

The TWENTY-FIFTH CENTURY

BUDDHISM AND THE
NEW AGE

Francis
Story



FOREWORD

“THE TWENTY-FIFTH CENTURY” is a series of articles by Francis Story[†] (Anagarika Sugatananda) specially written to mark the 2500th year of the Buddha Sasana. The articles were first published in the *Sunday Indian Nation*, *The Free Lance* (Calcutta), *Assam Tribune*, *Hyderabad Bulletin Weekly*, *Evening News of India* (Bombay), *Ambala Tribune*, *Urdu Pratap* (New Delhi), *Pioneer* (Lucknow), *The Times of Ceylon* and other Asian periodicals during May 1956 (2500 B. E.).

The aim of the writer was to give the general reading public a short account of the Buddha Sasana as it stands at the dawn of its twenty-fifth century, its position relative to the pressing problems of the modern world, and some indication of the important part it is destined to play in the future history of both East and West.

Acknowledgements are made to NEAR

AND FAR EAST NEWS (ASIA) LTD., of
New Delhi, for permission to reproduce the
articles.

The
BURMA BUDDHIST WORLD-MISSION
7, East Block, Sule Pagoda,
Rangoon, Burma.

I

BUDDHA JAYANTI:

A TRIUMPH OF THE SPIRIT

This year marks an epoch in the history of Asia. It was 2,500 years ago that the Indian prince, Siddhartha Gautama, having renounced his throne and wandered forth as an ascetic to find deliverance from the sorrows of repeated rebirth, became the Buddha, the Supremely Enlightened One, and proclaimed the doctrine which in the West goes by the name of Buddhism.

Through all the changes and upheavals of history Buddhism has maintained its influence on the minds of millions of people in Asia, and is now claiming more and more devotees in the West. Viewed superficially, there was everything against its survival. A religion that teaches absolute tolerance, that forbids the use of force in any form, that refuses to be harnessed to nationalistic aspirations and exacts from its followers the strictest moral conduct, even to refraining from

taking the life of the meanest creature, would appear to have little chance of holding its own in a world of prejudice, violence and self-interest. But there are hidden strengths in Buddhism which have enabled it to weather the storms of time and the iniquities of man. In the first place, it appeals to the highest ideals in every man, so that even those who do not profess it, or who follow it but indifferently, have acknowledged freely that it holds up for our example the noblest goal to which we can aspire, and that its humane teachings have no parallel in the chronicles of religious thought.

But Buddhism is not merely humanistic, not merely—as some have imagined—an ethical system of living. Its humanism and morality are inextricably bound up with a philosophy that is incomparably grand and world-embracing. This philosophy is not based upon supernatural beliefs or unproven dogmas. Although, in fact, the religious records of Buddhism abound in examples of “miraculous” happenings, these are not at all essential to the doctrine. The

sceptic may reject all of them, and yet become convinced of the truth of the Buddha's teaching by an examination of the facts and by applying to himself the practical method the Buddha gave for obtaining higher states of consciousness. The ascetic Gautama was not called "The Buddha" because he performed miracles. Those instances of psychic power which until recently the materialist derided as "superstitions", but which are now being studied by groups of responsible scientists in every country where freedom of thought still obtains, were a common achievement of the ascetics of the Buddha's day, and he despised them. His claim to the title "All Enlightened" rested upon the perfection of insight he had gained; the proof of which, in turn, lay in the manifest truth of the doctrine itself, a truth that is capable of being realised by anyone, here and now.

In the past few hundred years man has made great advances in his knowledge of the universe in which we live, and many ancient beliefs, once thought to be essential to religion, have had to be abandoned. But there

is no single teaching, of the many which the Buddha gave in the course of his 45 years' ministry, that science has disproved. On the contrary, the picture of the universe now presented by science agrees in every particular with that given by the Buddha. The correspondence between present day scientific knowledge and the truths discovered by the Buddha over 2,000 years ago is such as to stagger the mind, and to convince the most sceptical that here without question is an unique instance of supramundane intelligence; the only instance that history can provide. Other great seers have seen portions of the truth: it was for the Buddha alone to comprehend the whole of it.

We are not to imagine from this that every Buddhist has an understanding of the cosmos that in its scientific detail excels that of the most advanced physicist. He knows simply that matter is largely an illusion, the universe a system of incessant flux and transformation, and that phenomena are made up of processes rather than things. His understanding of all this is determined by his own degree of intelli-

ence, and Buddhism itself presents no limitations. That is why Buddhism is making rapid advances in the West. The modern mind, attuned to an objective scientific approach to all questions, finds in Buddhism the only creed that does not make any demands on credulity or fix a limit to the range of human knowledge. In Buddhism the spiritual and the rational sides of man's nature are reconciled; the partial man, marred by the dichotomy of modern knowledge versus ancient beliefs, becomes once more a whole man, with a clearly understood place in the cosmic scheme and a definite goal before him.

But it is for the Asian mind, with its centuries-old tradition of Buddhism, that the 2,500th anniversary of the Buddha's dispensation holds the greatest significance. Buddhism claims no personality or event as being the only one of its kind. Time is beginningless and endless; universes emerge from chaos, develop and pass away into chaos again through interminable cycles, and there is an endless succession of Buddhas. Each Buddha appears at a period when the Dharma

(the Truth or Doctrine) has been lost and forgotten. He rediscovers and proclaims it again, having made the vow to do so under some previous Buddha during that Enlightened One's last sojourn on earth. In the present world-period there have been four Buddhas, of whom Lord Gautama was the last. He declared that his teaching would endure in the world for 5,000 years, after which it would vanish from the earth, because all things are impermanent. Here it must be understood that the Dharma itself is not impermanent; whether it is known to men or not, it remains the constant and unchanging principle of the universe. But the Sasana, or dispensation of each Buddha, shares the quality of impermanence with all other institutions, and when it has passed away aeons of spiritual darkness must prevail before the next Buddha is born to proclaim the truth anew. Ancient tradition holds that in its middle period, at the end of 2,500 years, the present Buddha Sasana will be in dire peril, but that it will be preserved and wax greater even than before, through the efforts of devout Buddhists.

This tradition has been strikingly borne out by the course of history, particularly during the past 200 years. The Buddha Sasana has indeed been in great peril of decay and disruption. The Asian Buddhist countries have been exposed to influences that were in all respects inimical to the indigenous religion. Under foreign rule, although Buddhism was not actively persecuted, it was treated with neglect and indifference, and the tendency was to make the more westernised Asians despise it. Young Buddhists were educated in Christian missionary schools and taught to respect a different tradition from that of their parents and grandparents, with the result that many—particularly in the higher strata of society, the official and professional classes—grew up without any knowledge of Buddhism. Enamoured of the technical superiorities of the West and seeing only the more popular forms in which Buddhism manifested itself among the illiterate masses, they grew to look upon it as a rather deplorable proof of their country's backwardness, and knew nothing whatever of its profoundly scientific and rational teachings.

Indeed, in Ceylon it took an American, Colonel Olcott, to reawaken the people to a sense of their great spiritual heritage and to start a new Buddhist movement there which is still felt to this day. But the influence of a few enlightened people was not enough. The decay in the rest of the Buddhist world continued unchecked, until another and even more powerful influence took the field against Buddhism.

This was Marxism, which soon came to be identified with the revolt against colonialism and foreign rule. The materialistic tenets on which it was based are now largely discredited, but it came to Asia as a great new revelation, and filled the vacuum left by the decay of religion and the confusion of religious thought the mission schools had left in their wake. It furthermore provided the nationalistic-minded leaders of student movements not only with a religion but with the desired revolutionary impulse to carry them forward, if necessary to martyrdom. There were in it two ingredients that Buddhism did not provide, and never can

provide—a spirit of nationalism and a vindication of violence. Young Asia took to Marxism, and embraced communism with it.

All things change, however, and now many of the erstwhile fiery and revolutionary students are sober and responsible statesmen, leaders of their country in a newly-acquired independence. And while they are in many cases reluctant to renounce their Marxist political principles entirely, most of them realise that these are fundamentally in conflict with Buddhism, and that Buddhism is best. A compromise has been achieved by accepting a Marxist economic and political programme while abjuring the Marxist anti-religious credo and the more extreme forms of communism. A Buddhist equivalent to Christian Socialism has emerged, and seems likely to prove the most effective answer to the problems of Asian development as they now stand.

