

ASOKA

The Carmichael Lectures, 1923

ASOKA

BY

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To

His Highness Maharaja

SIR SAYAJIRAO GAEKWAR,

G.C.S.I., G.C.I.E.,

1/12/1913

Sena Khas Khel Samsher Bahadur,

The only Indian ruler at present living,
who, striving for the spiritual as well as the
temporal welfare of the people, and
eager to ascertain the truth in every religion,
may rightly be looked upon as an
Incarnation of Asoka.

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PREFACE

So much has been said and written about Aśoka that some of those who happen to see this book may perhaps wonder what new things yet remain to be said about that Indian monarch. It must not, however, be forgotten that the records which Aśoka has left in stone are a literature by themselves, and it will take many years yet for scholars to understand clearly all that he has said. A student of Indian Epigraphy need not be told that there are passages, by no means few, in these records, which are yet far from clear, and every day new and better interpretations are being proposed by scholars. There is, again, such a thing as piecing together the various items of information supplied by these inscriptions so as to give a vivid picture of the royal missionary. I am afraid, this work of piecing together is by no means complete yet and must continue for some more years to come. There is no section of Indian epigraphy, so interesting and, I should say, so edifying as that represented by the records of Aśoka. And as I have participated not only in the work of interpretation but also of collation and unification of his records, I hope I stand in no need of explanation for bringing

out this book which sets forth my views about the Buddhist monarch.

My study of the inscriptions of Aśoka began as early as 1898. There were before me translations and notes on these records not only by Prinsep, Wilson and Burnouf, but also by Prof. Kern, M. Senart and Prof. Bühler. I devoured the contents of all these books. But none interested and benefited me so much as "the Inscriptions of Piyadasi" by M. Senart which had appeared in English garb in the pages of the *Indian Antiquary*. I could at once detect in the French savant not only an epigraphist, not only a scholar of Sanskrit, Pali, and Prakrit, but also a historian whose aim was to piece together the different scraps of information supplied by the epigraphic and literary records so as to form one connected whole. Chapter IV of his book thus sets forth not only the chronological position of Aśoka or his inscriptions but also the extent of his empire, his administrative system, his independent neighbours, his connection with the Grecian world, his conversion to Buddhism, the nature of his Dharma and so forth. It was M. Senart who first showed the way how to construct the history of Aśoka from a systematic study of his records.

It will thus be seen that it is nearly a quarter of a century that I have studied the

inscriptions of Aśoka with a view to find out what light they throw upon the history of India. What real advance, if any, I have made can be best told by scholars and historians. Eager to know, however, how far my attempt has become successful, I sent to the French savant the page proofs of the first seven chapters of this book as soon as they were available, with a request that he might tell me unreservedly what he thought about it. But for a long time no reply was received, and just as this Preface was being put in type, the long expected letter came to hand. "You will forgive a delay," it begins, "due to the somewhat shaken health of an old colleague. I would have wished to thank you sooner for having sent me the good pages of your Aśoka. You kindly remembered the studies which I devoted years ago to the religious king and his precious inscriptions. How should I not be impressed by the testimony of such an enlightened judge as yourself? You can imagine that these researches of my youth are always dear and present to me. Your book leads me back to them once more. I am very grateful to it. I am grateful because it has brought me a brilliant example of the ingenious and passionate skill with which Modern India endeavours to reconstruct its past."

M. Senart is frank enough in this letter to tell me in what points he differs from me.

All of these represent minor differences of opinion except one. This last is in regard to the responsibility I have thrown upon Aśoka (which in his opinion the monarch little deserved) for his change of foreign policy, "for the mansuetude of his pitiful reflections," which rendered easy the success of foreign invasions, Greek and Turanian, that infested the country after him. "It is quite possible," says he, "that Buddhist Pacifism in the long run has tended to weaken certain people, whom it did not render more gentle except by making them less fit for action" I prefer to recognise in him simply a spirit of idealism and of deep religiousness which we know well, for it animates the whole remote past of India and it has perhaps stood for a greater spiritual honour than it has deprived India of realisations of external successes, for which it is doubtful whether its genius ever had

* In justice to myself I may state that this idea also had occurred to me, but I had to discard it as the interval was too short between Aśoka [and the Greek invasion after him. Aśoka is taken to have died about 236 B.C.; and the death of Euthydemus, the first Bactrian Greek invader, is supposed to have taken place about 190 B.C. There is thus scarcely an interval of fifty years, during which, again, Antiochus the Great is reported to have carried out a successful expedition into the north-west frontiers of the Mauryan Empire (*The Cambridge History of India*, pp. 442 and 444). The Greek invasion thus came off almost immediately on the death of Aśoka. Does it give enough time to Buddhism to spread and make the people, above all, the Magadha army, as gentle and pacific as to render them unfit for militarism—just that army which Alexander's men were afraid to encounter and which repulsed the forces of Seleucus after him?

made it fit." When, therefore, he has favoured me with such frank criticism, one feels inclined to believe, as a sincere expression of his opinion, the following that he has given to show what he thinks about my work as a whole: "It was not so much your purpose to establish a critical history of Aśoka by a general examination of the traditions more or less in keeping with the epigraphic information, but you intended to show by an analysis of the inscriptions what information hitherto unexpected they can yield to a sagacious and penetrating explorer. You have been prepared for this task as nobody else by your extended familiarity with literature. It is a marvel of a singular power that by throwing light on the monuments with the help of books you have enlivened your picture."

