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# BUDDHA JAYANTI MEMORIALS

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CEY

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by the Information Department  
Printed at the Government Press, Ceylon





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## FOREWORD

THE Buddha Jayanti is an event of dual significance, viz : the 2500th anniversary of the passing away of the Buddha and of the founding of the Kingdom of Lanka for, as the Mahavamsa states, 'the Prince Vijaya landed in Lanka on the day that the Tathagatha lay down to pass into Nibbana'.

This strange coincidence was but an augury of the subsequent spiritual and secular progress in Ceylon. Since the introduction of Buddhism in the 3rd century, B.C., the Dhamma became the supreme inspiration of the people. After its florescence in the reign of King Parakrama Bahu the Great, national and spiritual endeavour began to fade away until the 18th century when Weliwita Saranankara Sangha Raja Thero, assisted by King Kirti Sri Raja Sinha, stemmed the tide and caused a renaissance. Their work was continued by many others whose efforts are to be commemorated in this historic year.

Thirty-five memorials are to be erected to perpetuate their work which is briefly described in this little booklet.

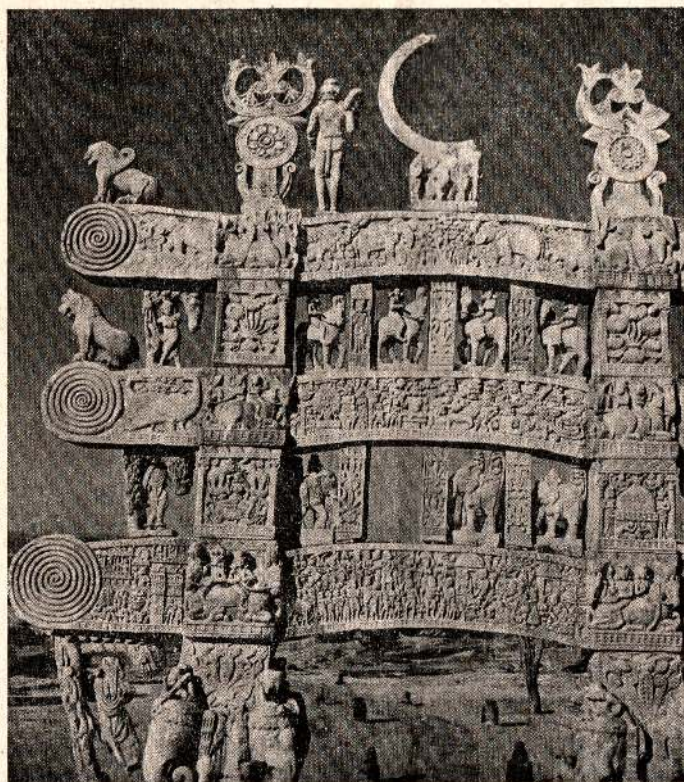


## LUMBINI

LUMBINI GARDENS was the birth place of Lord Buddha. This is situated about 12 miles away from the City of Kapilawastu in Northern India. Mahamaya, the queen of Suddodhana was on her way to her parents at Dewadaha when the time for the birth of her child came. She was, therefore, compelled to enter the Lumbini Gardens by the road side and take refuge under a shady tree where she gave birth to a child who was destined to become Lord Buddha.

It is said that the infant walked seven paces forward and proclaimed that he was the greatest and noblest person on earth.

Lumbini is now known as Rumindei and there stands an Asoka pillar with the inscription: "Here in this place the Lord, the Saviour of human beings and deities, the Blessed One was born".



Northern Gateway to the Sanchi Maha Stupa



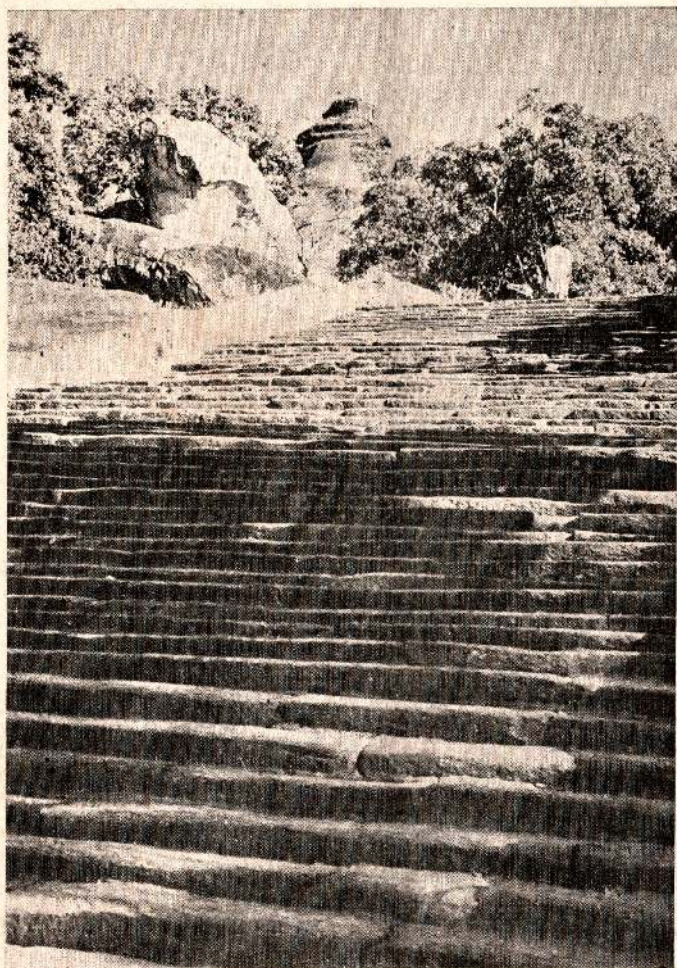
## SANCHI AND ARHAT MAHINDA

MOST of the Buddhist ruins so far discovered in India have been found at Sanchi. However, there appears no connection between the life study of Gautama Buddha and these ruins. Buddhist literature makes no mention of Sanchi. Nevertheless it is true that the various Buddhist shrines of Sanchi have had a great influence on Buddhist architecture of India.

There are historical records to show that the Emperor Asoka married the charming daughter of a wealthy merchant and had a son by that marriage. Mahendra, the son of Asoka, left for Ceylon as the head of a team of Buddhist missionaries. Mention has also been made of the rock where he broke journey and also the temples built there. There is also a vivid description of Chetiya-giri which is situated in the neighbourhood of Wedisa, in the *Mahavansa*. This Chetiyagiri mentioned in the *Mahavansa* is the present day Sanchi.

The story of the introduction of Buddhism into Ceylon by Arhat Mahinda is well known. Arhat Mahinda has, therefore, always been hailed by the people of Ceylon as the Second Buddha. In fact it was after the visit of Arhat Mahinda to Ceylon that the people of this Island started the Buddhist way of life.

The service rendered by Arhat Mahinda to the cause of the Sinhalese language and its literature is inestimable. There is evidence to conclude that the Sinhalese language was in a prosperous state when he arrived in



Stone Steps at Mihintale

this Island and that the advent of Buddhism further developed it.

Arhat Mahinda along with his followers like Ven. Arittha wrote commentaries to Tripitaka in Sinhalese. Thus the guidance given by Arhat Mahinda to the Sinhalese in the fields of missionary work, education, the art of writing and translation is great.

