5-2009

Henry Steel Olcott : from Civil War veteran to Sinalese Buddhist nationalist, a case study in international religious activism

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Henry Steel Olcott: From Civil War Veteran to Sinhalese Buddhist Nationalist

A Case Study in International Religious Activism

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Honors Thesis
In
History
University of Richmond
Richmond, VA
May 4, 2009
Advisor: Dr. John Gordon

Introduction

The nineteenth century was marked by a great deal of religious growth and change. Throughout the world, religion took on new forms, both with the introduction and expansion of movements like the Theosophical Society, and with the revival and reform of older faiths. Cultural exchange and broader exposure to religious ideals, in the form of missions and education were also important features of the century. At a cursory glance, an American Civil War veteran and a Buddhist monk from Ceylon would seem to share little in common, but during this time of increasing interconnectedness these two figures made contact. Henry Steel Olcott emerged as an important progressive figure, both in the annals of the American Theosophical Movement, and in the birth of an independent Ceylon and Buddhist Revival. Olcott, with his involvement first in the Spiritualist movement, then as the founder and President of the Theosophical Society and later as the first American to formally convert to Buddhism, provides historians of both world religion and political activism an interesting case study.

Historiography and Sources

No history or account of Theosophy and the Theosophical Society is complete without discussion of Henry Steel Olcott. As a founder and record keeper of the Society, neglecting to discuss his involvement would be nonsensical, yet he is rarely the focus of such texts. Helena Petrova Blavatsky and later Annie Besant are more generally the subjects of any discussions of the Society or of Theosophy itself. Madame Blavatsky was an essential part of the movement as she provided a great deal of the revelation, which was the basis for the tradition. She was the medium that guided Olcott and Theosophists in their spiritual study, and is herself a fascinating figure of study, which is evidenced in a number of biographical works. Research on Henry Steel

Olcott provided very little secondary source material on his life outside of mentions of his involvement in the Society and of his involvement in the nationalist and religious revival movements in India and Ceylon. The bulk of the primary source material on Olcott's life and work, while plentiful is limited in availability to physical copies held in the headquarters of the Theosophical Society in Adyar, India, lying outside of the scope of this project. Olcott himself was a prolific writer and is the source of most of the primary source material available on the subject. Stephen Prothero, the author of *The White Buddhist*, one of the two biographies available on Olcott and important resource for this paper, addresses the dearth of critical works discussing Olcott and the Theosophical Society, particularly with regards to their involvement and impact in South Asia. Prothero suggests that various academics, approaching the issue from differing perspectives, have called for further critical attention, including Michael M. Ames, a specialist on Buddhism who is interested in further analysis of Olcott's participation in Buddhist revivalism in Ceylon, and Carl T. Jackson who has called for more research into the effect of Olcott's participation in Eastern religions on American history.[1] The second biographical source, Howard Murphet's *Yankee Beacon of Buddhist Light*, is not a critical account, but rather a more hagiographic work told from the perspective of the Theosophical Society. For the purposes of this study, the primary source material came largely from Henry Steel Olcott himself. Olcott's account of the origins of the Theosophical Society in his *Old Diary Leaves,* his *Buddhist Catechism,* and a collection of speeches and pamphlets written by Olcott while in Madras, India, collectively titled *The Adyar Pamphlets* were the focus of my research. These texts were supplemented and contextualized by secondary source accounts of the American religious

[1] Stephen Prothero, *The White Buddhist: The Asian Odyssey of Henry Steel Olcott* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), 185.

movements which preceded Theosophy, the aforementioned biographies, biographies of Madame Blavatsky, and texts on Sinhalese Buddhism and Sinhalese political history. The scope and direction of my research was necessarily directed by the availability of sources and as a result, is more heavily weighted in discussions of Olcott's religious experiences prior to his conversion to Buddhism than originally intended.

Origins of Theosophy: Alternative Christian Sects, Occultism and Spiritualism

The Theosophical movement emerged during a very particular moment in the American religious context. The nineteenth century had been one of Christian revival, with various strains of evangelicalism gathering large followings, particularly prior to the Civil War.[2] A feature of many of these movements was a large degree of emotionalism. Tent revivals were attended by thousands and were often accompanied by reports of speaking in tongues, faith healing and bouts of religious ecstasy.[3] During the 1820s and 30s several non-mainstream Christian movements featuring some element of transcendental belief were either developed or experienced growth including the Quaker, Shaker and Church of Latter Day Saints. Moments of spiritual enlightenment, transcendence, and the exhibition of special talents granted by a higher power were essential to the experiences of each movement.[4] In William Howitt's *History of the Supernatural,* published in 1863, Shaker F.W. Evans was quoted as saying, "'Spiritualism originated among the Shakers of America; that there were hundreds of mediums in the eighteen

[2] Sydney E. Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972), 453 in NetLibrary, http://www.netlibrary.com/ (accessed May 2, 2009)

[3] Alvin Boyd Kuhn, *Theosophy: A Modern Revival of Ancient Wisdom*, American Religion Series, II (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1930), 18.

