

OBITUARY NOTICES

Thomas William Rhys Davids

BORN 12TH MAY, 1843. DIED 27TH DECEMBER, 1922.

A record of fulfilment, "great tracts of thought to order brought", is the "In Memoriam" of Rhys Davids. There is a remarkable completeness about his long life's work, equalled only by the clear vision with which, from the outset, he saw his goal and mapped out his course to attain it.

Before entering the Ceylon Civil Service, in 1866, he had studied Sanskrit (at Breslau, under Stenzler), then a rare accomplishment, which in Ceylon led him at once to take up Pali. His teacher was Yātrāmullē Unnānsē, to whose learning and character he pays so eloquent a tribute in his Hibbert Lectures of 1881. Returning to England, Rhys Davids was called to the Bar in 1877, but did not seriously pursue the law as a career.

For thirty years from 1882 Rhys Davids was Professor of Pali at University College, London, and Secretary and Librarian of our Society from 1887 to 1904. In 1894 (the year of his marriage) he visited the United States to deliver his American Lectures (published in 1896) on "Buddhism: its History and Literature" (being the first of the "courses in the History of Religions, somewhat after the style of the Hibbert Lectures in England"). He took an active part, in 1902, in founding the British Academy and, later, the London School of Oriental Studies. In 1904 he was elected Professor of Comparative Religion in Manchester, a post which he held till the outbreak of the war. In 1910 he was elected the first President of the India Society and retained office till his death. He was a Fellow of the British Academy, and held the honorary degrees of D.Sc. (from the Danish Royal College of Sciences and also from Sheffield University), of Ph.D. (Breslau), of LL.D. (Edinburgh), and of D.Litt.

(Manchester). From these biographical details I pass to his records as a scholar.

It was in 1877 that Rhys Davids, who had already contributed papers to the *Journal* of the Ceylon Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society, not only brought out his excellent "Ancient Coins and Measures of Ceylon", but also wrote his little manual of "Buddhism", which brought him immediate recognition by the general public and an assured reputation among Orientalists. "It was (he wrote, in 1894) a very venturesome undertaking (in 1877) to attempt to give an account of a system on which its European interpreters differed irreconcilably, at a time when they could not be brought to bar before the original authorities. The conclusions arrived at in 1877 have been throughout confirmed by the more recent publications of ancient texts, and have even been adopted and circulated by authors who have not deemed it necessary to refer to the manual in which these conclusions were for the first time stated. . . . But no one is more surprised than its author to find that a work written originally under so many difficulties requires now so few alterations. He ventures to indulge the hope that it may have contributed somewhat to the interest which is now increasingly taken in one of the most instructive chapters in the history of human thought." Eight and twenty years since 1894 have only served to justify his brilliant pioneer work (now in its twenty-second thousand) and to fortify the sure foundations on which the whole of his future Buddhist labours were to be based. In 1880 Rhys Davids published the first (and only) volume—still a standard work—of a translation of the *Jātaka*, and in 1881 not only the first volume of his translation (with Dr. Oldenberg) of "Vinaya Texts" but also his "Buddhist Suttas from the Pali" and his "Hibbert Lectures, 1881"—a *tiratanam* indeed of literary excellence and rare insight.¹

¹ Rhys Davids himself was wont to maintain that his succinct volume on *Early Buddhism* (1908) was intrinsically the best book he ever wrote.

A new chapter now begins. It was in his Hibbert Lectures of 1881 that, fulfilling the idea already adumbrated in 1877 (in the appendix to the first chapter of his "Buddhism"), Rhys Davids announced the formation of the Pali Text Society—"in order to render accessible to students the rich stores of the earliest Buddhist literature now lying unedited and practically unused in the various MSS. scattered throughout the University and other Public Libraries of Europe. 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 not too much to say that the publication of this unique literature will be no less important for the study of history—whether anthropological, philological, literary, or religious—than the publication of the Vedas has already been". (The original Committee of Management, it may here be noted, consisted of Professor Fausböll, Dr. Oldenberg, Dr. Richard Morris, and M. Émile Senart, with Sir William Hunter as Hon. Treasurer and Rhys Davids as Chairman; of these, M. Senart is to-day the honoured survivor.) With a courage as boundless as his resources were slender, Rhys Davids gave himself to the task, undertaking single-handed the interminable labours of organization and of correspondence that was world-wide from the outset. In 1882 he was able to issue the *Cariyā Piṭaka*, the *Buddhavaṃsa*, and Part I of the *Āṅguttara Nikāya* (all edited by Dr. Morris), with Professor Jacobi's (Jain) *Ayāraṅga Sutta*; and he could point to a substantial list of "works in progress". From 1882 onwards, the issue of Pali Texts continued without a break; and "forty years on", at his death, he could claim a total issue of some 25,000 printed 8vo pages, covering the whole of the four great *Nikāyas* and almost the whole of the entire Canon—supplemented by commentaries and minor Pali works. As his own contribution to the Pali Texts, he edited—with the commentary duly proceeding—the *Dīgha Nikāya* (in co-operation with Professor Estlin

Carpenter, who brought out the last volume alone). *Katam̐ karaṇṇīyam̐*; it was a great adventure, finely conceived and finely executed, through forty years; nor can we hail as other than happy the scholar who lived to see so noble an ideal realized in all essentials. He was privileged for nearly three decades to receive in this work the devoted co-operation of his wife, in whose accomplished hands it is left to set the coping-stone on this enduring monument of English Scholarship.

