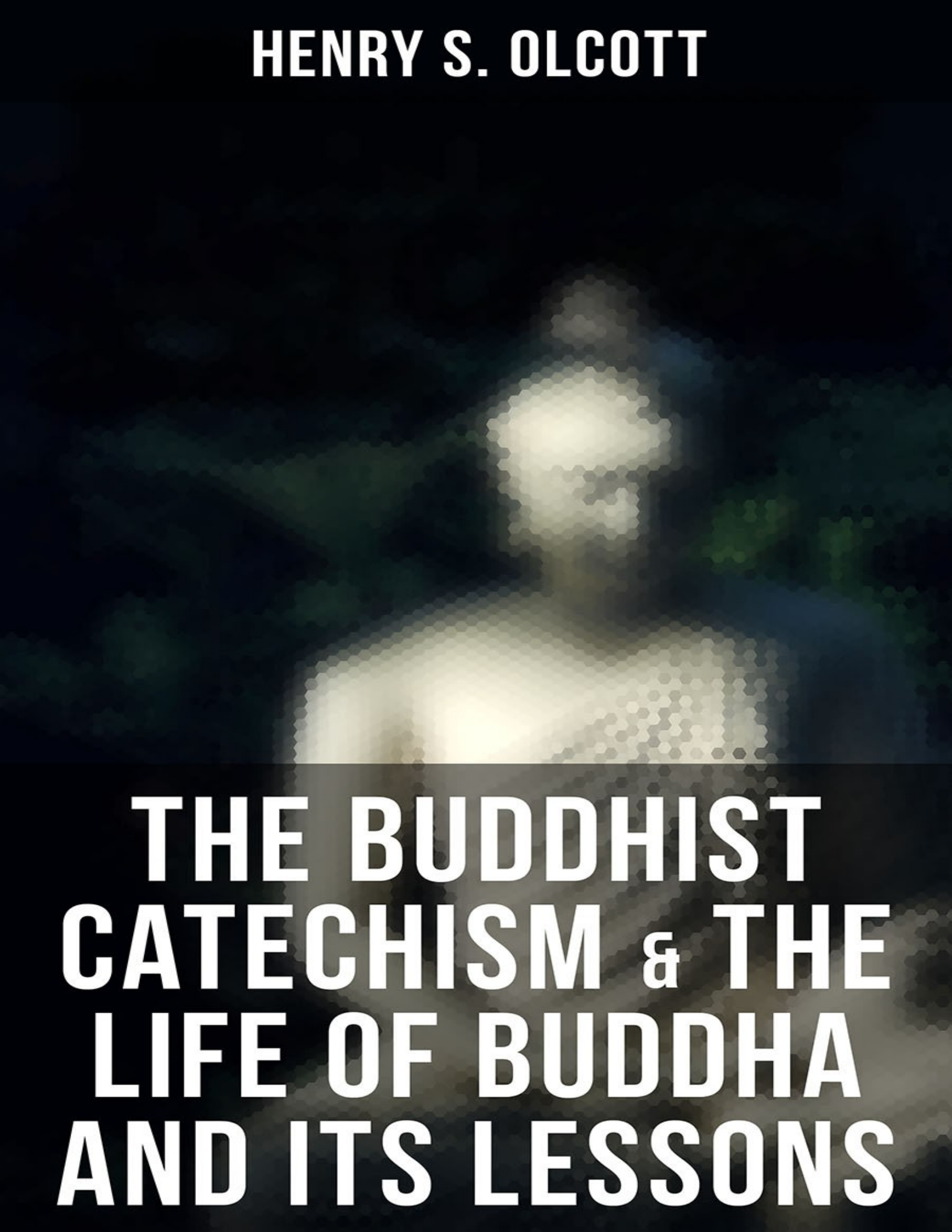


HENRY S. OLCOTT



**THE BUDDHIST
CATECHISM & THE
LIFE OF BUDDHA
AND ITS LESSONS**

Henry S. Olcott

The Buddhist Catechism & The Life of Buddha and Its Lessons

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PREFACE

TO THE THIRTY-THIRD EDITION

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In the working out of my original plan, I have added more questions and answers in the text of each new English edition of the Catechism, leaving it to its translators to render them into whichever of the other vernaculars they may be working in. The unpretending aim in view is to give so succinct and yet comprehensive a digest of Buddhistic history, ethics and philosophy as to enable beginners to understand and appreciate the noble ideal taught by the Buddha, and thus make it easier for them to follow out the Dharma in its details. In the present edition a great many new questions and answers have been introduced, while the matter has been grouped within five categories, *viz.*: (1) The Life of the Buddha; (2) the Doctrine; (3) the Sangha, or monastic order; (4) a brief history of Buddhism, its Councils and propaganda; (5) some reconciliation of Buddhism with science. This, it is believed, will largely increase the value of the little book, and make it even more suitable for use in Buddhist schools, of which, in Ceylon, over one hundred have already been opened by the Sinhalese people under the general supervision of the Theosophical Society. In preparing this edition I have received valuable help from some of my oldest and best qualified Sinhalese colleagues. The original edition was gone over with me word by word, by that eminent scholar and bhikkhu, H. Sumangala,

Pradhāna Nāyaka, and the Assistant Principal of his Pālī College at Colombo, Hyeyantuduve Anunayaka Terunnanse; and the High Priest has also kindly scrutinised the present revision and given me invaluable points to embody. It has the merit, therefore, of being a fair presentation of the Buddhism of the "Southern Church," chiefly derived from first-hand sources. The Catechism has been published in twenty languages, mainly by Buddhists, for Buddhists.

H. S. O.

ADYAR, *17th May*, 1897.

PREFACE

TO THE THIRTY-SIXTH EDITION

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The popularity of this little work seems undiminished, edition after edition being called for. While the present one was in the press a second German edition, re-translated by the learned Dr. Erich Bischoff, was published at Leipzig, by the Griebens Co., and a third translation into French, by my old friend and colleague, Commandant D. A. Courmes, was being got ready at Paris. A fresh version in Sinhalese is also preparing at Colombo. It is very gratifying to a declared Buddhist like myself to read what so ripe a scholar as Mr. G. R. S. Mead, author of *Fragments of of a Faith Forgotten*, *Pistis Sophia*, and many other works on Christian origins, thinks of the value of the compilation. He writes in the *Theosophical Review*: "It has been translated into no less than twenty different languages, and may be said without the faintest risk of contradiction, to have been the busiest instrument of Buddhist propaganda for many a day in the annals of that long somnolent dharma. The least that learned Buddhists of Ceylon can do to repay the debt of gratitude they owe to Colonel Olcott and other members of the Theosophical Society who have worked for them, is to bestir themselves to throw some light on their own origins and doctrines."

