ART. XIII.—*The Nigrodha-miga-Jātaka and the Life of St. Eustathius Placidus.* By Dr. M. GASTER, M.R.A.S.

IN connection with the story of Paṭācārā I had occasion to refer (J.R.A.S. 1893, pp. 869–871) to a series of parallels in Eastern and Western literature, one of which was the life of St. Eustathius Placidus. The second half of this Vita contained those incidents which made me connect it with the cycle of which Paṭācārā seemed to be the prototype. The first half, however, was totally different, and must have been added to the other portion by the compiler of the Life. That "Life" was worthy of being put up as an example to the pious, which contained a greater number of temptations successfully withstood, of sufferings meekly borne, of miracles wondrously wrought. Therefore the miraculous and pathetic portions were enlarged and specially dwelt upon.

In the Life of St. *Placidus* we find thus two distinct tales, one of his conversion, and the other of his sufferings and ultimate martyrdom, which last portion may have been added still later in order to round off the whole tale.

In consequence of the miraculous elements in it this Life has become very popular. Not only is it to be found in Voragine's "Golden Legend," Caxton's translation included, and in the collections of "Lives" of Surius, the Bollandists, etc., but it was also incorporated into the "Gesta Romanorum," the great storehouse of mediæval tales and legends. It figures there as a moral tale, and has as heading the words, "Of the miraculous recall of sinners, and of the consolations which piety offers to the distressed."¹

¹ *Gesta Romanorum*. Translated from the Latin by the Rev. Ch. Swan, revised by W. Hooper, London, 1877, No. cx. p. 191 ff. Cf. *Gesta Romanorum*, ed. Oesterley, Berlin, 1872, No. 110, p. 444 ff. and the important bibliographical notes, p. 730.

The first portion of this legend contains the miraculous conversion brought about by a *deer*. It is very elaborate, and, as most of these "Lives," amplified by numberless details.

I give it in a somewhat abridged form, omitting repetitions and details, summing up the more important incidents.

"In the reign of Trajan there lived a king named Placidus, who was commander-in-chief of the Emperor's armies. He was of a very merciful disposition, but a worshipper of idols. His wife also participated in the same feelings, and adhered to the same religious rites. They had two sons, educated in all the magnificence of their age and station; and from the general kindness and goodness of their hearts they merited a revelation of the way of truth. As he was one day following the chase, he discovered a herd of deer, amongst which was one remarkable for the beauty and magnificence of its form. Separating itself from the rest, it plunged into the thicker part of the brake. Placidus separated himself from his companions and followed the course it had taken with all the celerity in his power. While he was giving all his strength to the pursuit, the stag at length scaled a lofty precipice, and Placidus approaching to it as near as he could, considered how to secure it. But, as he regarded it with fixed attention, there appeared, impressed upon the centre of the brow, the form of a cross, which glittered with greater splendour than a meridian sun. Upon this cross there was an image of Christ suspended; and, as formerly happened to the ass of Balaam, utterance was supplied to the stag, which thus addressed the hunter: 'Why dost thou persecute me, Placidus? For thy sake have I assumed the shape of this animal: I am Christ, whom thou ignorantly worshippingest.' Some assert that the image said these things. Placidus, filled with terror, fell from his horse, and said: 'Declare what Thou sayest, that I may believe in Thee.' Christ explains his divinity, and Placidus said: 'I believe, O Lord, that Thou art He that made all things; and that Thou art He who bringest back the wanderer.' The Lord

answered: 'Go into the city and be baptized; return on the morrow hither, where I will appear again.' Placidus departed to his home and communicated all that had passed to his wife. That very night they were all baptized by the Bishop of Rome." So far the first portion of the history of St. Eustathius Placidus. His martyrdom is placed in the year 120, in the reign of Adrian, Trajan's successor. This is, however, independent of the time when the Life was written. The oldest texts seem to belong to the ninth century. A Syriac version of it exists in a MS. of the twelfth century (1197) (Brit. Mus. Add. 12,174, No. 53).¹

The principal incidents may be summed up in the following manner:—(1) Placidus, a keen hunter; (2) Placidus, of a merciful disposition, but has not yet obtained access to the way of truth; (3) A magnificent, beautiful stag draws his attention away from the rest; (4) Exposes itself to the danger of being killed, in order to speak to Placidus; (5) Christ assumes the form of that stag; (6) Placidus converted.

Without going into many details, it cannot be disputed that some of the ancient "Lives" owe their origin to Buddhist Jātakas. One need only refer to Barlaam and Joasaph. A thorough examination of those Jātakas will further reveal unexpected parallels to some of the apocryphal Acts of the Apostles—I think more especially of the Acts of the Apostle *Thomas*, which Gutschmid considers to be based upon a Buddhist Jātaka,² and some incidents in those of Bartholomeus and John. There is no doubt that the publication of all the Jātakas in existence, and their being made accessible through translation, will give a powerful impetus to investigations directed towards the history of ancient hagiology.

As one portion of the legend of St. Placidus had its parallel in an Indian tale, I surmised that the other

¹ v. *W. Wright*, Catalogue of the Syriac Manuscripts in the British Museum, iii. 1872, p. 1132 f.