In my judgment, his translation of the *Dīgha Nikāya* (1890, 1902, and 1921) is his finest achievement, as it is—with perhaps the “Questions of King Milinda” (1890 and 1894)—the most characteristic of his style and maturity of outlook. No one can read his masterly “Introductions” to the more important Suttas in the first two volumes without learning much of Buddhism and contemporary Indian history; few will have read them without a conviction of their sanity, depth, and finality in essentials.

In Indian history as such, Rhys Davids had at all periods of his life a most lively interest. It was by no means by way of a *paregon* that he addressed himself to his “Buddhist India” (1903) and to his succinct chapter on “The Early History of the Buddhists” in the first volume of the new “Cambridge History of India” (1922). In this field, chief significance—outside the history of the Buddhist Canon—attaches to his insistence on the early oligarchies round the Ganges and the subsequent development of the successive Kingdoms of Kosala and Magadha. Here he has added much to the pioneer work of Prinsep and George Turnour.

Lastly, in another field—closely associated with the publication of the Pali Texts and always included with them in his outlook—he was also destined to be fortunate, though not so fully, and then only after “cruel rebuffs and disappointments”; I refer to his Pali Dictionary. . . . Long before the end of last century he had looked forward to a modern Dictionary of the language, and, as each new text appeared,

entered up verbatim quotations and references in his interleaved copy of Childers. When, at the beginning of the present century, he had secured financial support sufficient to warrant him in formulating a definite scheme for the execution of the work, his original idea was to form a Pali "League of Nations" by enlisting as fellow-workers the Pali scholars of the world; and on this basis mapped out the work at a prodigious cost in energy and correspondence. In the end, frustrated—by the war and by the death of fellow-workers—in his hope of uniting scholars in a joint undertaking, he, at a time when he was well over 70, undertook this laborious work himself, with the philologist, Dr. W. Stede, as co-editor. Yet he lived to see nearly half the work actually in print and part of the remainder re-revised by his hand. To Pali students this dictionary, "provisional" though Rhys Davids styles it in his "Foreword", is invaluable as setting out the ordered results of half a century's growth in our Pali and Buddhistic knowledge since Robert Cæsar Childers began to print his pioneer work. The names of the two friends, both of them from the Ceylon Civil Service and both, in succession, Professors of Pali in University College, London, will always have an abiding fame in the lexicographic *paramparā* of Pali.

It was as "a friend of historical research" that in 1881 Rhys Davids made his anonymous contribution to the funds of the infant Pali Text Society; nor can I suggest a better description of him. To him all knowledge in the ultimate analysis came under what he called "history"; and, outside politics (in which he was always an earnest Liberal), the ideal of his intellectual life was centred in research, interpreted by him with the fullest catholicity of sympathy for workers and each and every field of research—in physical science as well as in humane letters. I do not think that he cared greatly for mere learning, as such. But for sound learning, wisely digested and scientifically applied—as for example in the bearing of Vedic philology on the Pali language of the

older Nikāyas—his reverence was profound. What he abhorred was an unscientific jumble—such as what had too long passed as Buddhism—of distinct and successive “strata”; what he sought always to achieve was the presentment of historical fact in its due sequence and in ordered relation to what stratigraphically preceded and succeeded it. Incidentally, he never shrank from combating, in the interests of what he deemed truth, established and powerful interests; against Sanskrit supremacy in a sphere not its own he argued as energetically as Gotama himself argued against the sacrificial Brahmins; he never lost an opportunity of attacking animism and “the soul-theory”. But I do not think that, keen disputant as he was, he ever wrote a line for writing’s sake or without the sincerest conviction; nor was he ever more gratified—as the true friend to historical research which he was—than when he could put his own materials, knowledge, and quick intelligence at the disposal of a fellow-worker. Though he never made the claim, he was entitled to claim (and what nobler claim can a scholar advance?)—“*Yaṁ satthārā karaṇīyaṁ sāvakaṇaṁ hitesiṇā anukampakena anukampaṁ upādāya, kataṁ vo taṁ mayā.*”

C.

M. Clermont-Ganneau

In M. Clermont-Ganneau the Society has lost one of the most brilliant of its honorary members. He was born in 1848 and from his boyhood devoted himself to Oriental studies. Encouraged by Renan, he entered the Diplomatic Service, and spent much of his life in Syria, Palestine, and Constantinople, thus acquiring a first-hand acquaintance with Oriental thought, languages, and antiquities, which was invaluable to him in his scientific work. He also became, and always remained, rather a man of the world, but he was at the same time an untiring worker. His first great achievement was in connexion with the discovery of the Moabite Stone, when