

## *Buddhistic Studies in the West*

WHEN Western scholars first began to investigate the religious treasures of the East, none was received with more sympathy than Buddhism. Yet from the first there were great difficulties. Not only was there the problem as to what Buddhism actually teaches, but the question was approached from two points of view. There were those who welcomed it for its noble moral doctrine, and who compared it with the teachings of Socrates and Jesus. But there were others who, having rejected any form of religion, were eager to welcome it as being a rival of Christianity, so far as its doctrines seemed to favour their own denial of a God and a soul.

But even the most serious students were hampered by the difficulty of finding authoritative texts. The result has been that the study of Buddhism in the West has not been a natural progress, but rather a series of revolutions, in which there was no real progress, but only repeated attempts to make a new beginning. This does not seem to have been appreciated in Ceylon, where information about the West has generally come from English sources.

We may put aside the efforts of French scholars in the 18th century to describe Buddhism from Chinese sources. The real beginning of Buddhistic studies in Europe was due to the French scholar Eugene Burnouf, who in 1844 published his *Introduction to the history of Indian Buddhism*. Though he was a very able and learned scholar, the work made an unfortunate beginning, as it was based entirely on late Sarvāstivādin and Mahāyāna works with some information from the Tibetan. So little was H. H. Wilson able to find anything historical in Burnouf's work that he thought it probable that Buddha might not have been a historical person at all.

Then came the discovery of Pāli and the publication of the Pāli Canon by H. Oldenberg and T. W. Rhys Davids. This seemed to make a new beginning, but the effect on French Scholars was unfortunate. They did not like to see Burnouf's work ignored. They continued to work from Sanskrit sources, and E. Senart wrote a *Legend of the Buddha*, in which he declared that the *Lalitā Vistara* was his chief source, and he explained that the life of Buddha was a myth. The Dutch scholar, H. Kern, also explained the life of Buddha as a myth, but a myth of a quite different kind. He did not deny that Buddha may have existed, but he held that all that is told of the life of Buddha was a sun-myth, an allegorical description of the sun's motions, in which Buddha was the sun, and the first five disciples were the planets. Naturally, two contradictory mythologies did not strengthen the mythological theory.

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There was some reason for the French to hold aloof from the Pāli scholars, because whatever the value of the Pāli texts, the French scholars found it impossible to accept the interpretations put upon them by R. C. Childers, Oldenberg, and Rhys Davids. To take one important question : do the Scriptures tell us that Nirvāṇa means the annihilation of the individual? All three in different ways held that they do. We need not trouble about the view of Childers, because no one holds it now, and he could not produce any texts that prove anything. Rhys Davids said, " the Arahāt will be no longer alive or existent in any sense at all ; he will have reached Parinibbāṇa, complete extinction." Naturally he gave no evidence for this statement, as there is none in the whole Scriptures. But it harmonised so well with his own belief concerning the destiny of the individual that he boldly held it to be the Buddhist doctrine.

Oldenberg was more cautious. He knew that there is no place in the Scriptures that teaches the annihilation of the individual. Yet he was determined to hold that this was Buddha's real view. He held that the refusal of Buddha to make a positive statement about the existence of a released person after death was due to a wish not to shock weak hearers. But he thought that the denial of an ātman implied annihilation.

Then came another remarkable change. All this reasoning and argument Oldenberg finally rejected. This change of view was really another revolution. It was given by Oldenberg in his last book, on the doctrine of the Upanishads and the beginnings of Buddhism, and as the work exists only in German it has not received the attention that it deserves. But he accompanied it with another change of view which is even more revolutionary. This was to maintain that Buddha really held the doctrine of the ātman, though he avoided the actual word ātman. This is much the same view as that of Mrs. Rhys Davids, but her conclusions do not need discussion, as no scholar has thought them worth treating seriously. This neglect was a matter of which she complained in her last book, but the only reply that she got was from Prof. E. H. Johnston of Oxford, who wrote, " her constructive formulation of the Buddha's doctrine appears to me to be at complete variance with all we know of Indian thought in the six century B.C."

It might be thought that we were at the end of these revolutions in the thought of Buddhist scholars, but there is still another. Only last year a work by J. G. Jennings, late Vice-Principal of the University of Patna, was published by the Oxford University Press, entitled *The Vedāntic Buddhism of the Buddha*. It is a book of over 700 pages, so it is impossible to describe it fully here. But its revolutionary character can be seen, both because he claims that he gives an original theory of the Buddha's teaching and that his conclusions are defi-

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nately his own, as well as from the fact that he calls Buddhism Vedāntic. Mr. Jennings thinks that Buddha may have learnt Vedānta from Āḷāra Kāḷāma and Uddaka, who may have been idealist Vedāntic monists or possibly Yogis of the dualist Sāṅkhya school. He thinks that Buddha did not believe in reincarnation. He thinks that the doctrine of rebirth or personal karma was apparently introduced into Buddhism subsequently to the period of Asoka's Edicts, since Asoka ignores it. He also thinks that when Asoka speaks of *svarga* he means not a future heaven but the present peace of Nirvāṇa in this life. He has discovered the Buddhistic One, which he calls "a single, divine impersonal force." One may ask how, if it is impersonal, it is more divine than a lump of clay or a puff of wind.

Surely it is time for the Buddhists of Ceylon, applying a direct knowledge of the Scriptures and equipped with all the instruments of research, to make another and more enduring revolution.

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