THE PASSING OF THE FOUNDER

IN issuing the following Report, the Committee have to record with deep sorrow the death of the Founder and President of the Society on December 27, 1922, in his eightieth year.

Professor T. W. Rhys Davids was the son of a well-known Congregational minister, the Rev. T. W. Davids, and was born at Colchester, May 12, 1843. After school years at Brighton he refused a good opening for following the profession of a solicitor, and passed to the University of Breslau, where he studied Sanskrit under Professor Stenzler, and took the degree of Ph.D. In 1864 he entered the Ceylon Civil Service, and at first, it is believed, acted as Secretary to the Governor. His philological training soon enabled him to acquire a working knowledge of Sinhalese and Tamil, and a curious incident directed his interest and his studies to Buddhism. Some case about the occupation of a village vihara, involving questions of canon-law, came before him as magistrate, and a document was produced before the court in evidence, but it was in a language which no one present could read. Inquiry revealed that it was Pāli, in which the sacred books of Buddhism were written. He immediately resolved to make himself acquainted with it. Further enquiry brought him the aid of Yātrāmullē Unnānsē, to whose elevated personality he afterwards paid a striking tribute in his Hibbert Lectures (1881):

"When he first came to me, the hand of death was already upon him. He was sinking into the grave from the effects of a painful and incurable malady. I had heard of his learning as a Pāli scholar, and of his illness, and was grateful to him for leaving his home, under such circumstances, to teach a stranger. There was a strange light in his sunken eyes, and he was constantly turning away from questions of Pāli to questions of Buddhism. I found him versed in all the poetry and ethics of the Suttas, and was glad to hear him talk. There was an indescribable attraction about him, a simplicity, a high-mindedness, that filled me with reverence."

Under such a teacher it was natural that the young student should make rapid progress, and opportunities of archæological research soon opened before him. He copied inscriptions, made investigations on the site of Anurādhapura, explored the Sigiri rock, and studied the history of Buddhism in Ceylon. Disagreement with a superior led eventually to his return to England (of course with character unsmirched) in 1872; he proceeded to read for the Bar, and was duly admitted to the Middle Temple in 1877. But in the meantime other interests had completely absorbed his energies; he practised little —he had no legal backing—and devoted himself to the interpretation of Buddhism.

The papers in the *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* in 1875 on "Inscriptions of Parâkrama

Bâhu," "Sigiri, the Lion Rock," and "Two Old Sinhalese Inscriptions," signalized the entry of a keen and well-equipped scholar into the general field of research. A new and valuable instrument was just ready for use. Eight years before Rhys Davids quitted Ceylon, Robert Cæsar Childers had come home in 1864. He, too, had discovered the existence of the Pāli literature, which Turnour and Gogerly had already used, while Spence Hardy had presented Buddhism in two books for English readers, founded on Sinhalese materials. Childers had realized that no real progress could be made without a dictionary. Fausböll, at Copenhagen, was already issuing valuable texts. Other scattered material existed in the journals of European societies, and Sinhalese scholars were publishing mediæval works of importance. These labours were all surveyed by Rhys Davids, who had been in correspondence with Childers since 1869, in a contribution on Pāli and Sinhalese to the Presidential Address to the Philological Society by the Rev. Dr. Richard Morris in 1875 (pp. 60 to 79). It was a fine sample of the breadth of his outlook and the thoroughness of his work. The same year witnessed the completion of the dictionary to which Childers had given himself with such self-denying labour. The first volume had appeared in 1872; its successor followed in 1875. Its value was afterwards indicated by Rhys Davids in the following terms:

"This great and important work did for Pāli what Wilson's Dictionary had done for Sanskrit. It was not only the most valuable contribution that had yet been made to the study of that language, but it was the indispensable means by which further progress could be made. Like Wilson's, it was sure to be superseded, for it made possible that rapid advance in the publication of Pāli texts which has been the most marked feature in Oriental studies since its appearance. It was the foundation of all that subsequent work by the various editors engaged on the Pāli Text Society which has rendered it inadequate."*

