NOTE

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“THE FEAR OF DEER DOES NOT PREVENT FROM SOWING . . .”

THERE is in Abhidharmakośabhāṣya, chapter ii, kārīkā 47a (Jap. ed. with commentary, fasc. 5, fol. 19a, 1), a Nyāya which would have pleased Colonel A. Jacob, the great hunter for philosophical maxims.

The Sanskrit runs as follows : *yathā na mṛgāḥ santīti yavā noppyante | yathā na makṣikāḥ patantīti modakā na bhakṣyante.*

“Just as they do not not sow barley because there are deer ; just as they do not not eat sweets because flies are there flying.”

The Chinese agrees—

非 恐 有 鹿 而 不 種 麥。
懼 多 蠅 附 不 食 美 團。

“Not fearing deer and not sow barley ; fearing many flies near by not to eat savourous cake.”

As Yaśomitra remarks, two negatives make an affirmative. *dvaṁ pratiśedhau prakṛtam artham gamayataḥ.* We have therefore : “the fear of deer does not prevent from sowing ; the fear of flies does not prevent from eating sweets.”

This picturesque Nyāya contains an important principle, Vasubandhu clearly sees that the doctrine of the Vaibhāṣikas is far from being unobjectionable. But except when the objections are really very strong, he believes that he has no right to reject the authoritative statements of the Abhidharmas of the Sarvāstivādins : “We must therefore endeavour to refute the objections ; we must follow the Doctrine (*siddhānta*, 本 宗 義), not to abandon it.”

I wonder whether there is some amount of Pragmatism in the case of Vasubandhu ; in any case his attitude is worthy of notice, for the common vice of philosophers—I mean the Indian philosophers—is to condemn doctrines which are not logically perfect and even to deny facts which cannot be explained according to the accepted doctrine.