

'Popular Pamphlets Series', No. 7

BUDDHISM
AND
THE WORLD TODAY

By
Dr. R. L. SONI



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THE WORLD INSTITUTE OF BUDDHIST CULTURE

Soni Building, Mandalay (Burma).

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FOREWORD

By

FRANCIS STORY.

Director-in-Chief, The Burma Buddhist World
Mission, Rangoon.

It is a Buddhist principle that each person is solely responsible for his own Kamma, or volitional action. No one else is responsible for it, neither is he responsible for that of anyone else. Each must work out his own emancipation—with diligence.

Who, then, is responsible for wars? Is it the national leaders, the people, or the blind forces of economics and politics? If it is the national leaders, how is it possible that a mere handful of men can lead millions of peace-loving people into wars they do not want? If it is economic and political pressure, how is it that these forces, which are created by men, are not under the control of men?

Then is it the people themselves who create, if not the actual wars, the conditions that ripen into war ?

Life, from its most primitive form upwards, is a struggle for survival. Even the human body is a battleground in which invisible legions of bacteria fight for mastery, and in so doing maintain that precarious state of balance between opposing diseases, that 'hostile symbiosis,' which we call *health*. So also in the mental realm, each individual is fighting a battle; he is engaged in an unremitting struggle between the lower and higher modes of his existence. He is also at war with his external environment, striving to assert himself, to obtain and hold what he desires, to survive and to flourish. And in so doing he finds himself pitted against antagonistic forces; his personal interests clash with those of others. To find the causes of war we must look within. Each one of us is responsible for his own share of self-assertiveness, of competitive ego, and that collective responsibility—the responsibility of no single man, but the aggregate responsibility of all—is the dynamism that finally spells, in letters of blood, the word WAR.

Peace must start from within; it must be established in the hearts of men before it can

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exist between nations. So every appeal for peace must be direct to the heart of the individual man, the citizen of the one great nation, mankind. This is the great truth proclaimed by the Dhamma of the Buddha: 'Not by hating does hatred cease ; by not hating alone hatred ceases. This is the ancient Law.' The ancient Law—Sanantana Dhamma ; known and taught in past world-cycles by previous Enlightened Ones ; remembered but dimly in the remote beginnings of our own era, when to the forests and mountain retreats of ancient Bharata the wise and gentle Rishis of old withdrew themselves from the sound of the trumpeting elephants of war and the chanting of priests at the sacrificial altars, to live in peace among the innocent creatures of the wild and contemplate the eternal verities made known to them through a life of austere simplicity and tranquil joy ; discovered once again by the greatest Teacher of all, the Supreme Buddha, and thereafter made to resound throughout the length and breadth of the vast Asokan empire and far beyond. That same Sanantana Dhamma is ours to-day, if we will but empty our minds of prejudice and delusion,

and our hearts of envy, ill-will and greed, to receive it. The initial act must be that of surrender; we must give up the lesser to be worthy of the greater—we must cast out the impure to make room for the pure, clear away the illusion to give unobstructed vision of the real.

Dr. R. L. Soni's inspiring message is but a reminder of the Way of Peace that our bewildered generation has lost. The Buddha was the supreme Physician, and it is natural that Dr. Soni should lay special emphasis on this aspect of His ministry to a world diseased, for the physician who knows the cause of the sickness also knows the cure. I am very happy indeed to write this short introductory note to Dr. Soni's sincere and thoughtful little essay, and hope that it will reach many readers whose minds are prepared to receive and profit by it in this, the two thousand five hundredth year of the Dispensation of Gotama Buddha. May the auspicious date lend it even greater authority, and help to spread its ennobling message of universal benevolence to men of every race and nation who, in the dark of the night, look still Eastward for the return of the Light that never fails.

FRANCIS STORY

INTRODUCTION.

This publication, entitled 'Buddhism and the World Today' is comprised of an address by the author before the East and West Association of Maymyo (Burma) on the evening of the 15th May 1946. The delivery was in response to an invitation from the military officers of the station, who were keen to know something of the religion of Burma. The author purposely chose the date, which was the full-moon day of Vesakha, the thrice-sacred festival of the Buddhists, commemorating the Birth, Enlightenment and the Passing Away of Lord Buddha. Capt. Russel, a devoted student of Buddhism, presided, some 300 persons, mostly American, British and Indian military officers, constituting the audience. Judged from the number of intelligent questions asked at the end of the function, and the numerous visits paid to the author in appreciation by several military officers for some days following the lecture, it was evident that the interest evinced in the subject was genuine and considerable.

