

## **RHYS DAVIDS – BRINGING THE DHAMMA TO THE WEST**

*In response to our appeals for comments and criticisms from our readers in the JUNE 1984 edition of Voice of Buddhism, we have been asked to carry articles on some historical aspects of the development of Buddhism. We have also been asked to report on the activities of other Buddhist groups in Malaysia and the rest of the world. We are trying to respond to some of these requests. The following is an account of the contribution of a Western scholar, who together with his wife, has been largely responsible for making the sacred Buddhist texts available to the western world. This is followed by an historical note on the introduction of the Order of Nuns in China, and a report on Buddhism in Taiwan.*

*--Ed*

In 1864, Rhy Davids, a young man of 21, joined the Ceylon Service. As a magistrate in Ceylon, he came in contact with the Buddhist monks and their temples and this led to his interest in Buddhism. He studied Buddhism and the Pali language deeply from the monks. He mentioned one of his monk-teachers the Ven. Battaramulle Dhammarama Thera of Bentara with deep reverence and love. He returned to England in 1872. In 1878 he wrote a book entitled "Buddhism" for the London Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge. This was well received and ran into twenty-three editions. In 1881 he delivered the Hibbert Lectures on "The Origin and Growth of Religion as Illustrated by Some Points in the History of Indian Buddhism." In the same year he started the Pali Text Society in London to get the whole of Pali Literature edited and translated. He says, "when I began to speak of the advisability of starting a Pali Text Society with this object, I was told that the project was doomed to failure. No one cared enough for Pali to contribute the necessary funds; and even if they did, there were no competent scholars, not already otherwise engaged, to carry out the work. Well, the King of Siam, one of the most cultured and enlightened of sovereigns, sent me enough money to bring out the first volume; and private friends of my own showed their interest in historical inquiry by subscribing enough to bring out a second; and soon I had a small list of supporters, mostly poor men and scholars, willing to subscribe a guinea a year. This was enough for me to venture on a beginning. "The Pali Text Society has done tremendous work in the spread of Buddhism and has published almost all the Pali Texts and had translated them into English. In 1981 the society celebrated its centenary and in the same year its third President, Dr. (Miss) I.B. Horner, passed away in

her home in London. She devoted the better part of her life for the society and spent all her money for its progress.

Dr. Rhys Davids was appointed Professor of Pali in the London University in 1882. In 1894-95 he delivered a series of lectures in New York on the “History and Literature of Buddhism”. This invoked a great interest in America and considerable help for the Pali Text Society came from that country. One of the Buddhists of this time who began to give public lectures on Buddhism was R.J.Pain. He founded the Buddhist Society of England. Later, in anticipation of the arrival in England of the first English Buddhist monk Ananda Metteyya (Allan Bennett) who was ordained in 1902 in Burma, this society was expanded to become the Buddhist Society of Great Britain and Ireland with the King of Thailand as Patron and Dr. Rhys Davids as President. Before Ananda Metteyya came to England he published jointly with another British monk Silacara (M’Kechnie) in Burma a journal called “Buddhism” giving details of his projected mission to England. Copies were circulated in England and many people became interested in the movement. He arrived in England in 1908 and began his work with great enthusiasm. People came in large numbers to his Dhamma talks and meditation classes. He started the “Buddhist Review” as the organ of the society. His last work was “The Wisdom of the Aryas” which is still read with interest all over the world. He died in 1923, a year after the death of the President of the Society, Dr. Rhys Davids.