I am afraid we shall have to wait long for this help to come from the Buddhist bhikkhus, almost the only learned

men of Ceylon; at least I have not been able during an intimate intercourse of twenty-two years, to arouse their zeal. It has always seemed to me incongruous that an American, making no claims at all to scholarship, should be looked to by the Sinhalese to help them teach the dharma to their children; and as I believe I have said in an earlier edition, I only consented to write THE BUDDHIST CATECHISM after I had found that no bhikkhu would undertake it. Whatever its demerits, I can at least say that the work contains the essence of some 15,000 pages of Buddhist teaching that I have read in connexion with my work.

H. S. O.

ADYAR, *7th February, 1903.*

PREFACE

TO THE FORTIETH EDITION

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The popularity of this little work is proved by the constant demand for new editions, in English and other languages. In looking over the matter for the present edition, I have found very little to change or to add, for the work seems to present a very fair idea of the contents of Southern Buddhism; and, as my object is never to write an extended essay on the subject, I resist the temptation to wander off into amplifications of details which, however interesting to the student of comparative religion, are useless in a rational scheme of elementary instruction.

The new Sinhalese version (38th edition) which is being prepared by my respected friend, D. B. Jayatilaka, Principal of Ānanda (Buddhist) College, Colombo, is partly printed, but cannot be completed until he is relieved of some of the pressure upon his time. The Tamil version (41st edition) has been undertaken by the leaders of the Pañchama community of Madras, and will shortly issue from the press. The Spanish version (39th edition) is in the hands of my friend, Señor Xifré, and the French one (37th edition) in those of Commandant Courmes.

So the work goes on, and by this unpretending agency the teachings of the Buddha Dharma are being carried throughout the world.

H. S. O.

ADYAR, *7th January*, 1905.

PREFACE

TO THE FORTY-SECOND EDITION

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The writer of this Catechism has passed away from earth, but, before he left the body, he had arranged with the High Priest Sumangala to make some small corrections in the text. These are incorporated in the present edition by the High Priest's wish, expressed to me in Colombo, in November 1907.

I have not altered the numbering of the questions, as it might cause confusion in a class to change the numbers, if some pupils had the older editions and some the new.

ANNIE BESANT

ADYAR, 17th February, 1908.