The paper appeared in full in the Puja Number of "The Amrita Bazar Patrika" 1946 and also in the Maha-Bodhi Journal for July-August of the same year, both of Calcutta (India), to the editors of which the author acknowledges his gratitude for reproduction here.

On recently going through the address the author was struck with amazement at the discovery that the talk given in 1946, a year after the close of the Second World War, was just as fresh a decade later, namely in 1956. This may be because of the eternal value of the teachings of the Buddha, though the fact is also patent that despite the richness of effort for the abolishment of war mentality during the decade just past, there has been a substantial poverty of success in that direction. Of course, a world-wide 'hot war' did not break out, but the 'cold war' has been throughout in the atmosphere. The difference is only this that while in the year 1946 there was a positive hope of peace, in the year 1956 there is a robust fear of war. It seems the hope born of exhaustion and sufferings has waned and

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the fear sprung out of recovery and misunderstandings is fast waxing. Consequently, despite all the expressions of peace on the lips, the mentality of war endures in the heart of man.

The dark clouds of war are hovering over the globe today. Our diagnosis of the situation reveals certain causal factors, the foremost of which seems to be the over-emphasis on the material side of the world picture and this at the cost of the moral issues. The problem, as a matter of fact, is more moral than material. So long as diplomacy is mostly directed towards *suppressio veri* and *expressio falsi* for the sake of certain personal and national advantages and so long as the leaders talk with masks not only on their faces but also around their hearts, there cannot be expected frank and free exchange of views and genuine decisions capable of being properly implemented. No wonder Conferences fail to find enduring solutions and the treaties receive no better consideration than that accorded to waste-paper.

Aldous Huxley, in his excellent essay on pacifism, "What are you going to do about it?" while emphasising the fundamental unity of mankind makes the illuminating observation:

“The whole philosophy of Constructive Peace is based on a consideration of the facts of personal relationship between man and man...It must be....a way of life.” Again: “Nobody but a fool can suppose that it is possible for a government to behave as a pacifist, when the individuals it represents conduct their private affairs in an essentially militaristic way.”

Certainly, the importance of the individual is supreme. That is why Buddhism is essentially devoted to personal culture, through which it endeavours to improve “personal relationship between man and man,” and also between group and group, and nation and nation.

If the world is really anxious to reconstruct humanity for the cherished goals of peace and happiness, humankind has to be conditioned to ethical ideals and moral tunes. The voice of the Buddha from across the corridors of 25 centuries comes as the call of hope for the confused and deluded world of today. It is expected that the reader will find some food for thought in these pages for helping the world towards a better state.

R. L. SONI.

BUDDHISM AND THE WORLD TODAY

Some 2,600 years ago the full-moon night of Vesakha witnessed the birth of Prince Siddhattha in India, who subsequently, after a hard physical, intellectual and psychological struggle, became enlightened, the Supreme Buddha, on a similar night, and later, after forty-five years of ceaseless noble service to humanity, passed away on a similar day, into that state of Final Release, which is beyond the clutches of Change and Sorrow, technically known as Nibbana, meaning the utter extinction of the fires of Lobha, Dosa, Moha (Greed, Hatred and Delusion.)

When I look at the soothing splendour in the full-moon sky above, the splendour that refused to be "blackened out" even by the worst war in history, and at the war maimed, dazed and anguished world below today, I shudder at the contrast. Indeed the world is more ill today than ever. "The world is very ill," declared a great statesman, Mr. Winston Churchill, at Aberdeen only recently. * Continuing, he said, "This is the time

* i. e. April 1946.

when hatred is rife in the world, and when many mighty branches of the human family, victors or vanquished, innocent or guilty, are plunged in bewilderment, distress or ruin. Two fearful wars in our lifetime have torn the heart out of its grace and culture....The psychic energies of mankind have been exhausted by tribulations....It is not only blood-letting that has weakened and whitened us. Vital springs of human inspiration are for the moment drained. ”

‘ Drained ’ indeed. There couldn’t be a better diagnosis of the world conditions today than this.