It is in this context that the Buddha Jayanti celebrations are being held in many Buddhist countries this year, and the prospects are ex-

tremely favourable for a widespread Buddhist revival, in which governments and people will unite, not for the duration of the celebrations only, but for a long time to come. In this lies the greatest hope for the future stability and national advancement of the Buddhist countries. If all the hopes of leaders and people are realised, Buddhism will place Asia in the vanguard of human progress, contributing something entirely new and as yet untried to the councils of a war-threatened world—the message of peace and universal benevolence preached in the Ganges Valley by One whose wisdom and love are still felt as a living triumph of the spirit across the abyss of 2,500 years.

II

THE ASIAN BACKGROUND

In the course of the centuries, and in its transplantation from one land and cultural background to another, Buddhism, like every other faith, has undergone changes. For many centuries there have been two great divisions of the religion: Mahayana, the Buddhism of Tibet, Nepal, China, Korea, Japan and Mongolia, and Theravada, (incorrectly called "Hinayana") the Buddhism of Ceylon, Burma, Thailand and parts of Indo-China. From India missionary enterprise carried it far afield, but it gradually became absorbed into Hinduism in the land of its origin.

Hinduism itself arose from the impact of Buddhist thought on the existing Vedic Brahamanism; but in essential doctrine Buddhism was from the beginning quite distinct from all other systems current in India at the time of Gautama Buddha. Its doctrine of Anatta—that there is no eternal,

unchanging principle in living beings—and its denial of a creator-god, marked it as unique in religious thought, and excited opposition among the more orthodox sections. The Brahmins in particular, seeing their privileged position in society threatened by a creed which refused to admit any divine authority or any elect priesthood, were strenuous in their efforts to arrest its progress, and when they found themselves unable to do so resorted to a policy of fusion, to bring it into the Brahmanic fold. Nevertheless, many Brahmins became followers of the Buddha both during and after his lifetime, and some became the foremost exponents of Buddhist philosophy.

Mahayana, which flourished in the atmosphere of the great universities of Nalanda, Takashila and other centres of learning, was first carried to Tibet in the sixth century (Christian Era) by a Tantric professor, Padma Sambhava. There it encountered the indigenous Bon religion, a form of Mongolian animism, and a long conflict resulted in a victory for the Mahayana, in which, however,

it absorbed a great many features of its defeated rival. In China Mahayana became coloured by Confucianism and Taoism; but both of these had something in common with it—Confucianism sharing its ethical humanism and Taoism its broad spiritual outlook—so that there was no great degeneration of the religion through these contacts. Mahayana Buddhism suffered its greatest corruption in Japan, where the demands of nationalism towards the end of the last century caused it to be combined with Shinto, a pre-Buddhistic indigenous cult artificially resurrected to further the spirit of nationalism among the Japanese. Buddhism, the creed of mercy and absolute non-violence, became a cult of the warlike Samurai, its system of self-discipline and mental concentration diverted from spiritual ends to the perfection of sword play and wrestling. Long before this, however, the Japanese had produced a teacher of their own, Shinran Shonin, who under the guise of Buddhism propagated a doctrine of “vicarious atonement” and salvation by faith that was the exact opposite of the Buddha’s teaching.

Mahayana Buddhism, therefore, not only underwent changes in doctrine, but as it spread outside India became modified by the racial temperaments of the people who adopted it. The Mongolian races cultivated their own kinds of Buddhism from the Ariyan root, but in the Theravada countries Buddhism remained unchanged. Only a difference in emphasis on different aspects of the doctrine in any way distinguished them. Siam stressed the importance of Vinaya, the code of rules governing the Sangha; Ceylon cultivated Suttanta, the Discourse section of the scriptures, while Burma attached the highest importance to Abhidhamma, the ultra-mundane philosophy. It was these countries, followers of the Pali tradition, which kept the original teaching of the Buddha pure and unalloyed with other systems, and it is there that Buddhism to-day is found in its most perfect form.

All "schools" of Buddhism, however, accept the fundamental principles of Theravada, the Four Noble Truths, since these are undeniably the original teaching of the histori-

cal Buddha, and the gravitational centre of all Buddhist thought. All modes of existence are subject to suffering; the cause of rebirth and suffering is craving; Nirvana is the cessation of both craving and rebirth, and the way to attain Nirvana is the Noble Eightfold Path of Right Views, Right Aspirations, Right Speech, Right Actions, Right Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness and Right Concentration. These principles, together with the Three Characteristics of phenomenal being, Impermanence, Suffering and Non-Soul, and the profound doctrine of Dependent Origination, form a common ground of concord between Theravada and Mahayana. Every other doctrine of Buddhism is but an elaboration and more detailed exposition of these fundamentals, worked out in terms of Karma and rebirth to a logical perfection that is without parallel in religious thought.

Buddhist universalism places all forms of life in the same ethical context, and denies any special place to man in the cosmic order. It is this, more than anything, which makes

the Buddhist outlook hard for the West to understand. The mind of Buddhist Asia—and in this must be included to a great extent the Hindu mind also—has as its ideal the life of absolute harmlessness, of non-violence towards every living creature. The first precept of Buddhism is to refrain from taking life, and while this may not be constantly observed by the lay Buddhist, it is a fact that it is constantly remembered, and sets a standard of conduct which every Buddhist hopes ultimately to reach and maintain. In practice it means that whereas in the West certain kinds of aggressiveness are commended, as for instance where they are directed against acknowledged evils, by Buddhists any form of violence, wherever it occurs and for whatever reason, must be regarded as a lapse from the ideal standard.

This undeniably presents many ethical problems to the Buddhist layman who is aware that human welfare, in the material sense, depends to a great extent on a successful war against other living creatures. He may be a confirmed vegetarian, yet still be un-

willingly committed to the extermination of disease-carrying animals, to say nothing of microbes and bacteria. He is compelled to make a choice between worldly and spiritual welfare, between what is ethically "right" from the mundane viewpoint and what is "right" in the ultimate sense. If he is resolved to follow the highest path it becomes incumbent on him to avoid any mode of livelihood which causes pain or death to living creatures, even if such action promotes the welfare of humanity. The relentless logic of Buddhism is aimed at the exposure and eradication of every form of self-interest; and the welfare of humanity, as it is commonly understood, is but a manifestation of self-interest, however impersonal it may appear. The only truly enlightened self-interest lies in the abolition of the false concept of "selfhood". However, there is another aspect to the problem, which somewhat relieves the weight of responsibility on the individual. Buddhism is concerned above all else with mental purity; that is to say, with the purity of intentions. "To refrain from evil; to cultivate all good; to purify the

mind—this is the teaching of the Buddhas”. Purity of intention, although it does not nullify the bad Karma of killing “inferior” creatures, may greatly reduce it where the conscious objective is to preserve the lives of human beings, and in cases where no specific feeling of hatred or repulsion is engendered in performing the act. Buddhism certainly makes an ethical distinction between the man who kills bacteria for the common good, and one who indulges in blood sports for the pleasure of killing. It is, moreover, a distinction based on sound psychological principles. Addiction to blood sports is a willing surrender of the mind to the basest instincts, bringing it down to a level lower than that of the hunted animal.

The Buddhist life is principally a mental life. It is concerned very little with externals, except where they reflect a mental state or stimulate a mental response and reaction. The influence of the West has been to turn the Buddhist mind outwards, and it has now become necessary to bring about a reconciliation between the attitude formed by long

tradition and that imposed by the new necessities. Buddhist Asia cannot keep outside the compelling current of world events and the conflict of alien ideologies. The great hope is that with the growing importance of Asia in world affairs Buddhism may become strong enough to influence them with some of its own ideals of non-violence and respect for life. Such influence can only be a moral one: it cannot be exercised by direct force or any of the less obvious forms of compulsion. If it is to carry any weight it must rely on the approval of people of intelligence and goodwill, and on their own ability to influence their countrymen. And here it is worthy of observation that Buddhist opinion suffers under another handicap, the lack of a unified spirit when it is directed towards practical affairs such as international relationships. This is due in part to historical causes, to explain which it is necessary to make a rough comparison between Buddhist Asia and Christian Europe.

They developed in totally different ways. Although in its alliance with the state Christianity was often involved in conflicting

national interests, its spirit was diffused throughout Europe in a more or less uniform pattern. It had a central authority and a recognised cultural and ethical background which was international, being shared even by those countries which had broken away from the principal church. It was possible to speak of "Christendom" as a unity: one which embraced political aims, scholarship, ideas and art, as well as religion. In Buddhist Asia there has never been the same kind of identification. There has been a sharing of cultural elements, mostly drawn from India; but even these have been given a different form in the lands of their adoption, becoming nationalised to an extent that is unknown in the West. In Burma the Buddha is represented as a Burman; in Thailand as a Siamese, and religious art depicts his surroundings and contemporaries in the architecture and costumes of those countries. Until comparatively recent times the tendency has been for each nation to regard Buddhism rather as its own exclusive property, and for the ordinary man to be even unaware that it had its origin elsewhere. Thus Buddhism deve-

loped in each country without reference to the other Buddhist lands, and divorced from its actual historical setting. There were exchanges of religious missions as between Burma and Ceylon, but these did little to affect the picture in its broad outlines.