## VIHARA MAHA DEVI

THE name of Vihara Maha Devi is written in letters of gold in the pages of our history. As the woman who braved all alone the angry seas, in self-sacrifice, to sooth the wrath of the gods, and who thus saved the country from being devoured by the ocean, Vihara Maha Devi's name is without peer in the annals of our history.

Her story reads like an epic. A king by the name of Tissa ruled in Kelaniya, and since he ruled in Kelaniya, he came to be known as Kelani Tissa. His younger brother, Arya Uttiya, had been secretly in love with the Queen, and the knowledge of this aroused the King's wrath. Arya Uttiya fled in fear of the King and lived elsewhere. However, he managed to send a man disguised as a bhikku, with a secret letter to the Queen. This man entered the palace in the company of an "arahat" who was accustomed to take his meals at the palace. After eating in the "arahat's" company, as they were leaving the place, he dropped the letter on the ground to be seen by the Queen. At the rustling sound, the King hurried and saw the letter. He read it, and unthinking, began to rage against the man and the "arahat" both of whom he caused to be slain and thrown into the sea.

The sea-gods were angered by this scandal, and they made the sea overflow the land. A human sacrifice became necessary to pacify the sea-gods and the King's pious and beautiful daughter consented to give herself

as a sacrifice. She was put in a golden vessel with the words "a King's daughter" inscribed on it, and the vessel was launched upon the sea. The sea-waters subsided and the country was saved. Driven by wind and wave, the vessel came near the shores of Ruhuna where it landed near Lanka Vihara. King Kavantissa of Ruhuna consecrated the princess as Queen and as she landed near a vihare, she was named Vihara Maha Devi.

She became the mother of Dutugemunu. When Dutugemunu asked his father King Kavantissa for permission to fight King Elara, and when that permission was refused, he was so much disappointed that he sent his father a woman's garb saying: "My father is a woman". When the King became angry over this insult, it was Vihara Maha Devi who advised Dutugemunu to flee to Kotmale.

It is difficult to find a parallel in all history of a woman who better exemplifies the saying: "The hand that rocks the cradle rules the world". For was it not Vihara Maha Devi who was responsible for the intense bravery, courage, sacrificing zeal, and love of nation and religion that were the dominating influences in Dutugemunu's life?

She loved her son more than she loved her life, but she urged this very son to risk his life in the battle-field. Beside the statue of Dutugemunu at the Ruwanweli Seya is a statue of his heroic mother Vihara Maha Devi. But that is only an inadequate tribute to one who, by common consent, is Lanka's greatest heroine. Her lasting monument has been built in the hearts of men whom she will inspire to the end of time.



Seruvila Dagaba after Conservation

## SERUWILA

ACCORDING to the *Datuwansaya*, an ancient chronicle of repute, Seruwila is a place sanctified by the presence of Lord Buddha during his life time. Buddha, it is stated, visited this particular spot accompanied by 500 arahats. He not only spent a couple of hours here but also blessed the spot by offering eight handfuls of "sapu" flowers. He also predicted that a Sinhalese monarch named Kavantissa from the southern part of Ceylon would one day construct a Dagoba on the spot and call it Seruwila Dagoba. The chronicle also states that the Buddha said that his collar-bone would, after his death, be enshrined in the Dagoba.

The Buddha's prediction came true. Kavantissa of Ruhuna—the father of Dutugemunu—came to Seruwila all the way from Magama (Ruhuna) and built a huge Dagoba. This is situated in the Eastern Coast in the neighbourhood of Trincomalee.

The lake called Seruwila and the rocky pond known as Warahasondi are both situated in the vicinity of Seruwila Dagoba. Two images of Lord Buddha decorated with nine hooded cobras remind us that this part of the country was once inhabited by the Nagas.

With the downfall of the Sinhalese monarchy Seruwila was abandoned. An organization of recent times, known as Seruwila Chaitya Wardana Samitiya, is however taking a keen interest in the restoration of the Dagoba. Thanks to this organization, great progress has been now made in this direction.



Aluvihare Rock Temple



## THE GREAT COUNCIL AT ALUVIHARE

TWO miles from Matale on the Trincomalee Road, are the Aluvihare rocks. Amongst these rocks are the ruins of an ancient temple. The old name of this temple was Aloka Vihara to which many references have been made in the Chronicles. On the rock there are inscriptions in Brahmi scripts. There are also a series of dug out caves. These caves are connected with one of the most important events in the history of Buddhism, for it was in these caves that the 4th Council for the revision of Tri Pitaka was held and soon afterwards the entire Buddhist doctrine with its commentaries was committed to writing for the first time.

From the time of the introduction of Buddhism into Ceylon by Arhat Mahinda during the reign of King Devanampiyatissa, up to the reign of Valagambahu, the teachings of the Enlightened One were transmitted from teacher to pupil by oral tradition. But during the latter's reign the leaders of the Sasana, who were very anxious to preserve the doctrine of the Master in its purity counselled the king to assemble the holy monks, who were well versed in Tri Pitaka, in order to commit the doctrine to writing. This counsel was accepted by the king who gathered 500 Arahats, by whom the Tri Pitaka with its commentary was revised and written in books.

Tradition has it that the king supplied ola leaves required for this work from the famous Galatare Medilla garden, where to this day are found many talipot trees.



Attanagalla

## ATTANAGALLA AND KING SIRI SANGABO

ATTANAGALLA is a lovely hamlet in Siyane Korale situated about thirty miles away from Colombo. On an elevated ground, overlooking the Attanagalu Oya, stands the historic rock temple known as Rajamaha Viharaya. This place is believed to be the spot where King Siri Sangabo offered his head to a traveller who treated him with a meal of rice. Two foot prints on the Attanagalla Rock remind us of this unique historic incident. Of the two foot prints the bigger one is supposed to be that of the king and the other of the queen who wept to death embracing the headless body of her royal husband.

During the days of Siri Sangabo, Attanagalla was a thick forest with massive rocks and ponds. The historic pond by the side of which Siri Sangabo used to sit in meditation is still in a state of preservation. Lotus and other flowers are found in abundance in this pond.

Gotabhaya, the younger brother of Siri Sangabo, converted Attanagalla into a place of worship by building Dagobas and Viharas in memory of his dead brother.

The story of how Prince Siri Sangabo, the son of a king called Salabhaya received his religious education under his uncle Nanda Maha Thera, and how he later lived the noble and austere life of a "Bodhisatta" is recounted in the Sinhalese classic *Attanagaluwansaya*.

## THE VEN. WELIWITA SARANANKARA SANGHARAJA THERO

THE Buddhist religion and the Buddhist arts, which had fallen on evil days from the time of King Rajasinghe of Sitawaka entered its worst phase with the dawn of the Kandyan period. Degeneration in the field of Buddhism had reached such depths that "Upasampada" or Ordination of the Priesthood to the Higher Order had become a thing of the past, and "Samaneras" (or novices) wearing the yellow garb were the only members left in the Order of the Sangha.

It was at such a time that the country witnessed the entry into the scene of a great leader, the Ven. Weliwita Asarana Sarana Saranankara Sangharaja, whose courage and zeal combined with inexhaustible energy was to give new life and vitality to the nation. His efforts culminated in the re-introduction of Upasampada into Ceylon, an event which marked a revival of learning and religion in the country.

The Ven. Weliwita Saranankara Thero was born in 1689 in the aristocratic family of the Kulatungas in Weliwita in the Tumpane District. One of the forbears of the Kulatunga family had held the office of Dissawa in Wellassa and Rate Rala in Tumpane under the regime of King Wimaladharmasuriya.