With all the great discoveries of science in the fields of knowledge and human Science and comforts, administration and com- Happiness munications, justice and co-operation, there has not come significant enduring increase in happiness to the masses. If a civilisation has to be judged from this standard, modern civilisation has miserably failed. Here let me quote once again the same statesman who in the same speech said,

“Only science has rolled forward whipped by the fierce winds of mortal war, and science has placed in the hands of men agencies of destruction far beyond any development of their commonsense or virtue.”

‘ Commonsense and virtue’: An excellent pointer indeed. The failure of these to keep pace with the developments in science, is the root-cause of many an evil in the world today. Obviously the treatment of such a situation consists in infusing an ethical tone into the collapsing arteries of the vital circulation of Peace and Prosperity in the world. The serious condition of the patient is an open challenge to all the physicians-in-moral-law. Every Faith owes duty to this sick world. And Buddhism, professing to be a specialist in moral science, the requisite remedy for the world today, owes a special obligation to the serious case. Therefore it behoves us to see what Buddhism is, what its laboratory equipment is like, what it has in its clinical armamentarium and what prescription it offers to the patient. Let us attempt a brief survey.

The venerable monk who converted me to Buddhism in 1933, once wrote:-

Buddhism "When a doctor sees a patient, he
In Action first satisfies himself that the patient is sick, then he diagnoses the case (finds the cause), prescribes the remedy (removes the cause), and the patient is cured. Similarly, Lord Buddha, the Great Spiritual Physician, saw that the world was sick with Suffering: He saw that Craving is the Cause of Sufferings: He saw that Suffering is removed by destroying Craving; and he prescribed the Remedy; Craving is destroyed by walking on the Noble Eightfold Path of Right Knowledge, Right Aim, Right Speech, Right Action, Right Occupation, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness and Right Concentration. These are the Four Noble Truths, the Four Pillars of Buddhism."

This is Buddhism in action: all else is a commentary on this statement.

This world is a psycho-physical phenomenon, of which the human being is so far the ultimate evolutionary product. Being on the summit of evolution, 'man' is the proper subject for a study of the 'action' in life.

Certainly he is the best model of psycho-physical organisation (Nama-rupa). On dissection he is found to consist of a physical part, the manifest body, and mental part comprising sensations, perceptions, inclinations and consciousness: there is nothing else in him. The mental part receives impressions from the environments through the sense organs, correlates these with reference to the previous impressions or concepts pigeon-holed in the conscious and subconscious sections of mind and directs the physical part to activity in its environments. This results in the phenomenon of 'action' (Kamma), mental and physical, and the resultant of this, is the real property of the individual, who is responsible for its creation and morally bound to its consequences, good or bad. Really speaking, an individual is a summation of his Kamma-results (Kamma-vipaka), past and present, and this summation, being personal in nature, circumscribes the person into a separate, though ever-changing, entity and leads to the erroneous conception of a changeless lasting Ego, called Soul.

At death, the physical and mental constituents disintegrate, but the Kamma-
The Forces resultant of the individual darts
of Action out like a wireless message and
 gets absorbed into an appropriate
 ready-tuned receiver in the form of a just
 starting conception in the womb of a new
 mother. There it moulds the new physical
 material round itself and ejects out at birth as
 a new body. But, the baby is new only in as
 much as the physical material of which it is
 made is new: it is old in as much as the Kam-
 ma-result (Kamma-vipaka) which directs its
 growth is brought forward from previous
 existences. Thus the cycle goes on—
 from birth to growth, from growth to decay,
 from decay to death and from death to rebirth
 and so on—till the factors perpetuating it cease
 to function. The cyclic perpetuation is depen-
 dent upon the perpetuation of the cause,
 namely the individual Kamma, which in its turn
 owes its existence to the maintenance of the
 action of certain fundamental infections on
 the human mind. These infections are Lobha,
 Dosa and Moha (Greed, Hatred and Delusion).
 These are the mordants which bind the individ

ual to Action: these are the ultimate germs that eat into the vitals of human happiness and create causes which bring about conflicts in personal, social and national relations. They were at the root of the causes of the two Great Wars: they are now acting on the prostration left as the aftermath of the recent war.

Is it possible to disinfect life of these noxious bacteria ?

