

Foreword

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Here is an exposition of Buddhism conceived in a resolutely modern spirit by one of the most qualified and enlightened representatives of that religion. The Rev. Dr. W. Rahula received the traditional training and education of a Buddhist monk in Ceylon, and held eminent positions in one of the leading monastic institutes (Pirivena) in that island, where the Law of the Buddha flourishes from the time of Asoka and has preserved all its vitality up to this day. Thus brought up in an ancient tradition, he decided, at this time when all traditions are called in question, to face the spirit and the methods of international scientific learning. He entered the Ceylon University, obtained the B.A. Honours degree (London), and then won the degree of Doctor of Philosophy of the Ceylon University on a highly learned thesis on the History of Buddhism in Ceylon. Having worked with distinguished professors at the University of Calcutta and come in contact with adepts of Mahayana (the Great Vehicle), that form of Buddhism which reigns from Tibet to the Far East, he decided to go into the Tibetan and Chinese texts in order to widen his ecumenism, and he has honoured us by coming to the University of Paris (Sorbonne) to prepare a study of Asanga, the illustrious philosopher of Mahayana, whose principal works in the original Sanskrit are lost, and can only be read in their Tibetan and Chinese translations. It is now eight years since Dr. Rahula is among us, wearing the yellow robe, breathing the air of the Occident, searching perhaps in our old troubled mirror a universalized reflection of the religion which is his.

The book, which he has kindly asked me to present to the public of the West, is a luminous account, within reach of everybody, of the fundamental principles of the Buddhist doctrine, as

they are found in the most ancient texts, which are called 'The Tradition' (*Agama*) in Sanskrit and 'The Canonic Corpus' (*Nikaja*) in Pali. Dr. Rahula, who possesses an incomparable knowledge of these texts, refers to them constantly and almost exclusively. Their authority is recognized unanimously by all the Buddhist schools, which were and are numerous, but none of which ever deviates from these texts, except with the intention of better interpreting the spirit beyond the letter. The interpretation has indeed been varied in the course of the expansion of Buddhism through many centuries and vast regions, and the Law has taken more than one aspect. But the aspect of Buddhism here presented by Dr. Rahula—humanist, rational, Socratic in some respects, Evangelic in others, or again almost scientific—has for its support a great deal of authentic scriptural evidence which he only had to let speak for themselves.

The explanations which he adds to his quotations, always translated with scrupulous accuracy, are clear, simple, direct, and free from all pedantry. Some among them might lead to discussion, as when he wishes to rediscover in the Pali sources all the doctrines of Mahayana; but his familiarity with those sources permits him to throw new light on them. He addresses himself to the modern man, but he refrains from insisting on comparisons just suggested here and there, which could be made with certain currents of thought of the contemporary world: socialism, atheism, existentialism, psycho-analysis. It is for the reader to appreciate the modernity, the possibilities of adaptation of a doctrine which, in this work of genuine scholarship, is presented to him in its primal richness.