As a Samanera, the Ven. Weliwita Saranankara had to contend against the difficulties of the times. For, in those days, the educated men were only a handful, who themselves knew nothing more than certain parts

of a limited number of books. The young monk had to seek the help of these few.

It did not take long for him to become alive to the danger that lay inherent in the degeneracy of Buddhism and the national education. He set his mind on restoring Buddhism to its former glory and stability by re-introducing the lost Upasampada.

This was the time when King Weera Parakrama Narendrasinghe held court at Hanguranketa. As there wasn't a single monk who had received Upasampada during the time of King Wimaladharmasuriya II, Upasampada had to be brought from abroad. King Narendrasinghe who was making preparations for this, however, died and King Sri Vijaya Raja succeeded to the throne. The Ven. Saranankara persuaded the King to send a delegation abroad in order to bring monks to Ceylon who were qualified to confer Upasampada. Unfortunately, the ship which took the delegation came to grief in the high seas and only one member who managed to escape returned to Ceylon. A second delegation followed but, as ill luck would have it, the King died as the delegation reached Siam, and they returned for fresh instructions from the new King who was Kirti Sri Raja Singha.

This King sent yet another delegation and success came at last. A mission, headed by Upali Maha Thera, arrived in Ceylon, and to the joy of all, Upasampada was once again introduced into Ceylon by these Siamese monks. When the King decided to confer the title of Sangharaja on him and sent a courtier to make the announcement, it is said that the Thero took an ola

leaf and inscribed on it the words: "Monk, be not proud", and hung it prominently on the threshold.

Among his literary works are *Sarartha Sangrahaya*, *Abhisambodhi Alankaraya*, *Rupa Mala*, *Madhurartha Prakashini*, *Muni Guna Alankaraya* and a Sinhalese paraphrase to the Pali medical book *Bhesajja Manjusa*.

In the year 1778, the Sangharaja decided to leave Malwatte Temple and go into residence at a "kutiya" at Hantana near Kandy. He lived to be 80 years, and these were years replete with service for his people.

## **GEDIGE AT ADAHANA MALUWA**

### **Tombs of the Ven. Upali and King Kirthisri**

THE Asgiriya Gedige is the beautiful stone temple built at the place where Queen Chandrawathie, mother of King Wickrama Bahu of Gampola, was cremated. This structure which consists of a shrine room and a small dagaba was decorated by the best sculptors of the time.

Though small in size, this temple is one of the finest in Ceylon. Round the building are carved figures of Makaras, lions, &c., and the door frames are made of solid granite and decorated most skilfully in the best national traditions.

In this temple, the roof of which also is made of solid stone, there is a majestic "samadhi" statue of Lord Buddha. Because of the thick layers of paint applied on the statue from time to time one might get the impression that it has been made of plaster. Although the sculptural work in the temple is of a very high standard, one cannot say the same of the paintings.

The Poyage or consecrated Assembly Hall is believed to be the Second Poyage built by King Wimaladharmasuriya after Upasampada was brought from Burma, the first being the one at Malwatte. This historic place is situated on a hill through which runs the railway line to Matale. On the spot where the bodies of kings

Wimaladharmasuriya, Wickrama Bahu, Kirthisri Rajasinghe, Sri Wijayarajasinghe and Queen Mother Chandrawathie were cremated were also deposited the ashes of Ven. Upali, the leader of the team of Siamese Theros who established Higher Ordination in Ceylon. The ruins of his tomb could still be seen today.

The sect that was established by Ven. Upali is known today as the Siamese Sect. The illustrious Sanga Raja the Ven. Weliwita Asarana Sarana Saranankara, who was the last to hold that highest religious office in Ceylon, was the sect's first head. King Kirthisri helped him and encouraged him in every way. This monarch also built the temples at Malwatte, Degaldoruwa, Gangaramaya, Suduhumpola, Ampitiya and Nittawela. He also improved the sacred Temple of the Tooth and renovated Rangiri Dambulla.



## THE VEN. WARIYAPOLA SRI SUMANGALA THERO

WARIYAPOLA, in the Kurunegala District, is a little village with a charm of its own. Set in a rustic environment, the hamlet breathes the very air of peace and calm. But it is neither its beauty nor any other scenic attraction that has made Wariyapola so widely known in the country. It is due simply to the fact that a national hero of the most extraordinary courage and daring was born in this "great little village". The Ven. Wariyapola Sri Sumangala Thero and the village of Wariyapola are inseparably linked.

The Ven. Wariyapola Sri Sumangala Thero showed qualities of fearlessness from his very childhood. No doubt the entry into the monastic order meant his dedication to a life of piety, but yet, an irresistible urge from within would not permit him to play the passive role of a looker-on in the face of what he thought was unjust.

The period in which he lived was a time when the downfall of the Sinhalese monarchy was imminent, and the country was in a state of violent agitation. The Ven. Wariyapola Sri Sumangala Thero was in close contact with the developments and he advised and guided the Sinhalese Ministers and other high-ranking officers who were at the centre of these developments. Indeed in every national problem the Ven. Wariyapola Thero was seen in the forefront.

The signing of the Kandyan Convention of 1815 transferring the supremacy of the Island to the British was

to him a time of agony—as indeed it was to every patriotic citizen. After twelve days of the incarceration of Sri Wickrama Raja Singhe, a conference was held in the Audience Hall, Kandy, at which the Kandyan Convention was read. It was read again to the Sinhalese officials who had gathered outside the Hall; and as they were getting ready to sign the Convention, the English flag—the Union Jack—was seen flying outside the Hall. Seeing this, Wariyapola Thero flew into a rage, and running to the spot, pulled down the flag and threw it away shouting: “This has no place yet”. For the country would legally belong to the British only after the Convention was signed, and not before.

The sentry at the flag-staff raised his gun to shoot, but instantly Sir John Doyle who happened to be nearby rushed to the spot and forestalled the soldier. Sir John Doyle apologized to the Thero and thus averted what might have developed into a major catastrophe.

It was the time-honoured practice among the Sinhalese Kings, the Sangha and the people to see that the Sacred Tooth Relic was preserved intact through all the vicissitudes of fortune. Towards this end no cost was considered too great. It is said that the Ven. Wariyapola Sri Sumangala Thero, entertaining fears about the safety of the Sacred Relic after the Kandyan Rebellion, attempted to carry it away—an act for which he was later censured.

After the flag incident, the British Administration became increasingly vigilant about the movements of Wariyapola Thero. They had been waiting for some

provocation to punish him for what they considered was a downright insult to them; and after framing charges against the Thero on the Tooth-Relic incident as well as on other grounds, the British Government exiled him to the island of Mauritius.

The Thero who was thus condemned to live in exile with other prisoners in the lonely isle lost no time in petitioning the British authorities about the injustice done to him. In the correspondence that followed, he was so persuasive and diplomatic that finally he was able to establish his innocence. Pardoned, the Thero returned to the Island in triumph.

Later he was appointed to perform traditional services at the Dalada Maligawa, a place for which he had always reserved special regard. Indeed, it is said that he made an attempt to secure for himself all the service rights at the Maligawa to the exclusion of others enjoying the same rights.

The Ven. Wariyapola Sri Sumangala Thero has taken his place in the annals of history as a national hero. The nation salutes him for the noble example he laid by refusing to bow to injustice even in the face of death.