Unfortunately, No! This is because they are in symbiotic combination with Sources of Life. It is, however, possible to Happiness stay or control their activity and even to sublimate their action. Thus, if inclination of greed is replaced by charity, that of hatred by love and that of delusion by wisdom and understanding, the world, so miserable today, shall soon begin to throb with a new pulse of peace and joy. But, the sublimation is not so easy as it appears, or else the world, so full of intellectual wisdom today, would have accomplished it long ago. These bacteria are tenacious and irresistibly potent. Perhaps another war, more total

than the last, will succeed in reducing their vitality and annihilating their power. But, why wait for rockets and atomic bombs to blast our brains and incinerate our living bodies? Why not use the antidote already with us and frustrate the danger? The Buddhist antidote is a preliminary dose of the Pancasila (the Five Precepts), followed by a course of the Eightfold Noble Path, and all this on the foundation of the Four Noble Truths.

The Five Precepts constitute a remarkable
 Code of Ethics code of ethics and morality:
 these though simple in nature, are
 full of practical implications to the
 present-day world.

The First Precept advises abstention from 'killing.' Its object is not merely to abolish the cruelties of the slaughter-house but the slaughter-house itself, in a really civilised society. Killing for fun, folly or sacrifice is equally forbidden. And, homicide, whether judicial or otherwise, is an obvious violation of this precept. Also rational arbitration is suggested for war. The U. N. O*, the best all-world institution so far organised, aims at accomplish-

* United Nations Organisation.

ing the latter. But, if we really yearn for peace, we must stay the relentless perpetual war against our innocent dumb fellow-creatures. We must realise that the act of killing is incompatible with the vision of compassion, with the idea of universal friendliness (Metta) and with the hope of securing mercy from others.

The Second Precept advises abstention from stealing. This covers not only the obvious gross form of it but also the subtler aspect of stealing, such as the exploitation of helplessness, dishonesty in business transactions and withholding the rightful dues of others. Many a dispute between Capital and Labour raging today shall witness liquidation under the benign auspices of this precept.

The Third Precept exhorts moral purity and brings home to us the truth that sex is not so much for vulgar indulgence as for being sublimated into the sublime virtues of fellow-feeling and benevolent service.

The Fourth Precept purifies our speech and teaches us not to lie, not to use harsh words, hypocrisy and flattery in our speech. It also taboos back-biting and idle talk.

And, the last Precept is an atomic bomb to intoxicants. Not moderation, but total abstinence is the spirit of this precept.

It is also illuminating to note that Lord Buddha not only advises a sincere practice of the precepts but also emphasises abstention from causing others to violate the precepts and also to abstain from sanctioning the acts of those who violate them.

The negative terminology used in the description of the precepts has led certain
Critics critics to level the attack against
Answered Buddhism that the Doctrine of the
 Buddha is a negative philosophy.

They should understand that as the building of a grand edifice requires an adequate foundation, building of character and personality requires proper clearance of the rubble of folly. They must also know that Buddhism does not stop at the laying of the foundation, as the construction of the grand edifice of positive character is its ideal. The negative precepts aim at laying a clean foundation and are therefore merely a preliminary aspect of Buddhism. The next two aspects, namely the acquisition of

Virtue (Sila) and the Purification of the Heart (Bhavana,) soon follow and complete the moral personal culture.

The “Ten Acts of Merit ” constitute the precepts of Buddhism. They are:

Moral Discipline Charity, moral excellence, meditation, allowing others to share one’s good actions, feeling joy when others perform meritorious acts, fellow-service, paying respect to worthy persons, expounding the Truth, hearing the exposition of Truth and coming under the refuge of the Three Jewels, namely the Teacher, His Teachings and His Organisation. For those who aspire to be a Buddha, these and many other precepts are followed by the practice of a harder routine in moral science, namely the Ten Perfections. And, purification of the heart is accomplished by meditations on Goodwill, Love, Sympathy and Friendliness etc.

Another attack hurled against Buddhism is that the Buddha paid no attention to the needs of the laity. To such critics are offered His discourses to **Virtue And Wealth** Sigala and Vyaggapajja, which

embody His instructions on domestic ethics and economics. They clearly demonstrate the interest He took in the welfare of His lay followers. He fully realised the importance of ethical regulations for domestic harmony and the importance of wealth in worldly happiness. But he did not subordinate virtue to wealth. Rather, He stimulated lay people to acquire wealth virtuously and spend it properly, thus showing them the way to prosperity here and happiness hereafter. Of course, He gave more attention to the monks, whom He organised into a democratic organisation, perhaps the first democratic institution the world ever witnessed, and fashioned them into moral patterns, models for the laity to follow.