There are many questions connected with Aśoka, which are still of a complicated nature. One of these is the effect of his foreign policy on India. How far or whether Buddhism had spread over Western Asia through his missionary efforts is another such question. It is not possible to reach any final conclusions unless they are freely and fearlessly discussed. I have expressed my views for what they are worth, and it would now be interesting to see what different views are expressed by scholars and, above all, historians. The more diverse these opinions are, the more are the viewpoints from

which the questions may be looked at and the greater is consequently the likelihood of arriving at early solutions of them.

It is true that history, and not epigraphy, is the main object of this book. Nevertheless, time has not yet come and perhaps may never come, so far as Ancient India is concerned, to separate History altogether from Epigraphy, Archaeology, or Sanskrit and Sanskritic literature. There are still some words and passages in the Aśokan inscriptions which require to be properly interpreted or understood though Dr. F. W. Thomas has done a yeoman's service in this field recently. I have, therefore, by no means neglected this source of our ancient history. That I have given sufficient attention to it may be seen especially from Chapter VIII which contains translation and annotation of Aśoka's Edicts.

I have said that the Aśokan inscriptions have engrossed my attention for a quarter of a century. But I cannot help adding that much progress in this respect I was able to achieve only when I came to Calcutta to occupy the Chair of the Carmichael Professor of Ancient Indian History and Culture and breathe in the pure intellectual atmosphere of the Calcutta University, which is the unique creation of the monumental genius of the late Sir Asutosh Mookerjee, Sarasvati, whose guidance, I should

say, providence, in the development of the post-graduate studies, is now for ever lost to us. He was specially interested in the publication of this book. And it will for ever be a matter of extreme regret to me that he was not spared just a little longer to see this book which has now come to light after being two years in the press.

The Index of this volume is the work of Mr. Girindra Mohan Sarkar, who was my pupil some time ago. As regards proof-reading and general help, I am highly indebted to Mr. Jitendranath Banerjea and Mr. Nani Gopal Majumdar, Lecturers of the Calcutta University, and also to my pupils Mr. Rakhohari Chatterji and Mr. Chintaharan Chakravarty. And I cannot better conclude this Preface than with the words with which the French savant concludes his letter: "To this famous ancestor you, true to the beautiful traditions, familiar to solid knowledge, wanted to render the tribute of your researches and the inspirations of your patriotism. If I cannot, in order to do you full justice, enter into a detail which would compel me to exceed the limits of a letter, allow me at least to address to you my hearty felicitations. I like to place this fertile union of sympathy and work—in which the piety of India and the respectful curiosity of the West should join—under the patronage of our hero in common."

D. R. B.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

- AR-ASEC—Annual Report, Archaeological Survey,
Eastern Circle.
- ASI-AR—Archaeological Survey of India—Annual Report.
- ASSI—Archaeological Survey of Southern India.
- ASWI—Archaeological Survey of Western India.
- CASR—Cunningham's Archaeological Survey Reports.
- CCII—Cunningham—Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum.
- CHI—Cambridge History of India.
- CII—Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum.
- CL—Carmichael Lectures.
- EB—Encyclopaedia Britannica.
- EC—Epigraphia Carnatica.
- EHI—Early History of India.
- EI—Epigraphia Indica.
- ERE—Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics.
- EZ—Epigraphia Zeylanica.
- GI—Gupta Inscriptions.
- HAS—Hyderabad Archaeological Survey.
- HASL—History of Ancient Sanskrit Literature.
- HIEA—History of Indian and Eastern Architecture.
- IA—Indian Antiquary.
- JAOS—Journal of the American Oriental Society.
- JASB—Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal.
- Jat—Jātakas.
- JBBRAS—Journal of the Bombay Branch of the Royal
Asiatic Society.
- JBORS—Journal of the Bihar Orissa Research Society.
- JDL—Journal of the Department of Letters (Calcutta
University).

- JPTS—Journal of the Pali Text Society.
- JRAS (NS)—Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society (New Series).
- MASB—Memoirs of the Asiatic Society of Bengal.
- MASI—Memoirs of the Archaeological Survey of India.
- PR-ASNWFP—Progress Report of the Archaeological Survey of North Western Frontier Province.
- PR-ASWI—Progress Report of the Archaeological Survey of Western India.
- PTFOC—Proceedings and Transactions of the First Oriental Conference, Poona.
- PTS—Pali Text Society.
- SAMSJV—Sir Asutosh Mookerjee Silver Jubilee Volume.
- SBB—Sacred Books of the Buddhists.
- SBE—Sacred Books of the East.
- VOJ—Vienna Oriental Journal.
- VP—Vishnu Purāna.
- ZDMG—Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft.
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<i>Page</i>	<i>Line</i>	<i>For</i>	<i>Read</i>
48	14	III	II
69	10	V	IV
112	3-4	Strydhyaksha	Stryadhyaksha
117	8-9	practice	practise
128	n.2, 1.2	Buddhists	Buddhists
188	24	Phœnician	Phœnician
228	4	Omit the last 'the'	
236	2	Esparanto	Esperanto
242	21	metamorphosised	metamorphosed
248	2	son	on