## THE VEN. TIBBOTUWAWE SIDDHARTHA BUDDHARAKKHITA MAHANAYAKE THERO

THE VENERABLE SRI SIDDHARTHA BUDDHARAKKHITA, who was the chief pupil of the illustrious Sangharaja, is the author of the third part of *Mahavamsa* (Pali) which narrates the history of Ceylon from Parakramabahu II to Kirtisri Rajasinghe.

There is a very important book written by Wilbagedara Rala—the Ambassador sent by King Kirtisri Rajasinghe to Siam to bring the Siamese Theros to establish higher ordination in Ceylon. This book which gives a vivid description of what he saw in Siam, the monasteries and temples which he visited and paid obeisance, and the gifts that were presented to Siamese Bhikkus was taken by the author to Ven. Siddhartha to get it revised. It had been recorded by Ven. Siddhartha himself that his work *Shyamopasampadawatta* was based on the facts given in the former book.

The Ven. Tibbotuwawe Sri Siddhartha was appointed incumbent of Ridiwiharaya by King Kirtisri Rajasinghe. It was after this appointment that he wrote *Sri Saddharmavavada Samgrahaya*, a religious work of considerable size and literary merit, and a Sinhalese commentary to *Satipatthana Sutta*. He also translated the book entitled *Saddhammopayana* from Pali to Sinhalese.

The Ven. Siddhartha Buddharakkhita caused a statue to be made in the cave at Panaliya temple. He got Ridi vihara repaired and established a library at the same place with many valuable volumes. This great and venerable member of the Order pre-deceased his Guru, the most Ven. Sangharaja.

## REVISION OF THE TRI-PITAKA AT PELMADULLA

THE great Preaching Hall of the Purana Rajamaha Vihara at Pelmadulla was built by Abhayakoon Atapattu Mudiyansele Iddamalgoda Bandara Nilame who held the office of Basnayake of the historic Maha Saman Devalaya of Sabaragamuwa. As it was his ambition to hold a council or at least an assembly of Bhikkhus to revise the Tri-Pitaka, he invited theros from all over the Island to Pelmadulla in the year 1867.

The Theros congregated in the Vihara held a conference at which they decided to revise the volumes of the Vinaya Pitaka one by one. Each member of the Revision Committee was given a copy of this particular volume which he revised. At an agreed date the revised copies were brought to the Preaching Hall for the approval of the general assembly. Corrections, where all the revisions were in agreement, were approved without discussion. Controversial points were discussed at length and approved only when unanimity was reached.

The copies thus produced were gifted to the well-known temples throughout the Island.

## THE VEN. WALANE SRI SIDDHARTHA MAHA THERO

THE VEN. WALANE SRI SIDDHARTHA THERO was born in March, 1811, in the village of Walane in Panadura Totamuna. His preceptor at his higher ordination ceremony, which was performed at Malwatte Viharaya, Kandy, was Nadimale Revata Thero, a pupil of Ven. Giddhava of Asgiriya Viharaya, Kandy.

The young Bhikkhu was trained in the Dhamma and in worldly knowledge under the able tutorship of Ven. Sumangala Nayaka Thero of Galle who was at Pelmadulla Viharaya and his pupil Induruwe Suman-gala Medhankara Nayake Thero and before long, the young monk began to be acknowledged throughout the country as a versatile scholar.

As his fame spread, students from many parts of the Island came to study under him. Among his students there were such well-known persons as Udu-gampola Ratanapala, Baddegama Saranankara, Vera-hera Sobhita, Malavenne Sobhita and Batuvantudave Devarakkhita.

While the Walane temple was thus gaining island-wide recognition as a seat of learning the Buddhist laity in Ratmalana requested him to come to their village. He accepted their invitation and established a new temple, the Parama Dhammacetiya in Ratmalana and also started a Pirivena by the same name.

Many distinguished scholars and educationists such as the Ven. Hikkaduwe Sumangala and Moratuwe Medhananda received their education and training in this institution. It was this institution that caused the eventual establishment of two other important seats of learning, the Vidyodaya and the Vidyalankara Pirivenas.

The Ven. Walane Sri Siddhartha's work consisted mainly of teaching and the revision of ancient classical and religious books. Many laymen as well as the members of the Order studied under him. The Ven. Hikkaduwe Sumangala, one of the most illustrious scholars of modern times, was his chief pupil. This great Thero died in 1867 at the age of 56.



## THE VEN. AMBAGAHAWATTE INDASABHAVARA GNANASAMY THERO

THE sect known as Ramanna Nikaya in the Buddhist monastic order has an interesting history behind it, the principal actor in it being the Ven. Ambagahawatte Indasabhavara Gnanasamy Nayake Thero, for it was his dissatisfaction with the Siyam Nikaya to which he first belonged that led to his founding an entirely new sect—the Ramanna Nikaya.

The Ven. Ambagahawatte Indasabhavara Thero was born in 1830 at Ambagahawatte in Akmeemana, Galle. He entered the Order in 1846 under the name of Rev. Saranankara and he spent eleven years carrying out his religious and academic studies under the Ven. Bentara Atthadassi Maha Thero, a reputed scholar of the Siyam Nikaya under whom he was ordained. At the end of this period he obtained "Upasampada". After about a year, however, he became dissatisfied with the Siyam Nikaya. Indeed so great was his disapproval that he became a Samanera or novice once again, and proceeded to Paramananda Vihara of Galle, where he took up residence becoming a pupil of the Ven. Bulathgama Sirisumanatissa Thero of the Amarapura Nikaya. He expressed his desire to take a letter from him and proceed to Burma to obtain Upasampada afresh. Accordingly, he got two bhikkhus, the Rev. Dipegoda Silakkhanda and the Rev. Pelpola Dhammadassi, and another two Samaneras,

Rev. Weligama Dhammapala and Rev. Kodagoda Sumangala to accompany him, and they embarked from the Galle harbour in 1861. When they reached Calcutta, they made friends with a pious Buddhist there by the name of Chandra and went to the town of Dhannawathie in his company.

After several days of discussions with the monks in that town, they embarked again and reached Hansawathie where they spent nearly thirty days before finally arriving at Ratanapunna (now Mandalay), the capital of Burma at that time.

There they called on the Sangharaja Thero of the city, who welcomed them warmly, and after providing for their stay, informed the King of Burma of their arrival. The King invited them to the Palace, and enquired the purpose of their mission. They told him that they desired Upasampada from that great country. The King was delighted, and he desired that the Sangharaja should comply with their pious wishes. Accordingly, they obtained Upasampada at the hands of the Sangharaja Thero.

After the conferment of the Higher Order, Saranakara Thero was re-named Indasabhavāra Gnanasamy. The monks stayed with the Sangharaja for about a year after the Upasampada ceremony. Finally, when they informed the King of their desire to return to the homeland, all the facilities and comforts for their journey were provided.

Thus, this enterprising mission, headed by the Ven. Ambagahawatte Indasabhavara Thero, came back to Ceylon and landed at the Galle harbour. They took up residence at Vijayananda Vihara of the

Ven. Siri Sumanatissa Maha Thero. In later years, the Ven. Ambagahawatte Indasabhavara Gnanasamy Thero lived at the Dharmagupta Pirivena, Paiyagala.

The Thero was a man who would admit of no obstacle between himself and the purpose he had set his mind upon. His singleness of purpose and indomitable courage helped him to establish the Ramanna Nikaya which, scattered as it is through the length and breadth of the country, stands as a lasting monument to its founder.



