More than forty years have passed since T. W. Rhys Davids wrote his admirable survey of social circumstances in the India of Gotama the Buddha's time. A great amount of research has been done in four decades in Oriental Studies, but nothing has been produced, which be regarded as a correction or even as an essential addition to this small very condensed study. Reading through it one cannot fail to place confidence in the conscientiousness of this great scholar. And it may at it is just this limitless confidence which compels the reader to read over again and to feel a certain doubt about a passage which now does not fit in with the rest of the book. More than that, the rich material presented in its various chapters contradicts this statement and gives y realistic picture of a life neither better nor worse than in any other part e world.

The passage in question reads:

"The economical conditions in such villages were simple. None of the householders could have been what would now be called rich. On the other hand there was a sufficiency for their simple needs, there was security, there was independence. There were no landlords and no paupers. There was little, if any crime. What crime there was in the country—of which later—was nearly all outside the villages. When the central power was strong enough, as it usually was, to put down lacoity, the people, to quote the quaint words of an old Suttanta, 'pleased with another and happy, dancing their children in their hands,' dwelt with open doors."

"The Golden Age was first..." Ovid, *Metamorphoses*. Tne. Dryden.
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The emotional pattern of these sentences recalls Ovid’s fantasy of a "Golden Age," in which the population "sine lege fidem rectunque colum". And the reader cannot but ask from where the notion arises in the mind of the author, of a feudal society, of a society based on private property, in which there was at the same time such an equal distribution of wealth and happiness. Since actual conditions are very different in other social systems of the same kind, the question arises what could be the special reason for Rhys Davids’ conclusions.

A scrutiny of the very sources which were used by him will throw light on this problem. It will show the reliability of the facts presented. This article sets out to examine this question.

There are a number of instances pointing to acute social differences in Gotama’s India. They refer to some who live in abundance while others have to starve. Maybe these differences are not as great as those between a Royal family and a beggar in the street today, but their subjective effect is the same. A small part of the population is in the position to satisfy its desires, whereas the greater part experiences severe frustration of its primary needs.

There is a Pātimokkha rule which prohibits a bhikkhu from begging food from certain households. These families—according to the Vibhanga—are growing rich in faith but poor in goods, and it happened that after giving away everything they had, the family itself went without food. The Buddha had not found it necessary to declare these households as being under training "sekh-sammatāni kulāni" if he had not considered their poverty. He was not object to Visākhā’s or Anāthapindika’s very generous gifts, because they were rich enough to afford them.

And would the Venerable Pilindavaccha ever have had the opportunity to make a little girl happy by changing a grass chumbat into a chaplet of flowers, if it were not for the tears of her poor parents? Seeing the children of the well-to-do enjoying a feast in the village, decorated with garlands and ornaments far above the dreams of the poor householder’s family?

3. "Needless was written Law . . . ." Ovid, loc. cit.
4. Pātidesaniyā Dhammā, 3.
5. Due to this relation to the Sangha they were sometimes over anxious to provide food for the bhikkhus even at the cost of their own sustenance.
6. Cullavagga VI, 14, 1, etc.
7. Cullavagga VI, 4, 9, etc.
8. Mahāvagga, VI, 15.
9. Cullavagga VI, 7, 7: VI, 18, 4; VI, 9, 2; VI, 20, 4; etc.
12. Cullavagga, VI, 14, 1, etc.
13. Cullavagga, VII, 7, etc.
14. Mahāvagga, VIII, 2, etc.
15. Mahāvagga, I, 7, 1. Cullavagga, VI, 14, 1, etc.
17. Dhammapada Commentary, XXVI, 17.
18. Dhammapada Commentary, XXVII, 3.
19. Dhammapada Commentary, XXV, 10.
20. Mahāvagga, VI, 26, 1.
21. Mahāvagga, VI, 21; Mahāvagga, VI, 17, 7: VI, 18, 4; VI, 9, 2; VI, 20, 4; etc.
rights as enjoyed by private owners. The chieftain Pāyāsi, who was residing at Setavā, a spot “teeming with life, with grass-land and wood-land, with water and corn, on a royal domain, granted him by King Pasenadi of Kosalan as a royal gift,” held power over it as if he were a king.21 The same we read about the brahman Pokharasādi at Ukkaṭṭha22 and others.23 Of the brahman Lohicca at Sālavatikā24 we learn in addition, that a number of people were dependent on him.