The political structure of the Buddhist countries prior to Western contacts, also, did not make for a sense of unity between them on religious grounds, since it was self-contained and parochial, with no central religious body to give Buddhism a more international character. Just as each monastic group was an autonomous entity, so each Buddhist country in its original state was an independent Asian unit, its king the sole arbiter of its internal affairs, knowing little of the world beyond its borders and certainly not in the least influenced by ideological trends abroad. Modern means of rapid communication are changing this situation, but in the ordinary course of events it would be a long time before the mass outlook could be affected by foreign interchanges sufficiently to break down the age-old barriers and allow

Buddhism to create a spirit of real unity between the peoples of different nations. It is a sad fact that many Buddhists today know more of the ideas and ways of life of the West than they do of their nearest Buddhist neighbours.

This is one of the features of Buddhist life that the Buddha Jayanti celebrations this year are likely to change for the better. The Sixth Great Buddhist Council in Rangoon has brought many leading monks, scholars and distinguished persons in all walks of life from other Buddhist countries to Burma, while missions have been exchanged between Burma and every other Asian country with the object of fostering the Buddhist spirit and promoting goodwill and understanding between them. During the course of this year many thousands of pilgrims will travel from their homelands to visit Buddhist shrines and sacred places in India, and India has prepared to extend them a cordial welcome, with celebrations on a lavish scale all over the country. Buddhists are becoming increasingly aware of India as the sacred

birthplace of the Buddha and Buddhism, and this occasion offers a magnificent opportunity for the ties of affection and veneration to be strengthened into a feeling of Asian spiritual unity. That India herself will send many pilgrims and goodwill missions to the Buddhist countries cannot be doubted, for Buddhism is reviving in the land of its origin. It may be hoped that this will result in the awakening of a new international spirit among Buddhists which will carry the Buddhist ideal far beyond its ancient confines and ultimately enable Buddhist Asia to speak with one voice in the cause of human brotherhood and progress.

III

THE BUDDHA AND HIS DOCTRINE

The Buddha lived and taught 500 years before the dawn of the Christian era, and over ten centuries before the birth of Mohammed. It is necessary to remind oneself of this to appreciate the timeless quality of his doctrine. It has not dated with the passing of the centuries but remains essentially modern in every respect.

The chief reason for this is to be found in its broad and all-embracing view of life, which includes not only the limited life of man but also that of every type of sentient being, both lower and higher. The Buddha was a seeker of truth, not one who claimed to come into the world fully equipped with divine knowledge or the authority of revelation. He started his quest from a very commonplace observation: the fact that every kind of life-experience contains more suffering than pleasure, a truth which has been noticed by most of the really significant thinkers the world has produced. This is not pessimism;

it is the outcome of an unbiased and realistic view of the sum totality of life. It passes unnoticed by the majority simply because in order that life may continue it is necessary that it should appear attractive, and the ability to make it seem so is part of the average man's psychological make-up. But whereas the ordinary man only becomes conscious of pain to any degree when it is his own suffering, the man who considers the experiences of others in the same light as his own, and feels them to be equally real, must conclude that suffering, not happiness, predominates in this world. Such was the case with the Prince, Siddhartha Gautama; he felt it so acutely that nothing could satisfy him but that he must discover the way out of this network of suffering, not only for himself but for all beings.

In India, where highly-evolved seers had long made a study of the hidden laws of nature, the facts of rebirth and Karma were already known and accepted. They were seen quite rightly as being the only laws by which a moral universe could function, since there

could be no justice or meaning in the causal distribution of good and evil without a prior cause. Only a few materialistic and Nihilist philosophers dissented, and they had no more reasonable theory to put forward. Man cannot believe in any but a universe governed by moral principles; and a succession of rebirths, conditioned by good and evil actions, is the only view compatible with this. The existence of rational man—that is, man with a moral sense—in an irrational universe is too great an anomaly for the human mind to accept. The idea that man invented morality is more unlikely than that he invented God.

The problem of how to put an end to suffering, therefore, was how to discover a way out of the round of rebirths. On this point there was not the same unanimity of opinion. The general belief was that union with the supreme unmanifested god, the Brahman, could bring this release, but the ascetics and priests themselves disputed as to how it was to be attained, each claiming his own system as the best, or even the only, one.

Prince Siddhartha followed the usual custom, and first placed himself under the foremost religious teachers of the time. He came to equal their spiritual attainments, yet found himself master of only a partial success. Long afterwards, in a discourse to disputing Brahmins, he acknowledged himself to be one who had achieved "union with Brahma", or who had gained access to the highest Brahma realms. But it was not sufficient; he clearly perceived that these exalted Brahma beings were themselves still involved in Samsara, the round of rebirths, and he began to understand why there was such doubt, perplexity and disagreement as to the exact nature of the Brahmic attainment. When the ultimate goal was reached, he knew, there could no longer be any uncertainty or dispute.

Having no more to learn from his first teachers, he turned to other means. He applied himself to rigorous asceticism, and carried it to such extreme lengths that he almost died. The belief that the liberation of the spirit was to be gained through mortifi-

cation of the flesh, he found to be also a delusion. He had almost killed himself, without achieving anything. He went back to moderation in eating and drinking, but his resolution to reach the goal was in no way impaired; he became more determined than ever. Strengthened in body and refreshed in mind he made a great vow, seated beneath a banyan tree at Bodh Gaya, that he would not arise from that spot, even though the flesh should wither and fall from his bones, until he had attained Perfect Enlightenment and overcome birth, suffering and death.

What happened on that epochal night we can only know from the Buddha's own account of it and what we may surmise from the result of his meditations. A tremendous spiritual struggle took place, and it was rewarded with victory. Beneath the Bodhi Tree the Ascetic Gautama was assailed by every temptation, doubt and threat that the evil forces of the world could bring against him, but his mind remained tranquil, unshaken and resolved. And at last Enlightenment came, and with it the knowledge of all

causes and links in the chain of causation. Prince Siddhartha, who became the Ascetic Gautama, was now a Buddha; the Dharma was rediscovered and would be again proclaimed for the benefit of gods and men.

There is not space to detail all the forms of Insight that arose in the Enlightened One in the course of that night's meditation, and only a broad outline can be given here. In brief, he discovered that the life-process is beginningless in space and time, and that it is subject to inexorable laws inherent in the nature of mental and physical being. Further, he found this process of birth, decay and death to be devoid of any factor of persistent identity to connect one phase with another; mental and physical phenomena arise, mature and pass away in a continual flux of momentary existences, all of them characterised by suffering. Karma alone connects them in a causal sequence that gives the illusion of an enduring self. The three characteristics of this phenomenal process, therefore, are impermanence, suffering and absence of any real, essential being (*Anitya, Dukkha,*

Anatman in Sanskrit). The cause of universal suffering is craving, for it is craving that leads to rebirth—or rather to the arising of a new psycho-physical sequence to carry out the results of the Karma of the previous one. The cessation of this craving-impulse is Nirvana, and the way to attain Nirvana is the Middle Path, summarised in eight particulars embracing Morality, Concentration and Insight-Wisdom.

To view existence in terms of *processes*, rather than of *things*, is the modern scientific trend. It is a view supported equally in their different spheres by biology, physics and psychology. Human life is but a section of an infinitely wide range of such processes as those we see operating in the external world, and man's consciousness of himself as a living organism differs from that of other creatures only in degree, not in essential kind. In Buddhism the system of causal relationships goes deeper even than that postulated by contemporary science, for it extends from the material universe into the realm of ethical and spiritual values. The law that integrates

them is that of the conservation of energy, which in the mental realm manifests as Karma.

Karma is volitional action, the Buddha declared, for only a deed that is consciously willed bears a moral result. In this Buddhism differs from Jainism. The laws of the universe are mechanistic, but the mechanism is subject to man's consciously-directed will, and it is in this that Buddhist doctrine also avoids the error of determinism. The individual is literally and truly the director of his fate, capable of defeating evil and pain through the regulation of his thoughts and desires. The first step towards purifying the mind is to exercise restraint of the passions in thought, word and bodily action. Hence the Buddhist layman undertakes, voluntarily, the Five Precepts: to refrain from taking life, to abstain from all forms of theft, from adultery, from falsehood and from intoxicants.