## THE VEN. RATMALANE DHARMALOKA MAHA THERO

JUST as Vidyodaya Pirivena gave immortality to the name of Hikkaduwa Sri Sumangala, so Vidyalankara Pirivena of Kelaniya which stands on par with Vidyodaya as one of the highest seats of oriental learning in the Island, gave to the name of the Ven. Ratmalane Sri Dharmaloka Maha Thero a permanent place in the annals of Buddhist education in this country.

Vidyodaya's junior only by two years, Vidyalankara Pirivena has rendered great service in the field of education both to the Sangha and the laity. If the products of an institution are an indication of its greatness, then Vidyalankara can well be proud of having given to the country men of the intellectual calibre of Sir D. B. Jayatilleke and the Ven. Sri Dharmarama Maha Nayake Thero, who were nurtured and nourished in its bosom. And again if a man is known by his works, let Vidyalankara Pirivena speak for the genius and stature of its founder, the Ven. Ratmalane Sri Dharmaloka Maha Thero.

This Thero was born on May 28, 1828. When he attained school-going age he was placed under the care of the Rev. Andupe Sonuttara Thero who, before long, discovered that the child was unusually talented. He therefore successfully sought the permission of the child's parents to ordain him as a monk. On joining the Order, he was named Dharmaloka, and his teacher,

the Rev. Sonuttara took him to Ratmalana and entrusted him to the care and guidance of the Ven. Pandithacharya Walane Siddhartha Maha Thero.

Entering Upasampada somewhat late in life, he went back to his own temple in Ratmalana, and spent his energies in developing it as an educational institution. It was his great luck that in 1864 he found among his numerous pupils a particularly promising one, who in later life, was not only to become one of Ceylon's illustrious scholars but also to play a vital part together with his teacher in establishing Vidyalankara Pirivena of Kelaniya. This pupil was none other than the Ven. Ratmalane Dharmarama Nayake Thero.

In 1875 when the Ven. Dharmaloka Thero was with this pupil at Dalugama, Kelaniya, their "dayakas" proposed the establishment of a Pirivena. Soon a body known as the Vidyalankara Dayake Sabha was formed for the implementation of the project, and their efforts under the initiative and able guidance of the Ven. Dharmaloka Thero gave birth to Vidyalankara Pirivena.

It is not only as a great educator that we remember this great Thero. His works have added their share to enrich the Sinhalese literature. A book of Sanskrit stanzas entitled *Raja Charita* was presented to King Edward VII when he visited the Island in 1875 as the Prince of Wales. *Vinaya Katikawata* and *Satya Vilasini* are two other books that came from the pen of this erudite scholar, while a book dealing with certain grammatical aspects of the Sanskrit language was also produced by him in collaboration with the Ven. Dharmarama. The magazine *Satya Samuchchaya* was also launched under his patronage.

When he died on August 15, 1887, he left a gap that was hard to fill. But his memory remains green in the minds of his countrymen for whose intellectual awakening he did so much.

## THE VEN. MOHOTTIWATTE GUNANANDA

THE VEN. MOHOTTIWATTE GUNANANDA was born at Mohottiwatte, Balapitiya, in the Wellaboda Pattu of the Galle District. He was a gifted writer and an eloquent speaker and all his natural talents he harnessed in his campaign for the uplift of his nation and religion.

He took a prominent part in religious controversies held at centres like Baddegama, Kelani-Waragoda, Udammita, Gampola and Panadura. Of all these, the Panadura controversy was the most important. He also saw to it that details of the controversies were translated into English and published in Europe and America.

The Panadura controversy and the fame of Rev. Mohottiwatte Gunananda largely contributed to the arrival of Madame Blavatsky and Colonel Olcott in Ceylon. The Deepaduttarama Temple of Kotahena owes its flourishing state to him.

When archæologists began to carry out excavations at the Abhayagiri Vihara, he successfully represented matters to the Government against the move. By his speeches he gathered public contributions to augment the fund opened to purchase the building site of the Vidyalkara Pirivena. The Rev. Gunananda was a pioneer in the movement which urged the Government to appoint separate Registrars of Births, Marriages and Deaths for Buddhists. This great Buddhist monk died at the Deepaduttarama Temple, Kotahena, on September 21, 1890, at the age of 67.



Col. H. S. Olcott



## COLONEL H. S. OLCOTT

ALTHOUGH Colonel H. S. Olcott was a foreigner by birth he was destined to render a unique service to our country—the resuscitation and uplift of the Buddhist religion.

Col. Olcott was born in Orange, New Jersey, in 1832. He was only twenty-three when his success in the model farm of Scientific Agriculture near Newark made the Greek Government offer him the Chair of Agriculture in the University of Athens. The young man declined the honour and founded in the same year the Westchester Farm School which is regarded in the U. S. A. as one of the pioneer institutions of the present system of National Agricultural Education.

With the outbreak of the American Civil War his passion for liberty drove him to seek enlistment in the Army and he rose to the rank of Colonel in a very short time.

Col. Olcott, who resigned from the War Department, founded the Theosophical Society of which he was appointed President for life. He delivered the inaugural address on the 17th of November, 1875, in New York.

When he was studying with Madame Blavatsky he came across a copy of the English translation of the Panadura Religious Controversy which kept them thinking seriously of the Buddhist philosophy.

In 1878, Col. Olcott and Madame Blavatsky left for Asia and carried on a vigorous campaign all over

India. In 1880, they crossed over to Lanka and began the great Buddhist Revival in this country. When they arrived at Galle via Colombo they were surprised to find the Buddhists of Ceylon in a state of lethargy. It is said that Buddhists as a community were so degenerated that they were ashamed to call themselves Buddhists in public. Col. Olcott, who was moved by this state of affairs, founded the Colombo Buddhist Theosophical Society and opened Buddhist schools all over the Island. The existence of the leading Buddhist Educational Institutions such as Ananda, Dharmaraja and Mahinda was entirely due to his Herculean efforts.

At the request of Col. Olcott, great educationists such as C. W. Leadbeater, F. L. Woodward, and Marie Musæus Higgins came to Ceylon to help the Buddhist Educational Movement.

Col. Olcott saw that there were far too many public holidays for the Christians whilst there were none for the Buddhists, although the latter formed the majority community. It was Col. Olcott's personal representations to the Secretary of State for the Colonies that made the Governor of Ceylon, Sir Arthur Gordon, declare Wesak Day a Public Holiday.