There were not many slaves25 and they were usually humanely treated, people we are not surprised at the idea of a slave who wishes to acquire merit in order to be reborn under better conditions of living.26

These brahmans mentioned above had their granaries probably full of times of famine, without having to toil in the fields like the farmer who had to look after his land alone with the help of his family. The onerous work of the farmer described by Mahānāma is not their burden.27

As it has been pointed out, life in the whole was not happier or unhappier than in any other society of a similar structure, and as there were people who need there was a fair amount of crime too. (The Cakkavatti Śīhanāda Sutta, in the form of a story gives a striking description of how crime develops because of widespread poverty.28) And there was crime not only “outside the villages.” Dacoity of course most often is at home on the roads placed as a central power “putting down dacoity,” Angulimala holds the population in terror and other robbers too are mentioned frequently.29 There are references to cheating with measures= certainly can only be obtained in the house of the merchant or in the market place. There is no reference to punishment; this is necessary only when the authorities are helpless usually results in increasing crime. The Mahā Dukkha-Khaṇḍa has a great number of different punishments like flogging, the bastinado, cutting off hands and feet, ears and nose, etc. Those with names intelligible to us are explained by Chalmers in a foot-note as follows: slow death, mulcted with fines, exiled,30 etc., and even the unfortunate was thrown into prison.31 All this did not stop petty thefts.32 Even the yellow robe and the begging bowl of the bhikkhu was branded.33 beaten with stripes.34 The same we are not surprised at the idea of a slave who wishes to acquire merit in order to be reborn under better conditions of living.26

There was no doubt that there were penalties too. But they were so severe that they certainly do not prove that the central power was able to control crime.

27. Cullavagga, VII, 2.
30. Mahāvagga I, 41; Dhammapada Commentary, XIII, 6.
32. Mahāvagga, I, 41; I, 42; I, 66; etc.
33. Mahāvagga, I, 44.
34. Mahāvagga, I, 45.
35. Mahāvagga, I, 46.
38. Mahāvagga, I, 46.
41. Mahāvagga, I, 62, 2.
43. Mahāvagga, I, 64; I, 65; Dhammapada Commentary, XXI, 4, etc.
44. Mahāvagga, I, 67; VIII, 30, 2: Cullavagga, X, 23.
45. Cullavagga, X, 9, 1; Sāleyyaka Sutta. Further Dial. of the Buddha, Vol. I.,
“Dicing, women, the dance and song, 
Sleeping by day, prowling about at night...49
—many an unhappy contemporary of Gotama found pleasure in amusements of this kind.

It was no Golden Age and certainly the evidence quoted here was known to Rhys Davids. In spite of this he quotes an old Suttanta in order to delineate sharply the lovely picture he conjures up. One wonders how that can be.

The quotation comes from the Kūṭadanta Sutta, in which the Buddha is questioned by Kūṭadanta the brahman as to how to perform a sacrifice in the best manner. The Buddha answers him with the story of King Mahā Malla, who, once upon a time, put the same question to his chaplain. The chaplain, in the course of his answer said these words:

“The king’s country, Sire, is harassed and harried. There are dacoits abroad who pillage the villages and the towns and who make the roads unsafe. Were the king, so long as that is so, to levy a fresh tax, verily His Majesty would be acting wrongly. But perchance His Majesty might think: ‘I’ll soon put a stop to these scoundrels’ game by demoralisation and banishment, and fines and bonds and death!’ But even if that were the case, the licence cannot be satisfactorily put a stop to. The remnant left will go on harassing the realm. Now, there is one measure to adopt to put a thorough end to this disorder. Whosoever there be in the king’s realm who devote themselves to keeping cattle and the like, let them go to His Majesty the king give food and seed-corn. Whosoever there be in the king’s realm who devote themselves to government service, to them let His Majesty the King give capital. Whosoever there be in the king’s realm, who devote themselves to government service, to them let His Majesty the King give wages and food. Then those men, following his own business, will no longer harass the realm; the king’s revenue will go up; the country will be quiet and at peace; and the populace, peaceable and happy, dancing their children in their arms, will dwell with open doors.”50

As we see, the quotation is from a story, a sort of fairy-tale, and not facts. Does this fairy-tale claim that life is as happy and pleasant as Rhys Davids sentences would have us believe? The story proves just the opposite. There is great poverty and crime—else such advice as that of the chaplain would not be necessary.

The story is not a genuine fairy-tale. Genuine fairy-tales are daydreams; their function is to satisfy desires of the daydreamer of the authors of the fairy-tale, as in real life remain frustrated. So far as the promises of a better world, it performs to a certain degree the function of a fairy-tale.

dared to see their life as it was. Even if in certain fleeting moments too may have allowed themselves daydreams, they certainly did not that theirs was a Golden Age.

Rhys Davids, with his great love for his subject, must surely in a of daydream, through the influence of a nostalgia common to us all, have formed the world of the Buddha into an *aurea aetas* . . .

“... quae vindice nullo
sponte sua sine lege fidem rectumque colebat.
Poena metusque aberant, nec verba minacia fixo
Aere legebantur . . .”

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EDITH LUDOWYK-GYOM