These Five Precepts constitute minimum Buddhist morality; they are supplemented by positive virtues whose cultivation strengthens the moral nature and reduces those selfish

cravings from which all unwholesome impulses spring. Greed, hatred and delusion are the three primary defects of the mind, and they must be opposed by the positive qualities of unselfishness, benevolence and wisdom. Therefore Buddhism urges the continual practice of charity, the cultivation of universal, indiscriminating benevolence, and meditation for the purpose of gaining Insight that will bear fruit in Nirvana.

The word 'love' is too much associated with a selective and possessive sentiment to be applicable in this context. Love is attachment; but Buddhist benevolence must be not only free from all modes of discrimination between one object and another, it must also be perfectly detached. Similarly, the practice of charity, in its highest form, should be unrelated to the object of the gift; no question of "worthiness" or "unworthiness" must be allowed to sully its purity. It is directed towards the alleviation of distress wherever this is found, and its final objective is the destruction of all sense of possession, of "me" and "mine" in the mind of the giver. But,

on a somewhat lower level, and considering charity as a type of good Karma, if the best results are desired it should be practised towards those who are morally worthy, such as Bhikshus or the “deserving” poor. Here it should be noted that every virtue has within it a spiritual trap; it may be merely a disguised selfishness. The complex ramifications of human psychology are themselves part of the formidable maze of Samsara, and many a reputed “saint” has achieved no more than the acquisition of good Karma for himself by his self-denial. Any self-denial which is seen as such, and consciously assessed, is not that complete self-negation that Buddhism calls for. The real goal, the only object worth striving for, is to put a stop once and for all to Karmic action and result. Only when this has been attained is the round of rebirth brought to an end in Nirvana. Actions that are desireless will be automatically good, but they will not produce rebirth.

The Buddha told his disciples that he had not the closed fist of a teacher who keeps some truths hidden, or who revealed his

highest teachings only to an esoteric circle. Everything necessary for them to know in order to make an end of suffering he had taught them, and they had witnessed the proof of it in their own lifetime. The state of Arahantship, the complete emancipation from phenomenal existence, is no mere mystical phantasy, but an empirical experience. Yet the Enlightened One also said that there were many kinds of knowledge coming within the purview of a Buddha which he had not revealed. There is no contradiction in these statements, and the second is not to be taken, as some have chosen to take it, as evidence of a secret doctrine in Buddhism. It means simply that the Buddha-mind is omniscient, and familiar with all the laws of nature. But to reveal these laws in their entirety is outside the scope of what a Buddha sets out to do. His self-appointed task is only to teach the Dharma of righteousness and emancipation. Let those who hanker after scientific knowledge spend their lives in pursuit of it if they wish; they will find that it does not bring deliverance from sorrow, or even any appreciable increase of happiness to themselves or mankind. At their most successful they can

be only like the miracle-worker who restores the dead to life, only that they may have to die again. But science as yet shows no signs of being able to accomplish this much.

The immense range of the Buddha's mind is apparent from the nature of his teaching. Nowhere else do we get the sense of so complete an understanding of life in all its diverse aspects as when we consider the analytical system he set forth and the universal applicability of the principles he discovered and enunciated. But its appeal to the intellect, unique as it is, is nothing beside the confirmation that comes with its practical application. In the methods of Buddhist meditation, particularly those directed towards Vipassana, or the development of Insight-Wisdom, lies the real vindication of the Buddha's doctrine. Relying upon no dogmas, it invites investigation in exactly the same spirit that science does. It is, in fact, the perfection of the scientific method applied to the realm of mind—that realm which so far orthodox science has neglected. By starting from facts, not from unprovable hypotheses, Buddhism opens

a door to this path of investigation which otherwise would remain closed to the responsible scientific thinker. Mind is the matrix of all conditions in this world, and until we have come to a better knowledge of its nature and the way it works we cannot hope for any real progress in the evolution of the race. Happily there are indications that this truth is being realised at last, for scientists, newly released from the dogmatic materialism that formerly inhibited them, are beginning to make a study of mental, or psychic, phenomena. Perhaps the next few decades will see a new orientation in scientific thought, away from the profitless—and often dangerous—struggle for mastery of the external world, towards a fuller understanding of the mental side of human life. For nothing is more certain than that the results of scientific and technical progress will always be put to more evil uses than good, until the minds of men are better regulated and attuned to higher motives than the acquisition of power and material benefits. In this new evaluation of the mind as the real source of human wellbeing, the principles laid down by the Buddha should

be approached with the same unprejudiced outlook that would be accorded to any scientific discovery of major importance. If this is attempted it will be found that Buddhism, as it exists in the records of the Buddha's original teaching, presents us with a truth that at once unites and transcends all that we understand of science, philosophy and religion.

IV

BUDDHISM AND SOCIAL PROGRESS

The doctrine taught by the Buddha differs in almost every respect from the theistic creeds which sprang from a tribal or nationalistic background. These must necessarily concern themselves to a great extent with the demands of communal life and the collective interest of the nation. They developed legalistically, as the revelation of the will of a Supreme Being in the ordering of his world. It was not so with Buddhism. The Buddha rejected divinity and did not assume the character of a lawgiver. He simply pointed out the principles of morality, and left it for others to regulate their affairs by them.

From the beginning it must be obvious that the highest path of self-renunciation, the path of the saint to Nirvana, is a highly personal one, and cannot be made the basis of rules for the generality of mankind. Hence the institution of the Sangha of monks, which enables those desiring to follow it to renounce worldly responsibilities and attachments alike.

The layman, self-burdened with duties towards his family, community and fellow-men in general, can only practise Buddhist morality to a limited extent. Accepting the protection of his national or communal laws he is bound to uphold them against hostile forces; being committed to the protection of dependents, he is in duty bound to shield them from whatever dangers may threaten their prosperity or existence. He cannot realise the perfection of non-violence in conduct, the complete surrender of self-interest, which Buddhism logically requires for the fulfilment of the highest spiritual effort, but has to adapt his conduct to the standards of worldly morality. This does not exclude him from the attainment of the highest, for the Sangha is always open to him, and if he does not choose to avail himself of it in his present life, he may do so in a subsequent one. His activities, in short, are directed more towards the acquirement of good Karma than to the renunciation of Karma; and for this purpose worldly morality, as laid down in the Five Precepts, is a suffi-

cient code. Observance of the Precepts can at least prevent him from being reborn in a lower state than that of a human being.

The world-regarding element in theistic religion is greatly attenuated in Buddhism. It was not the Buddha's intention to try to transform human life by removing material obstacles to happiness, either by miraculous intervention or by laying down systems of law. He would no more have attempted a temporary victory over death by restoring a corpse to life (even had this been possible) than he would have laid down arbitrary laws as to how many wives a man was entitled to possess. He was concerned with fundamental causes, fundamental cures and fundamental principles, not with the changing and superficial aspects of life that vary from time to time and place to place. Happiness—real, enduring happiness—he knew to be attainable only by a radical transformation of man's inner life. The conditions of the world, being the result of the mental impurities of the beings born in it, cannot be permanently changed for the better by an attack

upon their external defects; good and evil are in symbiosis with life, and cannot exist independently of one another in the framework of phenomenal being. Nothing short of final release from Samsaric conditions can produce the perfect and everlasting bliss.

The Buddha, therefore, was not primarily a social reformer; he taught men how to *re-form* themselves as individuals. Yet this in the ultimate sense is the only way that genuine reform can be achieved. Men cannot be made better by act of parliament, for laws can only serve to restrain their more anti-social instincts without removing the impulses that generate them. Buddhism goes deeper than seeking to prevent wrongdoing by setting up commandments against it; its object is to remove the mental bias towards evil and substitute for it a positive love of virtue. It is psychological treatment rather than legislation.

The humanitarian reforms that followed in the wake of Buddhism were a by-product of its emphasis on universal benevolence and compassion: an important by-product, and

inevitable, yet not the main purpose of the Buddha's mission. Under its influence the great king Asoka, who united India into a single empire for the first time, forsook bloodshed and instituted a reign of humane benevolence that has not been equalled since. Not only did he formulate laws of the utmost leniency for the welfare of his people, and cause them to be set up in stone inscriptions for all to read, but he also established hospitals, alms-houses, seats of learning and every conceivable kind of institution for the public benefit. Nor did his anxious regard confine itself to his human subjects; even animals, creatures entirely without political influence, were granted hospitals, provided with drinking troughs and given food in times of scarcity. The government of today which pays as much regard to the welfare of animals as it does to the most influential sections of the electorate may well claim to be as disinterested as this enlightened monarch.