In the meantime, Rhys Davids occupied himself with continuous study. Often invalided by attacks of malarial fever contracted in investigations in the Ceylon forests, which it took years for his system to surmount, he read widely on the general history of Buddhism, and gained more and more mastery over Pāli. He fell in with Tylor's *Primitive Culture*, which had appeared during his absence from England. He read it with avidity. It made a lasting impression on him, and supplied him with a method of thought which influenced all his subsequent writings. He contemplated an edition of the *Dīpavaṃsa* for which he had brought home materials. But one day Dr. Oldenberg, then working on the *Vinaya Piṭaka* in the India Office, called to consult him about a similar project. With characteristic generosity he immediately handed to his visitor all the *collectanea* in his possession, and the delighted scholar could hardly express his thanks for his emotion.

* "Dictionary of National Biography," article on R. C. Childers.

In 1877 he was ready with a treatise on the *Ancient Coins and Measures of Ceylon*, in which he endeavoured to fix the date of the death of Gotama, by arguments founded on Sinhalese tradition, within a few years of 412 B.C. But this result did not win general acceptance, and he himself abandoned it in later life.

At the same time, he was busy with the little manual on *Buddhism* in the series on Non-Christian Religions issued by the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge. This appeared in 1878, and its wide influence was attested by the issue of the twenty-third edition in 1914. It was founded on all the Pāli material then available concerning the life and teachings of the Founder, and embraced a short sketch of the history of the Order and the Scriptures. One important result was due to the writer's insight. By collecting and comparing the passages then published from the Piṭakas containing the much-discussed term Nirvāna (*nibbāna*) he proved that it did not signify "annihilation" in the sense so often assigned to it; it denoted "a moral condition, to be reached here, in this world, and in this life." This conclusion was justified two years later by Dr. Frankfurter's publication of three passages from the Saṃyutta Nikāya, in which Nibbāna was defined as the extinction of the threefold fire of *rāga*, *dosa*, and *moha*.

His reputation now brought him into correspondence with an increasing number of scholars, and the opportunities of interpreting Buddhism were multiplied. He began a translation of the Jātaka-book with its important introduction in the *Nidāna-Kathā* prefixed to Fausböll's edition, which appeared in 1880. The next year saw his first contribution to the Sacred Books of the East under the editorship of Professor Max-Müller, in *Buddhist Suttas* (vol. xi.), and he co-operated with Professor Oldenberg in three volumes of Vinaya Texts in the same great series (1881-85). The Hibbert Lectures of 1881 enabled him to emphasize some of the results indicated in his manual three years before, and in a strain of stately eloquence he described the new outlook to which research and reflection had brought him:

"It is not too much to say that a new world has been once more discovered by adventurers as persevering as Columbus, and perhaps at present earning as little gratitude as he did from his contemporaries; and that the inhabitants of the Old World cannot, if they would, go back again to the quiet times when the New World was not, because it was unknown. Everyone to whom the entrancing story of man's gradual rise and progress has charms peculiarly its own will welcome the new light; others will have to face the new facts, and find room for them in their conceptions of the world's history—that history which is the epic of humanity. Happy are we if the strains of that epic are ever ringing in our ears, if the spirit of that epic is ever ruling in our hearts! An abiding sense of the long past, whose beginnings are beyond imagination, and of the long future, whose end we cannot realize, may fill us indeed with a knowledge of our own insignificance—the bubbles on the stream which flash into light for a moment and are seen no more. But it will, perhaps, bring us nearer to a sense of the Infinite than man in his clearest moments, in his deepest moods, can ever otherwise hope to reach. It will enable us to appreciate what is meant by the solidarity of man, and will fill us with an overpowering awe and wonder at the immensity of that series of which we are but a few of the tiny links. And the knowledge of what man has been in distant times, in far-off lands, under the influence of ideas which at first sight seem to us so strange, will strengthen within us that reverence, sympathy, and love which must follow on a realization of the mysterious complexity of being, past, present, and to come, that is wrapt up in every human life."