² v. *R. A. Lipsius*, Die apokryphen Apostelgeschichten u. Apostellegenden, i. Braunschweig, 1883, p. 281.

would also have its origin there. It is well known that legends have often been made up of two or three independent tales, tacked one on to the other to make the legend more interesting and more attractive.

Through the kindness of Mr. R. Chalmers I have been able to see a proof sheet of his translation of the Jātakas (vol. i.), which is published by the Pitt Press under the editorship of Prof. Cowell, of Cambridge. In one of these Jātakas I found, indeed, the original for the history of Placidus' conversion. In comparing the two one must take into account the *rifacimento* to which those Indian tales have been subjected in order to suit them entirely to their new purposes. Only the framework, the leading incidents and the miraculous elements, are retained, the rest is fitted up with rhetorics and arguments borrowed from a different source.

The Jātaka to which I refer is the Nigrodha-miga-Jātaka, of which the following is an abstract¹: "Once upon a time, when Brahmadata was reigning in Benares, the Bodhisatta was born a deer. At his birth he was golden of hue; his eyes were like round jewels; the sheen of his horns was of silver; his mouth was like a bunch of scarlet cloth; his four hoofs were as though lacquered; his tail was like the yak's; and he was as big as a young foal. Attended by five hundred deer he dwelt in the forest under the name of King Banyan Deer. And hard by him dwelt another deer also with an attendant herd of five hundred deer, who was named Branch Deer, and was as golden of hue as the Bodhisatta.

"In those days the king of Benares was passionately fond of hunting, and always had meat at every meal. Every day he mustered the whole of his subjects and went hunting. Thought his people, 'Suppose we were to sow food and supply water for the deer in his own pleasure; and, having driven in a number of deer, to bar them in and deliver them over to the king.' So they did. Henceforth the king betook himself to the pleasure, and in looking once

¹ It is also translated in full in Prof. Rhys Davids's 'Buddhist Birth Stories,' No. 12, p. 205 ff.

over the herd, saw among them two golden deer, to whom he granted immunity. Sometimes he would go of his own accord and shoot a deer to bring home; sometimes his cook would go and shoot one. At first sight of the bow the deer would dash off trembling for their lives; but after receiving two or three wounds, they grew weary and faint, and were slain. The herd of deer told this to the Bodhisatta, who sent for Branch, and said, 'Friend, the deer are being destroyed in great numbers; and, though they cannot escape death, at least let them not be needlessly wounded. Let the deer on whom the lot falls go to the block by turns, one day one from my herd, and next day one from yours.' The other agreed. Now one day the lot fell on a pregnant doe of the herd of Branch, and she went to Branch and said, 'Lord, I am with young; order me to be passed over this turn.' 'No, I cannot make your turn another's,' said he. Finding no favour with him, the doe went to the Bodhisatta, and told him her story. And he answered, 'Very well; you go away, and I will see that the turn passes over you.' And therewithal he went himself to the place of execution, and lay down with his head on the block. Cried the cook on seeing him, 'Why! here is the king of the deer, who was granted immunity! What does this mean?' And off he ran to tell the king, who, on hearing it, mounted his chariot and came with a large following.

"My friend, the king of the deer, how comes it that you are lying here?"

"Sire, there came to me a doe big with young, who prayed me to let her turn fall on another; and, as I could not pass the doom of one to another, I, laying down my life for her, and taking her doom on myself, have laid me down here."

"My lord, the golden king of the deer, said the king, never yet saw I, even among men, one so abounding in charity, love, and pity as you. Therefore am I pleased with you. Arise! I spare the lives of both you and her."

"The Bodhisatta interceded then with the king for the

lives of all creatures, and obtained from him the promise that they would henceforth be spared. After thus interceding, the Great Being arose, established the king in the Five commandments, saying, 'Walk in righteousness, great king. Walk in righteousness and justice towards parents, children, townsmen, and country-folk, so that when this earthly body is dissolved, you may enter the bliss of heaven. Thus, with the grace and charm that marks a Buddha, did he teach the Truth to the king.'"

So far the Jātaka, as much as it concerns us here. The principal points are absolutely identical with those of the story of Placidus. (1) The king, a mighty hunter. (2) Of a merciful disposition, but has not yet obtained access to the way of truth. (3) The marvellous deer, characterized by specially brilliant horns. (4) Exposes itself to the danger of being killed in order to speak to the king. (5) The Bodhisatta impersonated by that deer, and (6) The successful conversion of the king by the deer.

The specific Buddhist argument, viz. the self-sacrifice, looses its force in the change from Buddhism to Christianity, and is therefore omitted in the story of Placidus.

The date of the Jātaka is not a matter of conjecture. As the central incident is to be found represented among the sculptured medallions of the Stupa of Bharhut (No. 1 in Plate xxv. and No. 2 in Plate xliii. of Cunningham's publication), it must therefore belong to the second or third century B.C., and is thus close upon a thousand years older than the oldest written record of the story of Placidus. The "Divine Deer" alone would suffice to prove the Buddhist origin of the latter, as Buddha, in several previous births, had been "King of the Deer." I know not of any other example of Christ appearing under the form of a deer or any other animal. It is a thoroughly Buddhist conception, which sees in the animal one of the forms of existence and impersonations of Buddha, and has been taken over bodily from the Jātaka to be incorporated into the Life of Placidus, the other half of which is also of the same Buddhist origin.