Whether the Emperor Asoka's interpretation of Buddhism would satisfy some of the more orthodox Buddhist communities of

today is a matter for conjecture. He appears to have been little preoccupied with the niceties of Abhidhamma disputation, but much concerned with the practical application of Buddhist principles. His love of erecting stupas did not exceed the devotion shown to work of public utility, and his charity was dealt as freely to the poor of his kingdom as to the Buddhist Sangha. He placed religious education above the pomp of religious ceremonial, and fostered the spirit of learning among his subjects, urging them to examine with an open mind all the teachings of the various sects and to embrace that which commended itself to them as being the noblest. Thus he set the pattern of Buddhist tolerance which has been followed ever since, and at the same time promoted the intellectual and moral advancement of his people by his own personal example.

Unfortunately, Asoka's error was that he tried to combine the roles of saint and ruler in the same person simultaneously, and in essaying what the Buddha himself had been too wise to attempt he made only a partial

success of each. The empire that he could never have welded together but by force, was wrested from him by force. Nevertheless, his heroic attempt to rule a kingdom by Buddhist ideals of mercy and non-violence stands as a noble example of what might be achieved on these lines.

The neglect of education and social services by Buddhists in recent times has been due to the prevalence of foreign mission schools and hospitals more than to any deficiency in the Buddhist spirit. These, by taking the responsibility for education of children and care of the sick off the shoulders of the Buddhists, have encouraged a habit of dependence not usually found among free peoples. Their activities, while materially beneficial, have been morally pernicious.

In former days the monastery schools were an institution to be found all over Buddhist Asia. Through them nearly every child received at least the rudiments of education, together with instruction in religion and good conduct. This early monastic training was

invaluable in the building of character, and was the means whereby the Sangha maintained its beneficial influence on the people throughout their lives. In the villages the system of monastery schools never entirely disappeared; but for those who wished their children to fill government or professional posts, the westernised education given by the mission schools became indispensable. So it came about that more than one generation grew up with little knowledge of Buddhism, and that little confused with alien ideas. Education was diverted from its most important aim—the training of character and promotion of cultural interests—to the utilitarian one of enabling the child to make a living, or to assume importance in the community as an official of some kind. The motive of self-interest came well to the fore. Students crammed for examinations without any real interest in their subjects, or even proper understanding of them, and the examination papers were mere records of what had been learned by rote. The enervating effects of this kind of forcible feeding with information

(for it is not worthy of the name of education) are still shockingly apparent in most of the Buddhist countries.

Organised social services do not come natural to the Buddhist temperament. Theoretically, private and individual charity covers all the requirements, and the Buddhist would rather give his assistance direct to the beneficiary than donate to a charitable organisation. In times of prosperity this works very well, and formerly there was little real destitution in the Buddhist countries of Ceylon, Burma and Siam. But with the present economic stringencies, coupled with a mounting birth-rate, it cannot any longer be counted on to alleviate all the cases of desperate poverty and sickness. There are those who deplore the institution of Buddhist organised charities, from a mistaken idea that Buddhism should have no concern with mundane affairs, but the example set by Asoka should be sufficient to correct this. Buddhism actually provides every incentive to social welfare work, and it is difficult to find any valid ground for the objection. A great

impetus would be given to Buddhism as an influence in the lives of the people if Buddhist institutions for health, education, social uplift and other humanitarian aims were to augment, if not supplant, those already established by foreign missions. Where so much that is inferior and unworthy has been borrowed from the West there can surely be no harm in adopting an idea that is of proven value, whatever may be said against it by self-appointed "guardians of the Dharma".

So far, the Buddhist revival in Asia has been promoted on lines that have not touched the more crucial problems of modern life. The practical needs of the people are still being dealt with in a manner that owes more to borrowed Western methods and ideas than to Buddhist principles. There has not been time as yet for the emergence of a characteristically Buddhist approach to the question of social welfare, and some prejudice against applying Buddhist ideas to everyday matters has to be broken down before it will be able to take definite form. When it is acknowledged, however, that Buddhism has

a broader area of impact on human affairs than it has been permitted hitherto, the result may be a return to the Asokan ideal of active participation in public matters. Independence gives the Buddhist countries scope for the restoration, not only of pagodas, but also of the spirit of service to humanity that was once so prominent and progressive a feature of Buddhist life.

V

BUDDHIST ASIA AND COMMUNISM

During the period when the Buddhist countries were striving for independence, the Buddhist Sangha was politically active in the nationalist cause, and "political monks" were high in public esteem. Monks such as the Ven. U Wisara in Burma played a prominent part in the independence movement and wielded considerable influence.

Since independence there has been a prevalent feeling among the laity that Buddhist monks should keep aloof from politics, and government circles in particular exhibit a pious desire to preserve the purity of the Sangha from contamination by worldly affairs. With a monastic order that comprises a great part of the male population, however, it cannot be expected that all should remain politically neutral, and there are groups that hold very decided views, at least on internal affairs.

In the case of the lay population, the general attitude may be summed up as an inclination to keep Buddhism and politics rigidly compartmentalised. A man's political views need bear no relation to his ideas as a Buddhist. This is not an easy attitude to maintain, since ethical problems that call for a Buddhistic solution are continually obtruding on the political scene. Some of these, such as the question of dealing with armed insurgents, present great difficulties to the conscientious Buddhist statesman. This is one of the reasons against declaring Buddhism a state religion. The fact is that Buddhism cannot be a state religion in the ordinary acceptance of the term, because, unlike the theistic creeds with their world-regarding morality, it cannot sanction acts of violence that are necessary for the preservation of public order and safety. It is strictly a way of spiritual evolution for the individual, and may not be forced into conformity with worldly necessities except by extensive compromise.

The strong influence of Buddhism in Burma is seen in the leniency shown to insurgents when they voluntarily surrender or are captured. To what degree this mildness has retarded the restoration of internal peace is a question for debate; there have been many instances of rehabilitated insurgents taking advantage of the kindness shown them to go underground again with fresh supplies of arms and ammunition. For the Burman Buddhist it is difficult to inflict harsh punishment in cold blood; it is against all his instincts and religious training. He can only be violent when angered to the point of forgetfulness of the Buddhist teachings.

The climate of Buddhist thought favours a democratic constitution, inasmuch as it demands complete personal freedom — that is to say, equality of freedom—for the working-out of individual destinies. Intellectual liberty is another important requirement of Buddhism which can only be realised in a democratic system. Yet this democracy must not be confused with the concept that “all men are equal”, for the law of Karma causes

them to be born unequal in mental and physical make-up, character, abilities, position in life and fortunes. These distinctions are all part of the results of their past actions, and can only be improved in the future by good Karma in the present life. There is no fatalism about this; a poor man may improve his position by hard work, for Karma, both good and bad, ripens according to opportunity, and fresh Karma is continually being produced, some of which may bear fruit in the present life. But Buddhism encourages respect for those born to high positions, or who have attained them, since their good fortune is something they have earned for themselves in the past by virtuous actions. So long as they remain worthy, they are entitled to respect—a respect, it may be added, which is sometimes carried a little too far for the good of the persons concerned. Seen in this light, there are some aspects of traditional Buddhist life which appear to the stranger anything but democratic; but the word is susceptible of many different interpretations, and in the Buddhist sense it must be taken to mean *equality of opportunity* rather than equality of nature or of station.

Buddhism places all beings in the cosmos in different grades, and in the true Buddhist sense there is little difference in grade between a powerful ruler and an inhabitant of one of the lower heavens. Both are "Devas", a word which is inaccurately rendered "gods." The various levels of being are not unlike a social hierarchy, only with this great difference: that the Deva, either worldly or heavenly, of this existence may fall to a sub-human state in the next, or the opposite may happen. Nothing is fixed or stable save the law of cause and effect.

Democracy as a political idea must therefore contend with the knowledge that the man of low station in life is working out the results of past Karma, and that his handicap is not the result of imperfections in the social order, but is due to imperfections in human nature, and to the unalterable laws of the universe. Set against this is the fact that every man has both good and bad Karma in his past, and that the most humble peasant may have great natural abilities, despite being born in a poor or backward community.

The purpose of democracy should be to give him every opportunity to develop whatever talents or virtues he may possess, for his own benefit and that of his country.

In view of the above it may appear strange that some political leaders have professed to find an affinity between Buddhism and communism. It is quite obvious that the communist attempt to level society and eliminate all economic and class distinctions is contrary to what Buddhism teaches of the law of Karma and the fundamental principles of existence. Any such attempt is doomed to failure because it goes against basic laws that govern the universe. However sound it may appear in theory, practice bears out the Buddhist contention that such an unnatural interference with the causal law cannot succeed. All communism has been able to achieve is the substitution of one type of class system for another, one set of economic divisions for a fresh one that is equally unequal. In this it has resembled every other revolution. The advantages that workers have gained under it in backward

countries could have been obtained without the great sacrifices of personal liberty, of freedom in speech and thought that it has imposed on all classes. One communist policy alone, the nationalisation of land without compensation to the owners, is sufficient to show the extent to which Buddhism and communism differ: in Buddhism it is against the Precepts. On the theoretical side, the Marxist materialist dogma is in direct opposition to the Buddhist teaching of rebirth and Karma. Marxism, based on an outworn scientific materialism, maintains that all phenomena arise from matter, whereas Buddhism is founded entirely on the principle that it is mind which dominates all conditions, both material and immaterial.