In the second of these lectures Rhys Davids had the gratification of announcing the next great step in the promotion of the aim which he had at heart. On the model of the Early English Text Society (in which his friend, Dr. Morris, had been active) a Pāli Text Society had been established. A group of distinguished scholars in France, Holland, Germany, and the United States, had welcomed the project, and important promises of co-operation had been secured. Rich stores of the earliest Buddhist literature were lying unedited and practically unused in manuscripts scattered throughout the public and

University libraries of Europe. These it was proposed to publish. Their importance was thus described:

"The historical importance of these texts can scarcely be exaggerated, either in respect of their value for the history of folk-lore, or of religion, or of language. It is already certain that they were all put into their present form within a very limited period, probably extending to less than a century and a half (about 400–250 B.C.). For that period they have preserved for us a record, quite uncontaminated by any outside influence, of the everyday beliefs and customs of a people nearly related to ourselves just as they were passing through the first stages of civilization. They are our best authorities for the early history of that interesting system of religion so nearly allied to some of the latest speculations among ourselves, and which has influenced so powerfully and for so long a time so great a portion of the human race—the system of religion which we now call Buddhism. And in the history of speech they contain unimpeachable evidence of a stage in language midway between the Vedic Sanskrit and the various modern forms of speech in India. The sacred books of the early Buddhists have preserved to us the sole record of the only religious movement in the world's history which bears any close resemblance to Christianity; and it is not too much to say that the publication of this unique literature will be no less important for the study of history, and especially of religious history, than the publication of the Vedas has already been."

To this paragraph we may append another of the same date, which emphasizes the significance of the early Buddhist literature for the history whether of language or religion in India, and relates its thought to significant parallels, ancient or modern, in the West (S. B. E., xi., 145, 1881):

"This Buddhist idea of the perfect life has an analogy most instructive from an historical point of view with the ideals of the last pagan thinkers in Europe before the rise of Christianity and of the modern exponents of what has been called fervent atheism. When, after many centuries of thought, a pantheistic or monotheistic unity has been evolved out of the chaos of polytheism—which is itself a modified animism or animistic polydæmonism—there has always arisen at last a school to whom theological discussions have lost their interest, and who have sought for a new solution of the questions to which the theologies have given inconsistent answers in a new system in which man was to work out here, on earth, his own salvation. It is their place in the progress of thought that helps us to understand how it is that there is so much in common between the Agnostic Philosopher of India, the Stoics of Greece and Rome, and some of the newest schools in France, in Germany, and among ourselves."

The missionary spirit of early Buddhism was, in fact, active in Rhys Davids. He saw in the ancient teachings of the Founder a noble moral force and a discreet intellectual reserve in powerful combination, and he set himself with enthusiasm to inspire respect for its deep sincerity and love of truth. His untiring labour for its appreciation was rooted in the secret reverence of his nature, and he prosecuted the work of the Society which owed its origin to him with a persistence that never failed. The scope of the work may be estimated from the simple statement that the Society has issued sixty-four separate texts in ninety-four volumes, extending over 26,000 pages, besides many important articles and notes by European and Oriental scholars, and for forty years it has never failed in its annual output. The lamented death of Dr. Morris after a few years deprived Rhys Davids of his only English co-operator in actual production, and the conduct of the Society practically devolved upon him until his marriage, in 1894, brought him a most accomplished and devoted helper. With unflagging energy he corresponded with scholars at home and abroad. He collected funds and managed the Society's finances; he made arrangements with printers and superintended publication.

Appointed Professor of Pāli in University College, London, in 1882—a post which he resigned on his removal to Manchester in 1904—he inspired some of his students with his own ardour. To the end of his life he loved to feel a pupil's response to his teaching; he delighted in their advance, and was never happier than in helping them over their difficulties, watching their progress, and enlisting their aid. As secretary and librarian of the Royal Asiatic Society (1885-1904) he was constantly in touch with investigations in other fields of Indology as well as in the wider field of the whole continent. With his vivid interest in so many phases of history—to say nothing of contemporary politics—it was impossible for him to become a pedant, and he never fell a prey to the cramping influences of acute specialization.

