

CORRESPONDENCE.

1. THE ARIṬṬHAKA STONE.

In the *Samyutta*, vol. i, p. 104, it is said of Māra, the Evil One, that to frighten and so disturb the Blessed One, he appeared to him in the form of a gigantic elephant-king, with a head like a great Ariṭṭhaka gem, tusks as of pure silver, and a trunk like the pole of a plough.

The first simile, that of the gem or rare stone, is obscure. The particular stone is not mentioned elsewhere, and in the absence of the commentary it is not easy to ascertain what stone is meant. Prof. Windisch, in vol. xlix of the "*Zeitschrift der deutschen morgenländischen Gesellschaft*," pp. 285, 286, has a most ingenious suggestion.

It is this. King Devānam-piya-Tissa of Ceylon had had, at his coronation, three gems (*maṇi*) brought to him from Malaya, the mountainous district in South Ceylon. These, with other things, he sent as a present to his friend Asoka at Pāṭaliputta. And as the head of the embassy he appointed his nephew Mahā Ariṭṭha, the son of his sister (Dīpavamsa, xi, 29, 31; xiv, 68). The glory of these gems, Prof. Windisch suggests, may have made so deep an impression in India that they became famous, and gave rise to the proverbial use in legend of the expression "*Mahā Ariṭṭha's gems*" as something specially wonderful. And this is what the author of our particular legend had in his mind. The elephant's head was like one of Mahā Ariṭṭha's gems.

The matter is of some importance: for, if this explanation be right, it would follow, of course, that (barring interpolation, which is here most unlikely) the legend itself, and probably the whole *Samyutta*, are, at least in their present shape, some time later than Asoka.

Now one would have thought that even if the stones had created so great an impression, they would have been called after the country which produced them, or the king who sent them, rather than after the minister who brought them over. And there is a greater difficulty still. Granting all the rest of the hypothesis, the simile does not hold. The three *maṇi* are described as *pabhissara-maṇi* (*Dīp.* xi, 30), and their names are given as Indasīla, Veluriya, and Lohitanka (sapphire, cat's-eye, and ruby: *Mahā Vansa*, p. 69). The author of the legend mentions only one. Which could he mean? No one of the three is like an elephant's head; and an elephant's head is not *pabhissara*, nor can it be compared to any brilliant gem. The other two similes are sound and natural. Is it not more probable that this simile was so also?

In that case the *Ariṭṭhaka* stone must be some stone like, either in colour or in texture, or in both, to the skin of a white elephant's head. The word *Ariṭṭha* is used in the *Old Commentary* on the 51st *Pacittiya* (last line) as the name of a drink mixture that was sometimes intoxicating, and sometimes unfermented. Was this of a dull grey yellowish white colour? It is also given in the dictionaries as the name of buttermilk, and of several plants, including the soap-tree (*Sapindus saponaria*) and garlic. In its sense of bringing luck, it might well be the name of certain rare forms of coloured rock, such as steatite or serpentine, which resemble in appearance the dirty grey white of a so-called "white" elephant's head. Soap-stone would fulfil these conditions, and in the description of an elephant the expression "with a head like a great mass of soap-stone" would be very much in place.

Literally translated the expression would merely mean "the fateful stone." *Ariṭṭhakaṃ nāṇaṃ* at *Sumangala Vilāsinī*,

vol. i, p. 94, means knowledge of fate. That stones were harbingers of good and bad luck is well known in Indian folk-lore. There may well have been some such stone, whether soap-stone or opal or some other, with which a "white" elephant's forehead could properly be compared.

I regret I have no copy of the commentary to refer to. Perhaps M. Léon Feer would give us Buddhaghosa's opinion on the point. But in face of Professor Windisch's very beautiful combination, it seemed desirable to point out at once the considerations which naturally occur to one on the other side.

I may add that the pole of a plough (*isā*) is constantly used as a simile in descriptions of elephants. See Mahā Vansa, x, 4. 7; Majjhima, i, 414; Vimāna Vatthu, xx, 8, and xliii, 9. M. Léon Feer, in his edition of the Saṃyutta (Pāli Text Society, 1884), has *nangala-sīsā*, but the correct reading is certainly *nangalīsā*, as given in the note from S¹ and S³.

T. W. RHYS DAVIDS.

2. THE SEMITIC ORIGIN OF THE OLD INDIAN ALPHABET.

SIR,—It is, I believe, admitted that some of the modern alphabets of India, including, of course, the Deva-nāgarī, are more or less derived from the Southern or Maurya alphabēt of the Asoka inscriptions. It will also be apparent, on a comparison of the inscriptions and documents of different periods, that the Sinhalese and the ancient Maldivian as well as the Kawi alphabets are derived from the same Asoka alphabet. The question, therefore, of the Semitic origin of this Southern Asoka alphabet, first mooted by Professor Weber, and so ably discussed by Professor Bühler in his recent essay on the subject,¹ is of general interest, irrespective of its great importance in palæographical researches. Besides, it is always a step in

¹ In Sitzungsberichte der Kais. Akademie der Wissenschaften in Wien: Philosophisch-Historische Classe. Band cxxxii. V. *Indian Studies*, by George Bühler. No. 3: "On the Origin of the Indian Brāhma Alphabet."