One reason for the desire to reconcile Buddhism and Marxism lies in the political immaturity which first saw communism as being synonymous with anti-colonialism, and has not been able to readjust to new situations. Another cause has been the inability to distinguish clearly between communism and socialism, and to adopt too impetuously the

sweeping assumptions of the former as being necessary to the latter. Unused, by training and tradition, to the mental discipline of placing one idea in comparative relationship to another, many Buddhists have seized upon some superficial points of resemblance between Buddhist causal principles and the doctrines of Marx, and political zeal has blinded them to everything else. However, few enthusiasts have gone to the length of the Burmese Stalin Peace Prize Winner, Thakin Kodaw Hmaing, who declared that the work of Stalin for humanity was “almost equal to that of Lord Buddha”; and in the light of recent developments they must be feeling thankful that they did not.

The desire to keep Buddhism apart from politics is on the whole a genuine one in the Theravada countries, but it leaves it open to exploitation by less scrupulous elements, who do not hesitate to take every advantage which the neutral attitude of the more conscientious Buddhists offers them. While attempts to align Buddhism with Marxism are not infrequent, and are seldom openly

questioned, any attempt to point out their incompatibility is met by prompt opposition from the Marxists, with accusations of using religion as an instrument of politics. The Soviet anti-religious policy is carefully soft-pedalled for Asia in recognition of the fact that it would antagonise the majority of the Asian peoples if it were to be openly expressed. On the contrary, every effort is made to win over the people by a show of religious tolerance and even active sympathy.

On the Mahayana side, China is naturally the focal-point at which Buddhism and communism meet, and it is being cultivated as the centre of a politico-religious zone of influence. The desire for peace of all those countries which are not in a position to make war was exploited at the Asian and Pacific Peace Conference in 1952, when the Chinese took the opportunity offered by the presence of many Buddhist delegates from other countries to hold a special meeting, including a Sacred Relic Presentation Ceremony, and to pass the following resolution:

“ We call upon Buddhists of all countries to unite together and make all efforts for the

be considered, if the party leaders so decide, an illegal act. A meeting in Wuhan, led by Wu Yao-tsung and reported by the New China News Agency, Peking, on September 9, 1950, passed a Resolution to the effect that: "Buddhism should develop along the road of production and not teach superstitious practices." Again, "superstitious practices" can be made to cover every possible form of religious observance.

One example of the new Buddhist "productiveness" is in a N.C.N.A. report of April 26, 1951, which said that "the 1,000 Buddhist monks and nuns of the temples of Mount Omei had appealed to Buddhists throughout China asking them to join in the patriotic reform movement". These monks and nuns described how they had taken up textile production, tea processing and farm work, and had organised mutual-aid groups. They said that they had set up their own cooperatives, and felt happy after exchanging "the life of parasites for that of producers". This communist view of what the life of a Buddhist monk should be could never find acceptance

in a Theravada country, for the Vinaya strictly forbids the Sangha to engage in any such pursuits. Mahayana, however, has always been more lax in this respect, and Chinese tradition has therefore offered less resistance to the secularisation of the monasteries than would be encountered in Burma, Thailand or Ceylon. The Buddha laid down three duties for monks: studying the Dharma, teaching it and practising it, and the purpose of entering the Sangha is not to become a farmer or textile worker, but to strive to realise Nirvana.

On February 1, 1955, "China Youth", the official organ of the China Youth League, featured a "Brief Treatise on the Question of Religion", which stated that primarily young people are to be educated as scientific atheists in the belief that man can obliterate class and dominate nature and social forces. By then, the article continued, the need for religion will have been satisfied and religious ideas eliminated. "When religious ideas are gradually eliminated and nobody believes in religion any longer, will it still be necessary

to protect freedom? Of course, it will no longer be necessary," the article concludes. The same line of thought is pursued by Mao Tse-tung in his "Investigation into the Peasant Movement in Hunan", where he writes: "The idols were set up by the peasants, and in time they will pull them down with their own hands; there is no need for anybody else prematurely to pull down the idols for them. The agitational line of the Communist Party in such matters should be: 'Draw the bow to the full without letting go the arrow, and be on the alert'.

The drawing of the bow takes the form of the usual communist materialist propaganda, exemplified by Wen Ch'ing in the "China Youth" (Chung Kuo Ch'ing Nien) of July 16, 1955: "The old women burn incense and worship Buddhism, the sick pray to heaven and take to oracles, the farmers pray for rain at the time of drought . . . All this is superstition . . . The monks and nuns are worshippers of Buddhism* and they perform their rites in their respective monasteries. But those going there to burn incense "

and worship Buddhas . . . merely represent a kind of superstition.” This propaganda is based on the naive supposition that religion is only followed by those who are ignorant of the natural causes of storms, floods, meteorites, eclipses and pestilences, and that when people are informed of the causes of these phenomena, religion of all kinds will automatically disappear. Such a crude idea of religious beliefs as this could only be held by those whose experience has been confined to the primitive notions of Mongolian and Chinese peasants.

Quotations such as the above are the only authentic sources of information we have on the subject of Buddhism in Communist China. When the China Buddhist Association was formed, the reports sent out for foreign consumption gave the impression that the association arose with “democratic spontaneity” from the Asian Peace Conference; but the Chinese version made it clear that the association had been promoted and guided by senior members of the Chinese Communist Party.

From this brief review it will be seen that the Theravada Buddhist and the Mahayanist attitudes towards politics differ radically. Without in any way involving Buddhism in political issues, the Government of Burma has sponsored a great revival of Buddhist learning and practice, and has succeeded in bringing together for the Sixth Great Council all the Theravada countries of Asia in a religious movement that has as its object the purification and prolongation of the Buddha Sasana and the promotion of the Buddha's teaching. In this there is no question of "modernising" Buddhism, for nothing could be more modern than its original doctrines. Furthermore, nothing could provide a better foundation for a true concept of democracy than Buddhism. It remains for the Sangha and laity of the countries that have been privileged to take part in this work, to carry its inspiration into the future, and to ensure the survival of a Buddhist spirit that is above politics, yet sufficiently in touch with the everyday world to act as a guiding principle in national life.

VI

BUDDHISM: THE FUTURE

Entering as we are upon the second half of the Buddha-dispensation, it is natural to cast a speculative eye on the future. In their hundreds the golden pagodas of Burma, the gleaming white dagobas of Ceylon, the many-gabled wats of Thailand and Cambodia challenge the earthy passions of men and attest a living faith in values that are higher than those of this world. The continuity of Buddhist history stands before us in all its richness and variety, embodied in the work of generations that have laboured for its enlargement and wrought an enduring testament of beauty in its name. Through all the vicissitudes of the past it still speaks to us with a single voice.

But now the historical continuity of Buddhism is meeting with a number of entirely new cross-currents in the worlds of thought and action. Some of these, such as the broader outlook fostered in most parts of the world by education and the breaking-down

of old preconceptions, are favourable to the growth of Buddhism everywhere. It is gaining converts all over the free world without any organised missions. Other factors, however, are not so propitious. The cult of violence in many forms, in itself no new thing but given a new significance by the sanction of approved theories, suggests that man as a whole has not yet sufficiently emerged from the primitive to be capable of pursuing a high collective ideal, or even of seeing the need for ethical guidance in questions that affect his prospects of survival as a free agent. From these disquieting symptoms it seems that man, unable to sustain the burden of his own destiny, is turning more and more towards a concept of authoritarian group-responsibility that shall standardise his conduct and outlook, invest him with power without personal responsibility and fill the vacuum left by the almost total collapse of his sense of supramundane values.

The advance of scientific knowledge which has dimmed the light of religion in the West, has so far affected Buddhism only indirectly.

Such decline as there has been in religion in the Theravada countries is traceable to diffused Western influences in the national life rather than to any spontaneous application of critical thought to religion on the part of Buddhists themselves. Technical and secularised patterns in education have tended to relegate Buddhism to the limbo of ancestral *mores* rather than to bring it to the foreground of attention, either in a favourable or unfavourable light. As a general rule it is only fairly late in life that the ordinary educated man begins to take an interest in the religion of his ancestors, which he then accepts in a spirit of pious faith, fulfilling all the religious obligations without deeply questioning the validity of the premises on which they are based. Their purpose, the achievement of a better state, is enough, and his life is defined by a Buddhism lodged in the instinctive nature where it is very little exposed to disturbance from outside.