At times Buddhism is declared pessimistic.

This is because it takes the fact of Rationalism suffering as its starting point.

Par Excellence Buddhism would have certainly been pessimistic had it shown helplessness in solving the problem of Suffering. The fact is that there could not be a higher optimism than that of the Buddha's doctrine which, understanding full well the gravity of

the case, does not denounce the case as hopeless, but heroically goes on with the treatment, fully confident of 'Final Recovery.'

Nor is Buddhism Fatalistic. Rather it makes of Fate a mockery and stimulates its followers to heroic perseverance and absolute self-reliance.

Dogmas are tabooed in Buddhism: blind faith is condemned and reason is acclaimed as the Dictator of Faith.

It will surprise some to know that prayer and worship have no place in Buddhism and concepts such as those of
No Prayer God and Soul are considered not
And Worship necessary for ethico-moral upliftment. Such a bold assertion, the earliest of its kind in the religious and philosophic history of mankind, shows the heroic courage of the Buddha in the advocacy of scientific truths. Such an attitude, though essentially the outcome of the rational spirit of Buddhism, must have been considered revolutionary when first proclaimed: for, the powerful and aggressive Brahminism, prevalent in

India in those days, was flourishing on the very foundations which the Buddha boldly declared null and void. But, the resultant heart-burn in the Brahmin world was meaningless at the time, for the decadent Brahminism found itself immediately helpless when face to face with the surging wave of dynamic Buddhism, which had the strong current of an intellectual, rational and invincible force behind it, an all-embracing ideal of Love as its sparkling crest and the rushing foam of human service as its vanguard. What power on earth or heaven could stay the onward march of such a wave! It rather received a further powerful momentum in about two centuries at the hands of Emperor Asoka, who transmitted it to the whole civilised world. The doctrine of the Buddha made Asoka a model King and Asoka gave a historic impetus to Buddhism. Consequently, the jewelled crest of Asoka shines in indescribable splendour above all the kings or rulers that the world has so far produced. Such is the view held by even H. G. Wells, and Buddhism is rightly proud of it.

It is, however, to the credit of the Indian Brahmin intellect which, notwithstanding the imperial patronage under which Buddhism flourished and the missionary zeal which Asoka exhibited, went on with its silent intellectual tug-of-war with Buddhism. Consequently within two or three centuries there resulted a product, the popular version of Buddhism, which goes by the name of Mahayana. This in the first century A. C. made a powerful appeal to Emperor Kanishka, under whose patronage the new edition of the Dhamma (the Doctrine) was propagated, mainly to Central, Eastern and South Eastern Asia, where it still mainly is the nucleus of religious ideals and the fountain source of spiritual inspiration.

‘The doctrine of the Buddha, as much rational as practical, as much full of virtue as of real hope, on account of its very simplicity based on facts, depth based on wisdom, toleration based on benevolent lovingkindness and all-embracing call to an ideal obliterating all artificial divisions, was destined to evoke

universal response. Its intrinsic worth in the field of rational ethics and its extrinsic potentialities of service made a powerful appeal far beyond its original home and far beyond the time it was preached.' It was the inspiration of the great Dhamma that infused matchless courage into the hearts of the Indian missionaries, who from the early centuries of the Buddhist era, and for a full thousand years, fired with unquenchable zeal for the sharing of the Truth with humanity, unafraid of the perilous forests, the high mountain barriers and the surging waves of the deep oceans, suffering untold hardships and renouncing all personal comforts, carried the torch of Light and Culture from the motherland, Buddhist India, over hills and dales and beyond the seas. That Light, kindled centuries ago by those unnamed agents of Indian culture, is still shining on those foreign soils and has made East Asia, with all her differences, a cultural ^{unity} ~~history~~. The ~~self~~-history of India of that period is a vivid demonstration of the fact that the ideal before Buddhist India, even when she was at the height of her glory and strength, was not imperial domination but Dhamma-Dana, the

happy sharing of cultural treasures and joyful promotion of moral values. Such an ideal the world needs to revive today.

