

## Preface

All over the world today there is growing interest in Buddhism. Numerous societies and study-groups have come into being, and scores of books have appeared on the teaching of the Buddha. It is to be regretted, however, that most of them have been written by those who are not really competent, or who bring to their task misleading assumptions derived from other religions, which must misinterpret and misrepresent their subject. A professor of comparative religion who recently wrote a book on Buddhism did not even know that Ananda, the devoted attendant of the Buddha, was a *bhikkhu* (a monk), but thought he was a layman! The knowledge of Buddhism propagated by books like these can be left to the reader's imagination.

I have tried in this little book to address myself first of all to the educated and intelligent general reader, uninstructed in the subject, who would like to know what the Buddha actually taught. For his benefit I have aimed at giving briefly, and as directly and simply as possible, a faithful and accurate account of the actual words used by the Buddha as they are to be found in the original Pali texts of the *Tipitaka*, universally accepted by scholars as the earliest extant records of the teachings of the Buddha. The material used and the passages quoted here are taken directly from these originals. In a few places I have referred to some later works too.

I have borne in mind, too, the reader who has already some knowledge of what the Buddha taught and would like to go further with his studies. I have therefore provided not only the Pali equivalents of most of the key-words, but also references to the original texts in footnotes, and a select bibliography.

The difficulties of my task have been manifold: throughout I have tried to steer a course between the unfamiliar and the popular, to give the English reader of the present day something which he could understand and appreciate, without sacrificing anything of the matter and the form of the discourses of the

Buddha. Writing the book I have had the ancient texts running in my mind, so I have deliberately kept the synonyms and repetitions which were a part of the Buddha's speech as it has come down to us through oral tradition, in order that the reader should have some notion of the form used by the Teacher. I have kept as close as I could to the originals, and have tried to make my translations easy and readable.

But there is a point beyond which it is difficult to take an idea without losing in the interests of simplicity the particular meaning the Buddha was interested in developing. As the title 'What the Buddha Taught' was selected for this book, I felt that it would be wrong not to set down the words of the Buddha, even the figures he used, in preference to a rendering which might provide the easy gratification of comprehensibility at the risk of distortion of meaning.

I have discussed in this book almost everything which is commonly accepted as the essential and fundamental teaching of the Buddha. These are the doctrines of the Four Noble Truths, the Noble Eightfold Path, the Five Aggregates, Karma, Rebirth, Conditioned Genesis (*Paticcasamuppada*), the doctrine of No-Soul (*Anatta*), *Satipatthana* (the Setting-up of Mindfulness). Naturally there will be in the discussion expressions which must be unfamiliar to the Western reader. I would ask him, if he is interested, to take up on his first reading the opening chapter, and then go on to Chapters V, VII and VIII, returning to Chapters II, III, IV and VI when the general sense is clearer and more vivid. It would not be possible to write a book on the teaching of the Buddha without dealing with the subjects which *Theravada* and *Mahayana* Buddhism have accepted as fundamental in his system of thought.

The term *Theravada—Hinayana* or 'Small Vehicle' is no longer used in informed circles—could be translated as 'the School of the Elders' (*theras*), and *Mahayana* as 'Great Vehicle'. They are used of the two main forms of Buddhism known in the world today. *Theravada*, which is regarded as the original orthodox Buddhism, is followed in Ceylon, Burma, Thailand, Cambodia, Laos, and Chittagong in East Pakistan. *Mahayana*, which developed relatively later, is followed in other Buddhist countries like China, Japan, Tibet, Mongolia, etc. There are certain differences, mainly with regard to some beliefs, practices and observances between these

two schools, but on the most important teachings of the Buddha, such as those discussed here, *Theravada* and *Mahayana* are unanimously agreed.

It only remains for me now to express my sense of gratitude to Professor E. F. C. Ludowyk, who in fact invited me to write this book, for all the help given me, the interest taken in it, the suggestions he offered, and for reading through the manuscript. To Miss Marianne Mohn too, who went through the manuscript and made valuable suggestions, I am deeply grateful. Finally I am greatly beholden to Professor Paul Demieville, my teacher in Paris, for his kindness in writing the Foreword.

W. RAHULA

Paris  
*July 1958*