Yet there can be no doubt that with the growing interest that is being shown in it in many parts of the world, and among people

to whom it is a new discovery, Buddhism will eventually be subjected to the same searching criticism that Christianity has had to meet. Its emergence as an increasing influence in human thought will inevitably excite such criticism. This is altogether desirable, since no matter how much of a legendary nature may be discarded in the process, the essential doctrines have nothing to fear from the most probing analysis, and critical examination can only result in a complete vindication of its philosophy. How much it has to offer mankind in the way of hope and inspiration will then be revealed as it could be in no other way.

Materialism can put up little opposition to Buddhism, and dogmatic religion none. The sceptic may argue that belief in rebirth and Karma is merely a theory hardened into a dogma; but against this Buddhism can bring not only the entire weight of human conviction in favour of a universal moral order that can only be logically satisfied by this particular view, but can also produce concrete evidence of its truth. One of the last remaining

strong links with the tradition of direct experience of the supramundane in the West, the Spiritualist movement, is itself automatically adjusting, as a gyroscope adjusts itself to positions in space independently of the earth's rotation, to an acceptance of rebirth as the only viable position it can maintain.

The world-process is truly a life-process and its visible aspects only a part of the cosmological order in which man, as a being endowed with understanding, plays out his temporary role. "In my Father's house there are many mansions", said Jesus of Nazareth; that they are the Thirty One Abodes of Buddhism, the planes of existence from one to another of which beings travel in the course of their Samsaric wanderings is the most reasonable interpretation of this gnostic teaching, and one which the early Church fathers, among them Origen, endorsed.

Science, freed from the superstition that the tangible is the only reality, must admit the possibility, at least, of an infinite range of experiences and states of consciousness outside its known categories. At present it has

only reached the stage of viewing man as a being not necessarily unique in the unascertained limits of space and time, but one owning a mind of indefinite range and powers which under certain conditions can function outside of temporal and spatial limitations. When it is recognised that the law of causality covers a far greater field, in unknown dimensions, than the scientist has hitherto ascribed to it, the way will be opened for Buddhism to fill up the gaps in knowledge that both science and religion have left as *terra incognita* in present day thought.

It is in Ceylon that Buddhism has been most exposed to the bracing winds of critical opposition. The Singhalese mind has been put on the defensive by generations of militant and well-informed European missionaries who have done their best to reduce Buddhism, to impotence with the result that it has flourished, intellectually, in an atmosphere of controversy. The educated Singhalese has been forced to examine his religion through a Western microscope, to place it in comparative relation with the

alternative ideas presented to him; and the outcome has been, invariably, a triumph for Buddhism. It has also been greatly beneficial to the Singhalese Buddhist outlook, bringing to it a greater awareness of the Buddha's achievement by measuring it against the background of Western thought. This is probably the reason why more original Buddhist literature in English, as distinct from translations from the Pali, is produced in Ceylon than elsewhere. Burma and Thailand are now contributing their share, but until recently, and with the exception of a few scholars like the late Shwe Zan Aung, most writers in these countries confined themselves to works on Buddhism in their own language. The preference is still for translations from the Pali rather than for original compositions on Buddhist themes.

It cannot be denied that there is a great need for Buddhist instruction among the mass of the people in Buddhist countries, and one of the reasons for this is the secularised education that has had to be adopted by

most of the newly-independent nations. Each of them has large minorities of other faiths, and for a truly democratic constitution it is essential to give equality to all in matters of religion. In Burma the government at one point came up against the wishes of a section of the Sangha on this issue. The monks agitated for Buddhist instruction in state schools, which the government, itself almost entirely Buddhist, was obliged to resist. A compromise was effected, however, by which it was agreed that religious instruction in all faiths should be made available wherever it was practicable. Theoretically, the ideal system is to train children in the ethical principles common to all religions, and leave them to choose their faith on reaching years of discretion; but—and it is a very large but, indeed—the majority of people in these days show little interest in religion and unless they are imbued with some particular faith in childhood it is unlikely that they will give the matter serious consideration in later life, or even be capable of choosing wisely.

from among the various rival religions offered them, even if they have enough genuine religious instinct to be interested.

The Buddhist who takes up religion in his mature years is simply making a reversion to the faith taught him superficially in his infancy; he does not study the different creeds and make a free choice. Ultimately, the responsibility for religious education rests with the parents, who should see that their children receive instruction from the Buddhist monks, who are always ready to give it and of whom there is certain to be at least one who is competent to do so in every neighbourhood. Muslims and Christians do not neglect this, and there is no reason why Buddhist parents should look to the State to provide the religious training which is readily to hand in every Buddhist country. It is a question of rousing the Buddhist consciousness to the need for moral instruction for the young, without introducing compulsion. Burma, to quote one instance, is making strenuous efforts to do this, by encouraging the people voluntarily to take up the study and practice

of Buddhism. Meditation centres under competent Buddhist monks who have an established reputation for holiness are being founded all over the country, and the number of these is not less than that of the institutions for teaching Buddhist philosophy. Rangoon University has its classes in Abhidhamma, and the students themselves maintain a University Pali Association which publishes an annual magazine in Burmese and English.

In Thailand, the Thai Buddhist Association is under royal patronage, and carries on very effective work for the promotion of Buddhist knowledge; and there, as in Burma and Ceylon, there are also numerous smaller Buddhist societies, each of which, in its own field, contributes to the religious life of the country. Everywhere laymen are taking a more active part in the work for Buddhism than was formerly the case. The days when the sole religious function of the layman was to support the monasteries are over, and lay participation in teaching the Dharma is becoming more frequent. There is a growing desire to spread Buddhism, and every

Theravada country can show at least a few laymen who bring their English education and more cosmopolitan outlook to bear on the task of making it known.

It is sometimes charged against Buddhism, in common with other religions, that it is designed and deliberately used to lull the people into passive acceptance of evil conditions that could be remedied by social and economic readjustment, and is therefore an apt instrument in the hands of the ruling classes. But its history, as I have shown in "The Asian Background", does not support the theory. It arose and developed quite independently of the currents of economic determinism. Its influence has rarely been seen to coincide with state policies, and could never be invoked as a political mass-ideology through the instrumentality of an established church, since it has no such organisation. Its appeal is direct to the individual conscience, not to the mass mind. Except in Mahayana, there is no ritual public worship or submission to a spiritual authority; the sole authority in Theravada is the Canonical Text, the Tripitaka,

and orthodox opinion is strongly against any attempt to inject personal ideas into it. Only a fully Enlightened Being is entitled to do this, and anyone else claiming to do so in his own right is arrogating to himself an authority the Sanga would never uphold.

The formula for teaching Buddhism is “Thus have I heard—”, not “Thus do I say.” So the purity and disinterestedness, in the widest sense of the word, of Buddhism is ensured. There is a case on record of a megalomaniac king who proclaimed himself another Buddha: he was very promptly disillusioned by the Sangha.

Here again, however, Mahayana differs from Theravada in having a Pope, the Dalai Lama, who is considered to be the incarnation of a Bodhisattva, or future Buddha, and as such claims something corresponding to Papal infallibility in religious and secular decisions. He does not create religious dogmas, but whatever political measures he sanctions, or is persuaded to sanction, take on the force of divine ordinances. In

Mahayana the Bodhisattva, who is still active in Samsara, has taken the place of the Buddha as the chief object of veneration, and much of the decay and disruption of Buddhism in the Mahayana countries is due to this shifting of emphasis from the abstract and absolute to the worldly and relative. Religion and state have been combined in a theocracy, as they could never be under Theravada, and imperfect human judgments have been substituted for the disinterested, purely spiritual guidance of the Buddha Word. Despite any temporary encouragement it may receive for political reasons, the prospects of Mahayana in Asia are not bright; noble as many of its aspirations and ideas are, it has decayed from within and is no longer able to resist the pressures brought upon it by changing conditions.

On the Theravada side a very different picture presents itself. Here, no changing conditions can affect the validity of doctrines or practice. In a scene of political confusion and international tensions, the pure Buddha Dharma continues to shine steadily in Asia,

and with increasing brilliance. Unless some major catastrophe intervenes it may well succeed in bringing together the Theravada countries in a spiritual and cultural unity more closely-knit than any it has known in past history.