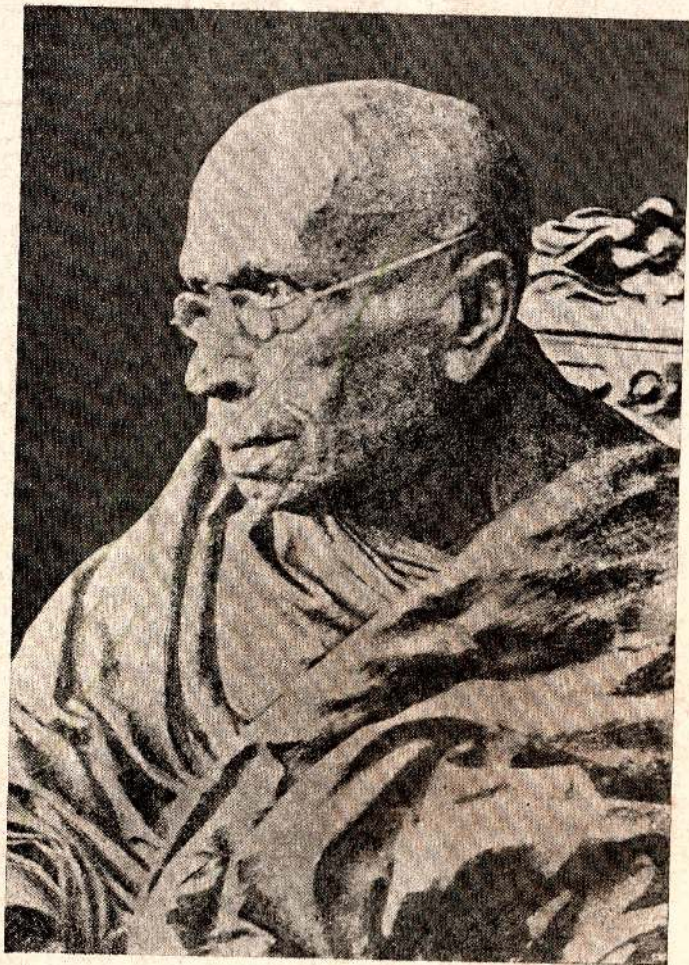
Col. Olcott died on the 17th of February, 1907.

## THE VENERABLE HIKKADUWE SRI SUMANGALA NAYAKE THERO

ON a calm day about a century and a quarter ago, the temple called Tilakaramaya, in Hikkaduwa, was the scene of a small ceremony. A child from the village had come there to receive his first lessons from the Rev. Sobhita Thero at an auspicious hour. Few people who witnessed this ceremony ever thought that the child was destined to become, in his maturer years, one of the most venerated and illustrious Buddhist scholars of the century. The Vidyodaya Pirivena, which the Ven. Hikkaduwe Sri Sumangala Nayake Thero founded and which became the highest seat of Buddhist education in the Island, and of which he was Principal from its inception to the end of his life, today stands as a monument to the scholarship and service of one who dedicated his life to the cause of Buddhism in Ceylon.

The depth of his knowledge of the Tripitaka was equalled only by his mastery of the oriental languages; and it is in the fitness of things that not a few of the scholars of repute in the country today received their education at the feet of this great teacher.

The Ven. Hikkaduwe Sri Sumangala Thero set to work at a time when Buddhist education and Buddhist influence were at a low ebb, and when even books had become scarce. With the assistance of Pandit Devaraksnita Batuwantudawe, he immediately



Ven. Hikkaduwe Sri Sumangala Nayake Thero

set about revising books that could be used as texts, and getting them published. The significance of the part that this doughty worker played in reviving Buddhism under such trying conditions has earned for him the highest love and admiration of the people he so nobly served.

The Ven. Sri Sumangala was appointed Nayake Thero of Sri Pada from where, at the invitation of several distinguished citizens, he went to live at Paramananda Vihara in Kotahena. After a short stay there, he came to Maligakanda in obedience to the wishes of the "dayakas", and there, before long, he founded the Vidyodaya Pirivena. Thousands of students both from the Sangha and the laity wishing to learn Sinhalese, Pali and Sanskrit have graduated, and are graduating from this great institution. In recognition of the Thero's services, the Sangha Sabha of Malwatte Chapter appointed him Chief High Priest of the Nine Korales of Colombo, and also conferred on him the honorary title of Tripitakawagiswaracharya.

Among the books he wrote, *Warna Prashnaya*, *Sandhi Granthaya*, *Brahma Dharmaya*, *Akhyata Vyakhyawa*, *Sidat Sangara Sannaya*, *Warna Ritiya*, *Kavya Sekhara Sannaya*, *Masarthu Lakshanaya* and *Sima Vibhagaya* are some of the more important ones. He also wrote a very exhaustive commentary on *Balavataraya*, the celebrated Pali grammar. In collaboration with Pandit Batuwantudawe, another scholar, he revised the *Pali Mahavamsa* and also completed its translation into Sinhalese.

He died on the night of April 29, 1911, at the age of 84 years.

## BRAHMACHARI VALISINGHE HARISCHANDRA

BRAHMACHARI VALISINGHE HARISCHANDRA was not only a great national hero but a spiritual leader as well. A great and venerated patriot, he devoted his entire energies to the welfare of his people and his religion, and remained a Brahmachari throughout his life. He was an orator who enchanted and enthralled his audience. Scholars and peasants, farmers and businessmen, the rich and the poor, all listened to him with the same enthusiasm and reverence.

Valisinghe Harischandra began his public life as a pupil of the celebrated Anagarika Dharmapala and remained so to the end of his life. He went to the villages in the far corners of the Island, sometimes deputizing for his Guru, sometimes acting on his own, and always a true friend to the poor villagers.

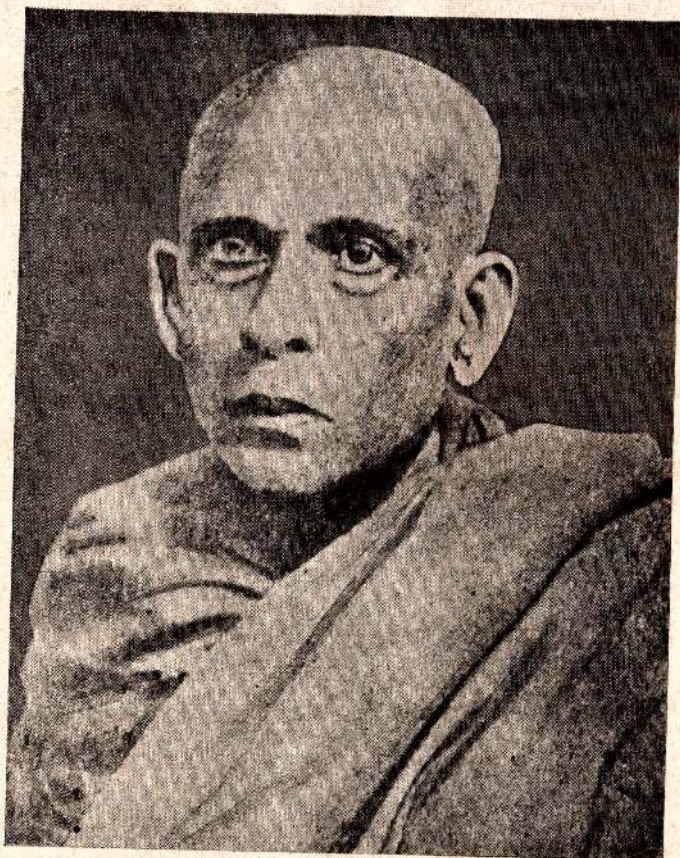
The years in which he lived was a period when the people, especially, those who lived in the towns, were vying with each other to ape the European masters. Valisinghe Harischandra decided to fight this. Many people who had been "westernized" began to feel that one must feel proud of one's nationality. He appealed to the people to use Sinhalese names and asked Sinhalese women to wear "osariya", the national garment.

The neglect of the ruins in the sacred city of Anuradhapura and Mihintale shocked him and he devoted his efforts to improve those places. Whilst

engaged in this work, he had some trouble with a government official and was charged in a court of law with inciting the public against the Government but was, however, acquitted.

He was deeply interested in archæology and worked zealously for the preservation of ancient Buddhist monuments. He was the author of several books on the subject.

He died on 13th of September, 1913.