This briefly is a sketchy account of the ethical, historical and geographical role of Buddhism. The practical implications of its philosophy to the world conditions today, already hinted in the course of this sketch, are self-evident.

Unfortunately in the West the conflict between Science and Faith has
 Real Cure Of
 World Ills resulted in a materialistic outlook that refuses to accept moral and spiritual guidance in the use of scientific discoveries. Fortunately in the East no such conflict generally existed, as all human activities were assessed on a spiritual background and the ethics of the 'means' counted as much as the ethics of the 'ends'. But, scientific speed and efficiency brought the East and the West nearer together and consequently the materialistic infection invaded Japan from the early years of this century, with the result that the rapidly expanding bubble of materialistic progress and imperialistic urge recently exploded into the worst disaster in her hoary history.

We can no longer think in terms of separate entities. The world as a whole today is one unity; a disease of one of its members is to be considered a disease affecting the whole organism. As evidently the serious world-malady of today is rooted in greed, mutual distrusts and lack of proper understanding, the essential psychological concomitants of materialism, proper treatment consists in the control of these evil psychic trends by scientific ethics. It must be realised that the illness of a psychophysical organism calls for as much attention to ethics as to physical considerations. Obviously, anatomy of boundaries and physiology of functions, food and shelter, nursing and quarantine, disinfecting the world of war-crimes and parading the world in certain exercises are some measures to help the world through this period of recovery, this period of convalescence; but, the subjective side of the picture, the vital motivating force behind all activities, has an importance which cannot be ignored. Consequently, unless the United Nations Organisation, the physician in charge of the patient, gives as much attention to educating itself and the world constituents in moral

principles and ethics as it is giving to the physical side of the treatment, the result is not likely to be a real cure.

And, in the application of ethics to the world conditions today, Buddhism has to play quite an important role. Unparalleled in the purity of its ethical teachings and unstained by even one drop of human blood, Buddhism is simply unique in this direction. It is expected that it shall make a substantial contribution towards the cure of the world ills of today by the Love it teaches and by the Truth it holds, till humanity wakes to its humane senses and learns 'to live in harmony, in self-restraint, in mutual forbearance' and thus attain to a true culture, filling the whole world with health, happiness and peace. Let us strive our best to attain to such a State.

May we abstain from harm to any !

May we strive for benevolence !

and May we radiate lovingkindness to all !

Thus, each and everyone of us shall contribute towards the atmosphere of general well-being and the climate of world peace.

THE WORLD INSTITUTE OF BUDDHIST CULTURE

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With the objects of promoting better understanding of Buddhism among the Buddhists and presenting Buddhist subjects in their cultural and practical implications to the world at large, the Institute is publishing suitable literature in various languages.

Those desirous of keeping themselves in touch with the publications are advised to get their names registered.

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The following literature for popular consumption is immediately available:—

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2. Cultural Background of India.
3. Some Fundamental Values of Buddhism.
4. The Fundamentals of Well-being.
5. Shwedagon : the Cultural Lighthouse of Burma.
6. Buddhism and the Indian Outlook.
and 7. Buddhism and the World Today.

Leaflets:—13 leaflets on Buddhist subjects, including the leaflets on the Mahamangala Sutta in Urdu, Hindi, Punjabi and Burmese, all printed on Art paper and adequately illustrated.

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Two research works are also ready:—

1. 'A cultural Study of the Burmese Era' by Dr. R. L. Soni and Foreword by the Hon. U NU., K. 26/-, Rs. 26/-,

£2/- or \$ 6/- a copy. It is a research work on the Buddhist Era in the context of Indo-Burmese Cultural ties and Asian historical trends in the past.

2. “Life’s Highest Blessings, The Highroad of Success and Happiness” by R. L. Soni and Foreword by Sir U Thwin, K. 10/-, Rs. 10/-, \$ 2/50. It is an exhaustive commentary on the Mahamangala Sutta in the context of modern conditions and needs.

Note:—Our Booklet “A Glimpse of Buddhism” is also available in German, and its Esperanto translation is in the press. French translation is ready and the Japanese is under preparation.

Arrangements are also in hand for the Burmese translation of the two volumes “A Cultural Study of the Burmese Era” and “Life’s Highest Blessings.”

Director,

Publication Department.

Department for the Promotion and
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