The Buddhist renaissance, although still in its uncertain infancy, is a very real thing, which shows promise of extending Buddhism on a global scale. That is, at least, the earnest desire of thinking people in the Buddhist countries, who look to the Buddha Jayanti year as the herald of a new era in the Sasana. Far from being passive or reactionary, the Dharma contains within itself everything progressive in thought and action that humanity requires. Providing, as it does, a comprehensive and intelligible explanation of life in all its aspects, a rational basis for morality, both individual and collective, a supreme goal to be striven for, and a working plan for happiness •which all can share in a society founded on both humanistic and spiritual values, the teaching of the Buddha, if it should be diffused on a

world-wide scale would give a new direction to human thought and history.

Distraught and disillusioned, man needs hope; but it must be a rational hope, something established on a sound bedrock of verifiable truth. This Buddha Jayanti year sees not only the Buddha Sasana but the entire world at a crucial turning point, and this is no mere coincidence, but signifies the cosmic identification of the Buddha's Law with the life and history of mankind as a whole. Men may accept or reject, but the truth proclaimed by the Supreme Buddha stands eternal and unchanging in a changing universe, and we ourselves are a part of it. It is not something outside of us, but the central fact of our very being. We can still save our civilisation if we give heed to the eternal Law, that "Hatred does not cease by hating—by not hating alone it ceases." Abiding by this everlasting principle, the Buddhist countries now stand in a unique position: they can, if they will, set the stage for the next act in the drama of man's evolution from beast to super-being. They can,

if they will, take their rightful place as guardians of the truth, and lead mankind into a new era of security, material prosperity, spiritual progress and a happier way of life than earth's troubled history has ever seen before.

BUDDHA JAYANTI

THE CROSSROADS OF HISTORY

(Broadcast on May 20th 1956. by Mr. Francis Story, Director-in-Chief, The Burma Buddhist World-Mission.)

This year, which sees the 2500th anniversary of the attainment of Nibbana by the Supreme Buddha, the middle period of the present Buddha Dispensation, also marks a very critical stage in the unfolding of human history. Never before, to our knowledge, has humanity been faced with problems of such magnitude and significance as those that confront us to-day. We are celebrating Buddha Jayanti in a world that is torn between conflicting ideas and contending purposes.

This is more than coincidence, for ancient tradition holds that such would be the situation when the middle era of the Sasana is reached. The history of the Sasana and the history of mankind are linked together; a crucial point in the history of the Sasana

must also denote a critical turning-point in the course of human affairs.

For many centuries men lived a life that was chiefly concerned with the interior world, the world of subjective or intuitive experience. They were concerned above all with questions relating to the purpose of life and the particular role they were destined to play in it. The great problems of life and death, of suffering and of fate, were the objects of their attention. Throughout the ancient world, particularly in the East, we find that man was primarily interested in matters which we broadly term religious, in a search for the basis of his being and a clue to his ultimate destiny.

But at the same time certain branches of the human race which had established themselves further West and North, found themselves up against different problems. In harsher climatic conditions the question of bodily survival became of more urgency than speculations about the unseen and unknown. Men became increasingly concerned with the

external world in the attempt to dominate the hostile forces of nature. They formed a habit of looking objectively at the physical world and devising means to overcome the material forces that were ranged against them.

Nevertheless, despite this forced preoccupation with things outside themselves, they still managed to retain some instinct which told them that the ultimate destiny of man was not on this earth, but elsewhere, in some higher realm outside their limited knowledge. They, too, had their religious ideas; and these were everywhere coloured by the characteristics of their immediate physical world. They thought in terms of a personal creator-god, of heavens moulded to earthly patterns, and of individual physical survival after death through all eternity.

Then there came a cleavage between the mind that was exclusively devoted to the study of the external world, and the other type of mind which still looked inward in its search for truth. Science, which is simply the accepted method of investigating and mastering the external world, became very

powerful. It not only proved that many of the assumptions of the religious mind were false, but it succeeded in reorienting the outlook of the majority of educated people towards the external world.

Unfortunately, the religious ideas had no very rational foundation, and although the religious thinkers still held a great deal of power and tried various ways of retarding the advance of scientific knowledge, they lost ground very rapidly. The age of materialism arrived. Men took into their service the powers of nature and the physical world; and the more they did so the more they cut themselves off from the realm of supermundane wisdom, until it seemed to them that the visible and tangible world was the sole reality, and the only truths were those that could be demonstrated in the laboratory, by the standards of scientific knowledge.

In this they were wrong; but their mistake was understandable. Those who are capable of perceiving even a slight degree of "Lokuttara" or "spiritual" truth are rare,

and what they perceive they cannot as a rule impart.

So began the age of disbelief, when faith in religious values was superseded by faith in science and technical progress. But with the advance in nuclear physics it also became increasingly evident that science has almost exhausted the possibilities of its exploration of the material world. The basic constitution of matter is known, yet still the ultimate secret of its nature eludes us. All that we really perceive is its function; its substance dissolves into energy. Why is this? The answer was given by the Buddha 2,500 years ago. It is because the external world is not a phenomenon strictly separate from the intelligence that is aware of it. It begins with a false inference drawn from certain sensory data; and for the rest it is a construction, a complex of the mind's own creating. Out of principles the mind creates things, gives² them names and endows them with characteristics. Between the conventional idea and the reality there is a tremendous difference, which only insight can dis-

tinguish. That is how it comes about that the mind, the “forerunner of all conditions,” has the power to make for itself heaven or hell.

Impermanence being the universal law, the mind itself is subject to it. But the nature of its changes—whether for better or worse—are entirely under the mind’s control. We are beginning to see more clearly than before that it is not by moulding the material world to the shape of our desires that we can bring about a lasting improvement in human conditions. We have advanced very far along this extraverted path, yet for every triumph we have scored over our physical environment we have lost points in some other direction, creating fresh problems for ourselves, so that at last we are presented with a balance sheet that shows more losses than gains in the unequal battle with the physical world.

We can perform miracles in transporting ourselves from one place to another—and what is it that we transport?• Death and destruction. We can communciate our thoughts with the speed of light to any part of the earth—and what is it we communicate?

Hatred and dread. We have found methods of combating disease and prolonging life—but we have not given health, we have merely prolonged the waiting period for death. We have flooded our markets with elaborate toys, masterpieces of mechanical ingenuity to make life more luxurious and sharpen man's appetite for newer, costlier and more fantastic inventions—and what have we produced by this means? We have produced more greed for possessions, more craving for sensations, more competition and more modern neuroses. This is the true sum of our achievement. Is it really worth it?

So now, in this Buddha Jayanti year, if ever, is the time to reconsider our position and reassess our notion of values. We are in leading-strings to time, and cannot stand still. Either we must go forward, to a better, happier life, or else go back. But the pressing question is: which direction is *forward*? Let us admit that our quest for happiness in the realm of material achievements has been a failure. Let us face squarely the chastening truth that we have

been travelling on a wrong path. But, wrong though it is, this does not mean that we have to retrace our steps. We can take off in a fresh direction from the very point at which we now stand. As Lao Tzu said: "The journey of a thousand miles begins right at your feet".

The Dhamma of the Supreme Buddha is not like the creeds that science has so nearly overthrown. It gives us moral law founded on universal principles, embodying counsel for all time in the loftiest ethical code known to man. The Enlightenment of the Buddha is self-revealed in His Teachings; for beyond morality, beyond philosophy, He offers us the Way to Nibbana, the Path and the Fruits of the highest beatitude. By it we can deliver ourselves and our world from the ocean of delusion and ignorance that threatens to submerge us; there is no other way.

That, I think, is the special significance that Buddha Jayanti, the middle period of the Buddha Sasana, has for us to-day. It marks the point at which all currents of history converge in a stupendous and crucial

choice. It is the point at which we have to pause in our headlong career, and take stock of ourselves. And when I say “ourselves” I mean it in a sense that is both personal and collective. The spiritual evolution of humanity begins, like the journey of a thousand miles, at the point closest to each of us—his own mind. We cannot as one person reform mankind or the world; we can only reform ourselves. Yet it is certain that if we do this, all the rest will follow. Our next step must be into a long-neglected dimension of experience—the exploration, understanding and purification of our own desires and intentions. It must be a step into the unknown territory of the mind, for there alone lies the path and the goal of the highest endeavour. The Dhamma reminds us, more urgently than ever before, that we ourselves hold the mastery of our fate, not in the elusive and ever-changing external world, but in the realm of mental culture which leads to that transcendental experience open to every man who ardently strives for it: the experience of Nibbanic Peace in this very life. The message

of the great Teacher is for all time; the shining hope it offers is for all men, and this Buddha Jayanti is the most timely reminder of its power to lead the world out of materialistic darkness into the light of wisdom and unchanging truth.

The
BURMA BUDDHIST WORLD MISSION,
7, EAST BLOCK, SULE PAGODA,
RANGOON, BURMA.