**Ven. Weligama Sri Sumangala Nayake Thero**



## THE VEN. WELIGAMA SUMANGALA NAYAKE THERO

THIS Nayaka Thero, who was a great educationist and scholar who worked for the promotion of the Sanskrit education in Ceylon, was born at Weligama in the Southern Province. As a child he was sent to the Ven. Peraliye Jinaratana Thero to receive his elementary education. It did not take a long time for his teacher and his parents to notice his extraordinary abilities and they decided to ordain him a monk. When he was 12 years old, Ven. Jinaratana got his own teacher and preceptor, Ven. Wilegoda Punnasara Nayake Thero, to ordain the child with the name "Sumangala".

The novice Sumangala continued for some time to study under the tutorship of the Ven. Jinaratana and then went to the Ven. Bentara Attadassi Maha Thero for further studies. Here his colleagues were Potuwila Indajothi, Yatramulle Dharmarama, Ambagahawatte Saranankara (Indasabhavara Gnanasamy) all of whom, later on, became eminent in various fields. By the time the young Bhikkhu finished his education, his fame as a scholar had spread all over the country.

The Ven. Weligama Sumangala was among those Theros who were invited to Pelmadulla for the revision of Tri-Pitaka. He was entrusted with the task of revising the Vinaya Pitaka and as he required a convenient place where he could carry out his work

unhampered, residents in Kalutara invited him to Pulinatalaramaya at Kalutara North, which was then known as Wellaboda Viharaya.

The members of the Kataluwa Sub-division of the Burmese Sect, who were at Sunandaramaya, Ambalangoda, elected Ven. Dodanduwe Piyaratana-tissa and Weligama Sri Sumangala as joint Mahanayakas of their division. The Ven. Weligama Sri Sumangala was further honoured by the conferment of the title "Sasana Vamsalankara".

When Sir Arnold, the author of "The Light of Asia", came to Ceylon he went to meet the Nayake Thero.

Weligama Sri Sumangala was the author of the first Sinhalese translation of *Hithopadesa*. He also produced a book entitled "Itihasaya" which was the outcome of his research into ancient Sanskrit works. But his most important literary work is a commentary to *Mugdhabodha*, a standard work on Sanskrit grammar. This book, which runs to some 700 pages, was published by the Government of Ceylon. The educational institution, Saugatha Vidyalaya at Rankot Viharaya, Panadura, was started by him.

While engaged in various religious and social duties the Nayaka Thero fell ill in February, 1915. He did not recover from this illness and passed away on 13th of March of the same year.

## WASKADUWE SRI SUBHUTI NAYAKE THERO

THE VEN. WASKADUWE SRI SUBHUTI entered the Order of Priesthood with the Ven. Saranapala Seelakkhandha Thero of Sumanaramaya, Kalamulla, as his teacher and preceptor. The novice Subhuti took a keen interest in the study of the Dhamma as well as Pali. As books were difficult to come by at that time scholars were reluctant to lend the few ola leaf books they had. Subhuti was not the person to get discouraged by such set-backs. He undertook the task of copying hundreds of literary and religious works all by himself and with undaunted courage and perseverance achieved his object.

Having received his higher ordination at the Udakukkhepa Seemawa, Balapitiya, he went over to Abhinawarama Temple at Waskaduwa. His education here was entrusted to the Ven. Sri Sumangala, Incumbent of Sri Pada, Sabaragamuwa Division and the Pelmadulla Buddhist Temple where he lived. On completion of his studies he left Pelmadulla with his teacher for the Abhinawaramaya Temple at Waskaduwa.

The Ven. Sri Subhuti, who was a Pali scholar of great distinction, compiled the Pali Niganduwa with English and Sinhalese equivalents. It was printed at the Government Printing Press in 1864. The "Namamala", a work of considerable size, was also



Ven. Waskaduwe Sri Subhuti Nayake Thero

written by this priest. It was published in 1876. The book was dedicated and presented to H. R. H. the Prince of Wales (later Edward VII), when he arrived in Ceylon that year.

Later a Pirivena to teach Pali was established at the Abhinawaramaya which was occupied by him. At this time the scholarship of Ven. Sri Subhuti was known all over the world and scholars like Professor Fousböll, Max Müller, and Childers held him in very high esteem. He also took a prominent part in the revision of Tripitaka carried out at Pelmadulla.

As a Siamese Prince, who was living at Deepaduttaramaya, Kotahena, entered the Order with the Ven. Sri Subhuti as teacher and preceptor, the title of "Raja Guru" was conferred on him.

The Ven. Raja Guru Sri Subhuti Maha Thero departed this life on Thursday, 19th April, 1917, at the age of 80.



Ven. Ratmalane Sri Dharmarama Nayake Thero

## THE VEN. RATMALANE SRI DHARMARAMA NAYAKE THERO

THE VEN. SRI DHARMARAMA, Principal of Vidyalankara Maha Vidyalaya, who gave it an international reputation, was born in 1853. He received his first lessons in the Sinhalese language at the age of 5 and was subsequently sent to the Ven. Kotagama Thero, who was the incumbent of Kitsirimevan, Kelaniya. From there he went to Ven. Kahatuduwe Chandajoti Maha Thero, who, noticing the abilities of the child, ordained him in spite of his parents' disapproval. The young Samanera was then sent to the Ven. Ratmalane Dharmaloka to continue his education.

It was at this time that he came to know the Brahmin scholar, Matu Bhuteswara Sharma Shastri, and began the study of Sanskrit although still a Samanera with several years ahead for the higher ordination. His reputation, as a scholar, had, by this time, reached foreign countries.

In the second year of his higher ordination, the Rev. Dharmarama, with his teacher Ven. Dharmaloka, spent the annual "vas" retreat at Dalugama. It was during this period that the council of devotees called the Vidyalankara Dayaka Sabha was inaugurated. The Vidyalankara Pirivena was established at the request of this Sabha.

The teacher and the pupil, who began teaching at the new institution, realised the difficulties of students and compiled the book entitled: "Sanskrita Sabdamala".

The Ven. Dharmarama succeeded his teacher, Ven. Sri Dharmaloka, as the Principal of Vidyalankara Pirivena after the latter's death.

At the invitation of the Government, he revised the celebrated Sinhalese classic, *Dharma Pradipika*. He re-composed the stanzas of *Janaki Harana* of King Kumaradasa of which only words were available along with the Sinhalese commentary. A comprehensive commentary to *Sidat Sangarawa* and *Siksa Sangraha* for the benefit of the students in Sanskrit are two other works of his.

He also encouraged and helped Mr. Samaradivakara, a lay student of his, to write a Sinhalese commentary to Kalidasa's *Raghuwamsa*. His system of revising ancient classics always drew the interest of other scholars because of the meticulous care with which he worked in this field.

The high and rare honour "Tri Pitaka Vagisvara-charya" was conferred on him by the Sangha Sabha of the Malwatte Chapter after the death of the Ven. Hikkaduwe Sri Sumangala Nayaka Thero.

He passed away on the 3rd of May, 1918, at the Dharmaprasada Temple at Dematagoda.



## ANAGARIKA DHARMAPALA

THIS great man, who inspired all Sinhalese with the slogan, "Sinhalese! Rise", did not hesitate to attack them mercilessly when he noticed their weaknesses. Those Sinhalese who ignored their own customs and followed the foreigner were the special target of his attack. At the same time, he launched a campaign against the wearing of skirts, frocks, short-sleeved jackets and hair combs all of which he thought was unbecoming of the Sinhalese.

