a weary unending cycle of fate or necessity—*κύκλος τῆς γενέσεως, ὁ τῆς μοίρας τροχός*, etc.—from which the soul longs to escape, and entreats the gods, especially Dionysos (*Διόνυσος λυσεύς, θεῖνι λύσιος*), for release,—*κύκλου τε λῆξαι καὶ ἀναπνεῦσαι κακότητος*. In the verses inscribed on one of three golden funereal tablets dug up near the site of Sybaris the line occurs: “And thus I escaped from the cycle, the painful, misery-laden” (*Inscr. gr. Sicil. et Ital.* 641). These allusions may be referred to at second-hand in Herr Erwin Rohde’s study of Hellenic ideas respecting the soul and immortality, entitled *Psyche* (4to. Hälfte, pp. 416 *et seq.*; 509), recently completed. Pindar, Empedocles, and Plato, as is well known, all entertained the notion of repeated re-birth in this world at intervals ranging from nine to one thousand years, repeated twice, thrice, or an indefinite number of times, and, according to the two latter writers, often including in its phases incarnation as an animal, or even as a vegetable. And throughout there runs the Orphic idea of each re-birth being a stage in a course of moral evolution and effort after purification. But I do not know whether the actual image of the wheel occurs in other instances besides those I have quoted. Empedocles, for instance, sees rather a toilsome *road* or roads of life—*ἀργαλέας βίωτοιο κελεύθους*. With Plato again, we more readily associate his simile of a re-birth as a fall of the soul from heaven to earth, as it drives its chariot after the procession of the gods, through the steed of Epithumia being dragged down by its craving for carnal things—or,

as the Buddhist might say, the steed of Chandarāgo overcome by Upādāna for the skandhas.

The question of a genetic connection between Oriental and Hellenic notions as to re-birth is of the greatest interest. Prof. Leopold von Schröder's opinion that such a connection exists (*Pythagoras und die Inder*, especially pp. 25-31) seems on the whole to be well founded. And the common parable of the Wheel may, or may not, add a link to the further arguments making for such a connection in Prof. Richard Garbe's disquisition contributed to the *MONIST* of last January. I will only add that, if the typical Greek were always as enamoured of this life in the glad sunlight and amongst the sons of men as he is commonly represented to be, we should expect as his dying plaint,

I am gone down to the empty weary house,
Where no flesh is, nor beauty, nor swift eyes,
Nor sound of mouth, nor might of hands and feet.

All the more remarkable is it to find such passages as the above describing his haunting dread of re-visiting, on the wheel of Anangkē, the scenes he was so loth to leave.

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P.S.—Since the above was in type I have found, through a reference in Maine's *Dissertations on Early Law and Custom*, p. 50, that the account of the construction of the picture of the wheel just as we see it in the Tibetan painting occurs already in the *Divyāvadāna*, pp. 299, 300. 587

There it is related how Buddha instructed Ānanda to make a wheel (*cakram kārayitavyam*) for the purpose of illustrating what another disciple, Maudgalyāyana, saw when he visited other spheres, which it seems he was in the habit of doing. The wheel was to have five spokes (*pañcagaṇḍakam*), between which were to be depicted the hells, animals, pretas, gods, and men. In the middle a dove, a serpent, and a hog, were to symbolise lust, hatred, and ignorance. All round the tire was to go the twelve-fold circle of

causation (pratītyasamutpādo) in the regular and in the inverse order. Beings were to be represented “as being born in a supernatural way (aupapādukāḥ), as by the machinery of a waterwheel, falling from one state and being produced in another.” The wheel was made and placed in the “grand entrance gateway” (dvāraśoṭṭhake), and a bhikshu appointed to interpret it.