[4] Ibid., 20.

Shaker communities, and that, in fact, nearly all the Shakers were mediums. Mediumistic manifestations are as common among us as gold in California.'"[5] There seemed to be a clear sense of a relationship amongst the movements as well as a conscious desire to establish historical connections.

Running parallel to these movements were Unitarianism and, later, Transcendentalism. Unitarianism and Universalism grew out of a response to a strict Calvinist theology, in part, as argued by Bruce Campbell as a result of increased material prosperity.[6] Belief in the salvation of all men in opposition to the invisible elect of Calvin's church and the Puritan tradition was an important aspect of Unitarian and Universalist doctrine. Universalist ideas of faith and salvation, and the inherent idea that all religions were connected by something greater, were recurring themes in both the Spiritualist, and Theosophical movements and later in the writings of Henry Steel Olcott on world religion. Yet even Unitarianism, which itself was created in response to a stricter religious tradition, did not fully satisfy all of its participants. A response to what Ralph Waldo Emerson deemed the "'corpse-cold Unitarianism of Boston and Harvard College'"[7] was the development of American Transcendentalism, in which Emerson was a vital figure. This new movement was not solely the product of the American religious environment; rather it was heavily influenced by European responses to the Enlightenment and the works of the Romantics. Early members of the transcendentalist movement, which initially emerged in Boston in 1836,

[5] Quoted in Kuhn, *Theosophy,* 21.

[6] Bruce F. Campbell, *Ancient Wisdom Revived: A History of the Theosophical Movement* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 9.

[7] Ahlstrom, *A Religious,* 599.

were typically involved in the Unitarian church.[8] Emerson, himself a Unitarian minister, in an address to the Harvard Divinity School in 1838 carried the movement even further beyond the mainstream, effectively distancing himself and the later transcendentalist movement from Christianity.[9] Many of Emerson's later writings and poems were focused on various religious and historical themes from South and East Asia. He and other transcendentalist writers made a significant contribution towards expanding the awareness of many Westerners to alternate traditions. Theosophy, which focuses very heavily on non-Western religious philosophy, could only have benefitted from the work of the Transcendentalists. Some writers, like Arthur E. Christy and Alvin Kuhn have even gone so far as to argue that not only was Emerson essential to increased study of Asia, but also that "There is every justification for the assertion that Emerson's Orientalistic contribution to the general Transcendental trend of thought was preparatory to Theosophy."[10]

Occultism was another branch of American religiosity which experienced growth and served as a vital precursor to the Theosophical movement. Mesmerism and Swedenborgianism were two particular strains from which Spiritualism, the direct predecessor of Theosophy, drew heavily. The first was developed by Franz Anton Mesmer of Austria, and centered strongly on hypnotism, trance, and the manipulation of fluids in the body through "magnetism".[11] The second branch was created by Emmanuel Swedenborg, a Swedish scientist, in an effort to create a language which bridged the spiritual and the scientific. Referenced in many of his writings

[8] Ibid., 600.

[9] Ibid., 602-3.

[10] Kuhn, *Theosophy,* 28.

[11] Campbell, *Ancient Wisdom,* 13.

were interactions with the spirit world, both with the deceased and with angelic figures. Both of these branches of occultism saw increased popularity in the United States, with the Northeast and Upstate New York acting as centers. The year 1847 served as a turning point for both movements, as well as a seminal year for the Spiritualist movement. The publication of *The Principles of Nature, Her Divine Revelations,* and *A Voice to Mankind*- a series of works on nature, history and society that were believed to be revealed in a trance state by Andrew Jackson Davis, known popularly as the "Poughkeepsie Seer"—followed in the next year by the "Hydesville Rappings",[12] provided the foundation for Spiritualism as a distinct movement, under the leadership of those who were typically former Quakers or Unitarians. The "Hydesville Rappings" pushed Margaret and Katherine Fox, the sisters who first engaged with the spirit which communicated through rapping on furniture, into the national spotlight. The case, along with other reports of spirits and visitations were featured by Horace Greeley in the *New York Tribune*, in addition to other newspapers. A number of famous figures of the day were at least nominally attached to the spiritualist movement at some point, including James Fenimore Cooper, Harriet Beecher Stowe, William Lloyd Garrison, Susan B. Anthony, Frances Willard and Elizabeth Cady Stanton.[13] Interactions with the spirits, who communicated through writing, creating music, moving objects or speaking through mediums, were reported with increasing frequency through the 1850s. The spiritualist movement reached its peak in the mid 1850s, with some estimates identifying approximately one million participants.[14] The movement provided women in particular with opportunities for leadership and participation that were not commonly

[12] Ibid., 15.

