

OBJECTS OF THE SOCIETY

THIS Society was started in 1881, in order to render accessible to students the rich stores of the earliest Buddhist literature then lying unedited and practically unused in the various MSS. scattered throughout the University Libraries and other Public Libraries of Europe.

1. PUBLICATIONS OF CANONICAL TEXTS.

The historical importance of these Canonical Texts can scarcely be exaggerated in respect of their value for the history of religion, of language, and of folklore. It is very probable that many of them had been worded in a fixed form during the lifetime of Gotama, the Founder, and that many more fixed sayings, long before any idea of writing them came into vogue, were added during the following two centuries. But there will have been many differences in both form and language from the texts as we now have them. The publication of these texts in roman letters facilitates the work of weighing by internal evidence how far it is possible to detect advent and growth in these changes. Within a period of some four centuries or more the texts have preserved for us a record, quite uncontaminated by filtration through any European mind, of the everyday beliefs and customs of a people nearly related to ourselves, just as they were passing through certain stages of civilization. They are our best authorities for the early history of that interesting system of religion so nearly allied in some points to some phases in our own religious standpoint, and which has influenced so powerfully, and for so long, a considerable portion of the human race—the system of religion which we now call Buddhism. The scriptures of the early Buddhists have preserved to us the sole record of a religious movement which bears in some respects a close resemblance to early Christianity. In the history of speech they contain unimpeachable evidence of a stage in language midway between

the Vedic Sanskrit and the various modern forms of speech in India. In the history of Indian literature there is nothing older than these works, excepting only the Vedic writings; and all the later classical Sanskrit literature has been profoundly influenced by the intellectual struggle of which they afford the only direct evidence. It is not, therefore, too much to say that the publication of this unique literature is no less important for the study of history—whether anthropological, philological, literary, or religious—than the publication of the Vedas has already been.

2. PUBLICATION OF TRANSLATIONS.

The work described above being now in great part accomplished, and its completion in due course fairly ensured, the Society has started a Translation Series to make these documents available for those who cannot read Pali. This series being external to the series of Texts, the cost of which is covered by annual subscriptions, it will not be possible to carry it on unless it is also supported by annual subscriptions, as well as by donations such as have helped us so largely in the past.

3. PUBLICATION OF A DICTIONARY.

Childers's Pali Dictionary being now antiquated and imperfect, the Society collected funds to pay for the compilation of a new dictionary. This work is now published.

4. OTHER PUBLICATIONS.

Publications of the principal Commentaries and other mediæval Pali works are in progress. Lastly, there are three works of great importance, the first editions of which, not published originally by the Society, are exhausted.¹ To the reproduction of these by photography there is no obstacle save the maintenance and, if possible, the increase of the Society's funds.

It is greatly to be hoped that the many generous donors, through whose aid the Society has produced so much at so low a subscription, will in the next few years find worthy successors.

¹ Vinaya, Jātaka, Milindapañha.

SUBSCRIPTION.

The Subscription to the Society is One Guinea a year, for texts, or text and Journal, and ten shillings a year for a translation, payable in advance.

Publications, two volumes a year, and, when possible, a translation, are sent post free on receipt of the subscription.

BACK ISSUES.

Back issues are sent post free on payment of the subscription for the year, or years, in which the volumes were issued (that is, of One Guinea a year or a proportional payment per volume). But the payment for issues dating prior to 1901 is now increased 50 per cent.

A list of the publications from 1882 to the present day will be sent on application to the Hon. Secretary.

This prospectus is now revised for the second time.—ED.