From time to time his aid as a translator and interpreter was still sought. Two volumes of "The Questions of Milinda" appeared in the Sacred Books of the East in 1890 and 1894. To a separate series of the Sacred Books of the Buddhists he contributed the first volume of the Dīgha Nikāya (a text in which he had the aid of J. E. Carpenter) in 1889, a second and a third following, in co-operation with Mrs. Rhys Davids, at long intervals in 1910 and 1921. The masterly introductions to the successive "Dialogues" enabled him to discuss numerous points of Buddhist teaching, and ranged over many topics of sociological and literary import, while the notes contained frequent philological data of much value. A visit to America in 1894-95 enabled him to inaugurate an important series of lectures on the "History of Religions," with a volume on *Buddhism: Its History and Literature* (1896).

Rhys Davids had left Ceylon without visiting India, and the desire to see the actual sites of

Buddhist story was naturally strong. Opportunity was at last found for absence in the winter of 1899-1900, when he went to Gayā and other traditional localities. Two results of this journey may be here named. A survey of the social and political conditions in which Buddhism arose was greatly needed as a setting for the Teacher's activity and the labours of his disciples. This was provided by his *Buddhist India* (1903) in the "Story of the Nations" series, written, after long cogitation, with remarkable freshness and rapidity while the glow of his Indian travel was still on him.

An interview with the Viceroy in Calcutta brought him into close connection with a larger enterprise. He laid before Lord Curzon the outline of a scheme for the publication of a series of books of reference on the history of India. His Excellency so far approved the idea that he wished to have fuller details presented to him. In the summer of 1900 the plan had been considered by the Council of the Asiatic Society, and with their approval it was submitted to the Government of India. The essence of it was the publication of a series of historical volumes corresponding to the Rolls Series and the publications of the Historical Manuscripts Commission in this country. Rhys Davids suggested the inclusion of both texts and translations, the preparation of indices or dictionaries of proper names, personal or geographical, of importance for Indian history, and the production of monographs summarizing the historical data scattered through numerous Oriental texts already accessible to scholars. He pointed out that while such documents would have little or no literary merit, they would be materials out of which the history of the development of the social conditions, the industries, and the political relations of the peoples of India could be reconstructed. Under Lord Curzon's auspices the scheme was not only accepted, it was still further extended. Rhys Davids was at first actively concerned in promoting it. Changes in the original arrangement, under which the Indian Government proposed to entrust the publication to the Asiatic Society, and his own removal to Manchester, led to his withdrawal from all participation in the enterprise. In taking leave of it, he pointed out the kind of aid which the student might derive from the data which it would collect and classify, and expressed the earnest desire that Indian scholars might be led to co-operate in investigations which should not only illuminate their own past, but also promote the future welfare of their country.

" I may be permitted," he wrote (August 5, 1906), " to express the confident hope that a scheme so generously adopted by Government, and so generously enlarged and improved, will continue through the years to provide a succession of just the sort of books that, as tools to a craftsman, will enable the historian of India to trace out the evolution of social institutions, religion, and literature, in the same manner as the provision of the necessary tools has enabled the historians of Europe to do for the West.

The result cannot fail to be of value for the history of humanity as a whole, for what, in the absence of a better word in English, we are compelled to call *Weltgeschichte*. Already, in the history of government, of tribal customs, of land tenure, and of marriage, the Indian evidence has been much used, and has proved of considerable service to Western scholars. It will certainly prove more so in proportion as it becomes fuller and more exact. There are many similar questions on which the Indian evidence has not been utilized merely because it is not sufficiently known. And there is action and reaction in all these matters. The more the Indian evidence is used, and compared with evidence from other sources, the more light is thrown upon the real value and bearing and meaning of the facts recorded in India, the clearer become our views of the order in which they should be arranged, the more suggestive and instructive the study becomes.