As his aims were the saving of the people and the advancement of Buddhism, he took the vow of celibacy thus becoming an Anagarika. In conformity with the ideals of his service, he changed his name from David to Dharmapala and in his last days was known as Siri Devamitta Dhammapala.

When Colonel Olcott arrived in Ceylon, Anagarika Dharmapala joined him in the good work of the Buddhist Theosophical Society. He also started the English magazine called "The Buddhist". He worked untiringly to obtain the sacred Buddha Gāya for Buddhists and also established the Maha Bodhi Society. The great objects of this Society included the propagation of Buddha Dhamma the world over, the improvement of Buddhist education and the provision of such facilities as hospitals and recreation centres and the encouragement of all manner of good work.

A cause dear to his heart was temperance. He warned the people by his public speeches of the dangers of drinking. With the object of creating a renaissance of national and religious feeling among the Sinhalese Buddhists he started the Sinhalese weekly called "Sinhala Bauddhaya" and wrote a column called "Things You Ought to Know" for the edification of Sinhalese Buddhists.

In India, he was successful in building two temples called "Dharmarajika Vihara" in Calcutta and "Mulagandhakuti Vihara" in Saranath. In order to carry the Message of Buddha to the peoples of Europe he made it a point to attend the Parliament of Religions held in Chicago.

He established a branch of the Maha Bodhi Society in London and engaged Buddhist monks on missionary work in western countries.

In his last days, he was ordained as Siri Devamitta Dhammapala and died at the Mulagandhakuti Vihara in India. "This is my last moment. May I be re-born in a Brahmin family in India to work for the upliftment of Buddhism. I would I were re-born even twenty-five times to work for the cause of Buddhism and spread it all over the world", were his last words

See "Return to Righteousness"  
by Gurnee, p XLIII.

## Dr. W. ARTHUR DE SILVA

PHILANTHROPY is a great virtue but to carry it to the point where, as the result of it, one finds oneself in need, is a phenomenon rare indeed in any land or in any age. But that was what happened to W. Arthur de Silva. He not only gave of his best for the public weal but gave of his wealth until his munificence brought him to the doors of poverty.

Born in the village of Gandara in Ruhuna, Wilmot Arthur de Silva showed unusual talents at an early age. He first attended Buona Vista in Galle and later entered the Colombo Academy—now Royal College. Having decided to follow veterinary science, he gained admission to a leading Medical College in Bombay where he gained an M.R.C.V.S. together with special qualifications in agriculture before returning to the Island in 1883.

He was appointed a Lecturer at the School of Agriculture, and subsequently a Veterinary Surgeon of the Municipality. Sometime later he married the daughter of Mudaliyar Seemon Fernando Chandrasekhara, a wealthy landowner of Moratuwa.

When W. A. de Silva started building "Sravasti" in Colombo for his personal residence on a scale hitherto unknown it created quite a sensation. Here he and his wife received several distinguished guests among whom were Mahatma Gandhi, Rabindranath Tagore and Srinivasa Sastri. A portion of the building was set

apart for a library which was one of the finest and largest of its kind in the Island.

A scholar of English as well as oriental languages, Arthur de Silva was a keen student of history, religion and the national arts. The Royal Asiatic Society's magazine carried a large number of his contributions. It was Arthur de Silva who started and became the first editor of the Agricultural Magazine.

Arthur de Silva's outstanding contribution to national education in general and Buddhist education in particular deserves special mention. As President of the Buddhist Theosophical Society, he helped that institution in its financial difficulties, on one occasion alone donating Rs. 98,000 for the B. T. S. to pay its teachers. Ananda College gained from his munificence to the extent of Rs. 25,000 while Nalanda Vidyalaya had Rs. 15,000 donated to it. His desire to promote education saw him playing a pioneering role in the establishment of the Buddhist Training Colleges at Nittambuwa and Walana.

During his life there was hardly a scheme, whether religious, national, social or political which did not receive the assistance or active support of this great patriot. When on the 31st of March, 1942, he died at the age of 77 the country lost one of its greatest Buddhist benefactors.

## SIR D. B. JAYATILLEKE

THE present century has seen the emergence in Ceylon's public life of a number of men who have true claims to greatness, among whom Sir Don Baron Jayatilleke takes an important place. He was first and foremost a scholar ; and while his erudition won him an international reputation, he is remembered today perhaps more for his contribution to the political emancipation of Ceylon.

Sir Baron studied Sinhalese, Pali and Sanskrit under the Ven. Ratmalane Sri Dharmaloka Nayaka Thero, and later under the celebrated oriental scholar, Tripitaka Vagiswaracharya Dharmakirti Sri Dharmarama Nayake Thero. He received his religious instruction and training at the Vidyalankara Pirivena, Kelaniya.

His interest in Buddhist education made the Buddhist Theosophical Society appoint him Principal of Dharmaraja College, Kandy, whose rise from very small beginnings to be a leading educational institution was largely due to the untiring efforts of Sir Baron. From Kandy he came to Colombo to take up duties as Vice-Principal of Ananda College, and here too he made a remarkable contribution to the advancement of Buddhist education.

Sir Baron realized that the Buddhist youth of the country could be of great service in the uplift of Buddhism, and he started, with the active co-operation of Dr. W. A. de Silva, one of his distinguished contemporaries, the Young Men's Buddhist Association.



Sir D. B. Jayatilleke

Sir Baron soon became the Head of Ananda College. Instead of confining the curriculum of this leading Buddhist school in the Island to English, he took steps to give its students instruction in Dhamma, Sinhalese, history, etc., as well as to train them in national customs and traditions. This had the effect of encouraging parents to send their children to Ananda College.

The contribution Sir Baron made as Ceylon's representative to the Conference of World Religions held in Germany, in which he analyzed the Buddhist philosophy, left a deep impression not only on Buddhists but also on the exponents of other philosophies and faiths.

Sir Baron was a zealous worker in the temperance movement, and in spite of the varied activities that left him little leisure, he found time to make his contribution to the Sinhalese language as well. *Buduguna Alankaraya*, *Dampiya Atuwa Getapadaya*, *Saddharma Ratnavaliya*, *Katikavat Sangara* and *Sikhavalanda Vinisa* are among the books that were revised by him. Sir Baron was also the Editor-in-Chief of the Sinhalese Etymological Dictionary which, when finished, will be a monumental work in the development of the language.

## PURWARAMA RAJAMAHA VIHARA OF WEHERAHENA, MATARA

PILGRIMS who visit Kataragama, Tissa, Mookirigala, Weurukannala and Dondra never fail to touch at the Purwarama Rajamaha Vihara of Weherahena, Matara.

Although Weherahena wears a "new look" today it can boast of a very old historical tradition. This sacred spot is said to have been the abode of arahats about two thousand years ago. Subsequently, it turned into forest land and passed into the hands of six individuals one of whom was a Muslim. However, at the earnest request of Buddhist devotees, Bedigama Sri Ratnapala Thero, Chief High Priest of South Ceylon, who lived at the Maha Mantinda Pirivena, Matara, converted Weherahena into a religious place of retreat (Was Bhumiya) and appointed his own second pupil Parawahera Revata Thero as incumbent of the place.

The proposal to erect an eighty-eight-cubit image of the Buddha in this place of rural scenic beauty was, undoubtedly, a colossal task. In order to execute this work a tunnel of an unprecedented size which reminds one of the tunnels of Mahausadha described in the Ummagga Jataka, was built.

Weherahena sprang into popularity because of this huge tunnel. It is known as the "Maha Umaga".





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