

EDITORIAL—1921 and 1965

WE herewith issue the New Series of *The Eastern Buddhist*, after an elapse of 43 years, with the same thoughts and ideas that prompted the original organizing members of the Eastern Buddhist Society to undertake the original publication of *The Eastern Buddhist*.

In the spring of 1921 the first number of this publication launched out with these words:

“The pen is mightier than the sword” has a far deeper significance than is usually understood by most people. In truth, the progress of civilization is to be gauged by what literature the world has produced, and not by how many wars and how bitterly they have been fought. The result of the erroneous conception of culture we have seen in the recent world-catastrophe, the disastrous works of which are still in evidence everywhere. But at the same time we cannot deny the fact that a new dawn is beginning to clear up the darkened horizon. The time has come for those who believe in peace and enlightenment and universal brotherhood. This is especially true with us Buddhists whose history has never been tainted with a war of conquest. We must now boldly walk out in the new light and endeavor to contribute whatever share we regard as our own to the general stock of civilization.

Buddhism is a religion of peace and enlightenment, and especially the Mahayana school which has been cherished and developed by Far-Eastern people has so much light in it that it ought not to be kept under a bushel. We, the Mahayanists, want to make the whole world better acquainted with its teaching and see if there are not things in them which may beneficially be utilized for the amelioration of life. We have already suffered too much from sordid industrialism and blatant militarism. Some of higher idealism must be infused into our lives.

The Japanese Buddhists have hitherto been kept too ignorant of the

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original texts of their own religion, some of which are still extant. The Chinese translations of the Tripitaka have been the sole source of our knowledge of Buddhism, and these days even this source is growing more and more inaccessible to the general public, not to speak of the original texts themselves. It will be most opportune, therefore, to present them with a new vernacular version of the Sanskrit or Pali texts. Such an attempt will surely prove a spiritual impetus not only to Eastern people but to the world at large when the translations appear also in some of the European languages.

Buddhism is not a faith of the past, while it is full of the ancient wisdom. It is alive with faith and force, and the highest ideal of the Eastern people must be sought in it. By the organization of the present Society, we, therefore, hope that the beacon of Buddhism, especially of Mahayana, will be placed in a higher stand than before not only in the land of its birth but in the West where unfortunately it has so far not been presented in its perfect form. . . .

A few words may not be amiss to preface the publication of this sort of a magazine. In the first place, Buddhism, especially Mahayana, is very much misunderstood in the West. It is forgotten that Buddhism is a living force still actively at work in moulding the destiny of the East. It may be found clustered with many superstitions or antiquated beliefs, but this is also the case with other living religions. As long as everything living has its historical background, it is inevitable that it harbors something of anachronism in it. The point however is to dig into the essence of the matter, and this is what is undertaken by the present magazine. If our humble attempt succeeds even to a modest extent in dispelling some of the misunderstandings entertained by foreign critics concerning the true spirit of Mahayana Buddhism, we shall be content with the result.

One may say, "East is East and West is West"; but when we know that this antithesis comes more or less from the difference of one's emotional reaction to environment, and further that this emotional reaction is largely modifiable through an intellectual sympathy and mutual understanding, we must not stop short at merely stating disagreements; but let us endeavor to clear up all the obstacles lying between the East and the West so that each may profit by the other, for our views are generally the half-views of half-men. And there is no doubt that Buddhism forms one of the key-notes that have struck deep into the hearts of the Eastern peoples. Indeed, without some knowledge of Buddhism the East may remain forever an enigma to the West.

Aesthetically, the Japanese arts come from Buddhism, without which Kyoto and Nara, the two main birthplaces of the arts in Japan, would have long been robbed of their attractions. Even the minor arts such as tea-ceremony, flower-arrangement, landscape-gardening, and the composing of Hokku or Haiku, all of which are now closely interwoven with our daily life, would have suffered greatly if the influence of Buddhism had been withdrawn from the culture of the Japanese people. The art of fencing so vitally concerned with the making of the samurai in the olden days, strange to say, was also the outcome of the Buddhist doctrine of life and death.

Ethically, the teaching of mercy based on the idea of oneness of all things has deeply affected the Oriental outlook of life. The doctrine of karma and transmigration has also left its normal marks on the people. Even in these days of science and free research, we have Buddhist sutras read over the dead, human and animal, that helped the specialists to be enlightened on some obscure points in anatomy, bacteriology, medical chemistry, or what not.

Philosophically, as an Indian product, Buddhism is highly tinged with intellectualism. Before the introduction of Western sciences, Buddhism has been the storehouse of logic, metaphysics, theology, psychology, and cosmology. One of the chief reasons why the Japanese could so readily assimilate the highest flights of Western intellect was no doubt due to the Buddhist training through which the Japanese have gone for many long centuries.

When these facts are considered, we realize how much Buddhism has done for the Japanese and for the East generally. The cherry-blossom season is now on and the whole city of Tokyo goes crazy over it. Those who only see the wild orgies under the snowing blossoms and think they understand the people, are quite mistaken. Let them wait until the twilight comes and let them listen to the temple bell ringing softly through the white clouds of flowers—what calmness it imparts to the entire surroundings! We forget the maddened crowds, and are carried away to a land of visions, when for the first time we understand the mysterious fascination of Buddhism. We intend to throw light on these mysteries, if we can.

Lastly, Japan is almost a sealed country to the outside world as far as scholarly work on Buddhism is concerned. This is inevitable owing to the linguistic difficulties. Of course, Japanese Buddhism has her own problems which are not necessarily of interest to other peoples. But as one of the modern nations Japan cannot stand away from the rest of the world, not only politically and socially, but intellectually and spiritually. It will therefore be one of the functions of this journal to report scholarly activities in

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this country in connection with the study of Buddhism.

Theravada Buddhism in Pali has found many able exponents, but the study of Buddhism in Sanskrit and especially in Tibetan and Chinese has not been so zealously pursued. Except by a handful of specialists, Buddhism known as Mahayana has not yet received scholarly labor. In fact, Buddhism preserved and expounded in the Chinese language is a veritable storehouse where not only the lost Indian wisdom but the genius of the entire East lies buried and awaits a thorough excavation. Besides its being a living faith, Mahayana Buddhism is, when it is historically considered, a great monument of the human soul. Its struggles, its yearnings, and its triumphant and joyful cries are all recorded in it. The Mahayana, therefore, is not solely the heritage of the East, but must be made accessible to the West.

With the New Series, we continue to abide by the ideas expressed above, but with one amendment. The world is rapidly growing more of an organic whole in every sense of the term. A narrow regionalistic standpoint can no longer prevail as we are all one complete network of humanity. One nation's welfare is the concern of all other nations on all levels of human activity. We have come to envision a world culture—this, not in the sense of a monotonous uniformity, but shining in glorious multiplicities of variegatedly colored and scented spring flowers. It is our wish, then, as Buddhists of today, to serve humanity generally by striving to make the Buddhist teaching better understood and appreciated by the entire world. Understanding among men—is this not the greatest dignity and privilege we are all given to enjoy?