"And there is another consideration. It has long been a matter of regret that the natives of India afford us so small a degree of help in the study of the history of their own country or countries. . . . This cannot be for want of intellectual power. . . . Is it too much to hope that, when this series of scholarly handbooks shall have placed in their hands sufficient examples of the right methods in historical research, some of them may be moved by emulation to take up these studies for themselves, and themselves to join, in much larger numbers, in the work? Is it too much even to expect that a more widely diffused knowledge of the history of their own land, of the causes that led to intellectual achievements, and also to long periods of intellectual decay; of the reasons why the social and economic conditions were in some times and places favourable, in others almost disastrous; of the predisposing factors of the rise and fall of governments—is it too much to expect that knowledge of such questions, and of the many similar ones that are included under the name of history, may incidentally also have its due effect in suggesting and strengthening, among the educated youth of India, high ideals of life and policy?"

In 1904 Rhys Davids accepted the chair of Comparative Religion in the Victoria University, Manchester, the first University post created in this country for that purpose. He left London to reside near Manchester, in 1905, and then took his leave of the Royal Asiatic Society, when a presentation was made to him by Lord Reay on behalf of a large number of the members. In the course of his reply, Rhys Davids dwelt on the way in which each generation of scholars furnished the means for the advance of the next.

"Whatever work I have been able to accomplish on the history of thought in India, or towards the publication and elucidation of the historically important literature of the early Buddhists, will, I hope, soon be superseded by better work, done partly on the basis of those labours. And the greater my success in inducing other scholars to devote their attention to those matters, the sooner will that desirable end be reached.

"So also with the schemes with which the usefulness and credit of the Society is so intimately bound up—the Translation Series and the Monograph Series—they, having been nursed with much care and trouble through a frail and ailing infancy, are at last standing on their feet. They may be expected (and in this connection I should not omit my pet baby, the Indian Text Series) to grow continually. . . .

"We shall not be in the least dismayed because our studies are at the present juncture the reverse of popular. The study of nature looms so much more largely in the public eye than the study of man, that our own pursuits—and especially the history of philosophy, literature, and religion, of economics and social institutions in the East—seem to be left out in the cold. We have no quarrel with science—quite the contrary. But we have a reasonable hope that the contempt in which Orientalism is now regarded is but a passing phase, and that our work is really helpful, in a modest way, to that increase of knowledge, that broadening out of ideas, which is the main basis of the welfare and progress of mankind."

At Manchester University his teaching ranged over the whole field of the history of religion except Greece and Rome, which were reserved for the professors of the classics. He read widely in all directions, but found time to throw off, in 1908, a small book on *Early Buddhism* (in Constable's series on "Religions, Ancient and Modern"), which he afterwards regarded as the embodiment of his maturest views. A little later he wrote a chapter on "The Early History of the Buddhists" for the first volume of the "Cambridge History of India," the publication of which was delayed by the war till last year. In the meantime he was concentrating his energies more and more on the preparation of a new Pāli Dictionary, for which the Pāli Text Society had provided so much fresh material.

After the death of Childers, his own copy of his Dictionary was sent to Rhys Davids. With the interleaved volume beside him, as he read page after page of the new texts, fresh words, unusual grammatical forms, and peculiar meanings or applications were duly entered. An immense store of linguistic usage was thus constantly accumulating. Other scholars were interested in the same object, and it was hoped at the Oriental Congress at Copenhagen, in 1908, that a scheme of international co-operation might be arranged. Certain letters were allotted to different fellow-workers. Some contributions were sent in and were published in the Journal. But the constant pressure of other engagements prevented the punctual fulfilment of expectations, and, finally, the outbreak of the war severed all scientific relations with Germany. It became more and more clear that the execution of the plan devolved on the courage and determination of Rhys Davids alone.

Full of years and honours, in 1915 Professor Rhys Davids left Manchester. Many years before the University of Edinburgh had conferred on him the degree of LL.D. Manchester made him a Doctor of Letters; Copenhagen and Sheffield enrolled him as a Doctor of Science. In 1902 he had been one of the original founders of the British Academy. In Manchester he had served as President of the Manchester Oriental Society.

In 1910 the newly formed India Society made him their President, and attendance at its council meetings and those of the British Academy induced him not infrequently to undertake the journey to and fro of nearly 400 miles—an exertion to him sorely irksome, the more so as his infirmities grew upon him. At sea it was otherwise. The years seemed to fall from his shoulders with the open spaces, the pure air, the shelved business of a sea-voyage, and the movement over tossing billows had no terrors for him. It was partly the prospect of enjoying a spell of this that induced him at the request of the Colonial Government to represent it once more at the Congress of Orientalists at Athens in April, 1912. Greece to him was disappointing, save only in the haunting beauty of the Parthenon. Perhaps she veiled herself from his vision, recognizing in him a heretic mind, one ever a rebel to her siren call and her traditional domination. *Ex Oriente lux.*

He had won the confidence alike of the foremost scholars in Europe and America, and of the representatives of Buddhism in Ceylon, Burma, and

Siam. Both in this country and on the Continent he was the acknowledged leader of Pāli studies. He settled at Chipstead, in Surrey, still able for a while to enjoy a round of golf, even a game of tennis, or a quiet game of billiards at home. He wrote many reviews for the *Manchester Guardian*, but concentrated his remaining strength chiefly on the preparation of the Dictionary for the press. He secured as his collaborator a younger scholar, commended to him by the late Dr. Windisch, Dr. W. Stede, who undertook the heavy labour of the final sifting and arrangement of the materials which had been collected in his forty years of study or contributed by a few friends and fellow-workers. Cross-references had to be added, etymological puzzles solved, various or faulty readings compared and corrected. Illness, frequently involving disabling pain, laid a heavy burden on his last years, but with undaunted resolve he still worked on. In the preface to Part I., dated in July, 1921, he showed that he was under no illusion about the permanence of the work. As it would supersede Childers's first effort, it would itself, he hoped, be superseded, and much sooner.

"This work is essentially preliminary. There is a large number of words of which we do not know the derivation, but rather the reverse. It is so in every living language. Who could guess, from the derivation, the complicated meaning of such words as 'conscience,' 'emotion,' 'disposition'? The derivation would be as likely to mislead as to guide.

We have made much progress. No one needs now to use the one English word "desire" as a translation of sixteen distinct Pāli words, not one of which means precisely desire. . . . The same argument applies to as many concrete words as abstract ones. Here again we claim to have made much advance. But in either case, to wait for perfection would postpone the much-needed Dictionary to the Greek Kalends. It has therefore been decided to proceed as rapidly as possible with the completion of this first edition, and to reserve the proceeds of the sale for the eventual issue of a second edition which shall come nearer to our ideals of what a Pāli Dictionary should be."

The eventual second edition can only remain a very distant vision. Fifty years had elapsed since the publication of Childers's first volume; will another half-century elapse before a scholar with the enthusiasm, resolve, and insight of Rhys Davids carries his ideal nearer to fulfilment? He lived to see the third part—nearly half the work—issued to subscribers, when hypostatic pneumonia supervened upon other maladies, and, after two days of suffering, he passed peacefully away.

Of his home life, of the sorrow which the war brought him in the death of his brilliant and only son, who quitted the captaincy of Eton to enter the air service, and won unusual distinction, of his warm regard for his friends, his generous helpfulness to younger scholars, his magnanimity in the face of differences or misunderstandings, nothing can here be said. The Committee commend his memory to the members of the Society not only as its Founder, but as a high example of the spirit in which knowledge should be sought and truth be loved.

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At the request of the Committee, Mrs. Rhys Davids has kindly consented to prepare the annual statement of the Society's work for the past year, and to carry on its operations as Interim Hon. Treasurer till fresh arrangements can be made. In due course a fresh President and Treasurer must be elected. It has been suggested that a meeting of the Society should be held, when some of the foreign members may be present, in connection with the celebration of the Centenary of the Royal Asiatic Society next summer.

Dines Andersen
J. Estlin Carpenter
Edward Greenly
George A. Grierson.
Emile Senart
Arnold C. Taylor.