[13] Prothero, *The White,* 21.

[14] Campbell, *Ancient Wisdom,* 16.

found in other sectors of public life. By most accounts[15] spiritualism was a popular movement across many sections of society, including women, African-Americans, Catholics, Protestants, and laborers, both urban and rural, though the extent to which that popularity extended beyond fascination into spiritual dedication is somewhat unclear. One interesting feature in much of the literature regarding the history of the spiritualist movement (particularly that written by concerned parties), is that accompanying any mention of particular individuals is their non-religious occupation, with a great deal of emphasis placed on those who worked as scientists, inventors or jurists.[16] This can be seen in some part as a defense against accusations of irrationality or fraud, both of which occurred with some frequency and were often proven to be accurate. [17] The onset of the Civil War served to further disrupt Spiritualism as a movement. Yet, although it was lacking a set structure or hierarchy of leadership, and with many of the cases having been exposed as fraudulent, it persisted with publications like *The Spiritual Scientist* and in smaller groups, though admittedly it had experienced a considerable decline in popularity by the 1870s. The persistence of spiritualism was a matter of curiosity for figures of the time, as can be seen in the establishment of the Seybert Commission on Spiritualism out of the University of Pennsylvania in 1888, as well as the publication of R.B. Davenport's *Deathblow to Spiritualism: True Story of the Fox Sisters,* which sought to expose the spiritualist movement as corrupt and dangerous once and for all.[18] His attempt was ultimately unsuccessful.

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[15] Prothero, *The White,* 21.

[16] Kuhn, *Theosophy,* 35.

[17] Campbell, *Ancient Wisdom,* 16.

[18] Kuhn, *Theosophy,* 36.

One significant event that had an impact not only on Spiritualism and later Theosophy, but on the entire landscape of American and global religion was the publication of Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* in 1859 and *The Descent of Man* in 1871. Darwin's theory of evolution, and its growing popularity within scientific circles was seen as incredibly threatening in many religious circles, and understandably so. It was felt by many that Darwin's theories directly contradicted the Biblical understanding of God and denied him as an all-powerful creating being, an accusation which was pointedly made by Charles Hodge of the Princeton Seminary in his work *What Is Darwinism?*[19] and echoed by those from previously opposing religious traditions. The American religious community was again thrown into a great deal of turmoil, and similar to the early 19th Century following the publication of various metaphysical texts which attempted to rationalize religious belief, alternative religious movements once more gained popularity. In addition to the appearance of Theosophy, Christian Science emerged under the direction of Mary Eddy. These two movements, though they did not share a great deal of philosophical similarities, did maintain a connection as, according to Alvin Kuhn, "Their [Christian Scientists] experience in the Eddy system brought them to the outer court of the Occult Temple." [20]

Spiritualist and subsequently theosophical responses to Darwinism and the increasing strain between science and religion differed from those of more mainstream and Christian sects. Spiritualists claimed to have solved the problem of a perceived disconnect between science and religion. Following from the Swedenborgian tradition of attempting to express the spiritual in scientific terms, the use of séances and meditations were seen as empirical experiments as well

[19] Ahlstrom, *A Religious,* 769.

[20] Kuhn, *Theosophy,* 32-3.

as spiritual experiences.[21] This marriage of the occult with scientific reasoning and language is a common feature in much of the writings of the Theosophists, and most importantly to this study, the work of Henry Steel Olcott.

Henry Steel Olcott

Henry Olcott was born, the eldest of six children on August 2, 1832 to Henry Wyckoff and Emily Steel.[22] Very little is known about Henry's childhood, as he failed to discuss his own past in any depth in his own autobiographical works. Henry's father worked in business in Orange, New Jersey and later moved the family to New York City. Olcott began attendance at New York University (then the University of the City of New York) in 1847 at the age of fifteen but left a year later, due to a lack of funds and as a result of what biographer Stephen Prothero terms a "heeding [of] the call to "Go West" into America's wilderness."[23] Olcott was raised as a Presbyterian, in the Calvinist tradition which produced the Unitarian movement, and this heavily influenced his later writings on Christianity as a whole as well as his vehement reaction against even liberal Christianity. Olcott's journey westward ended in Amherst, Ohio, as did any lasting allegiances to his Presbyterian upbringing. There, while working as an agricultural laborer, he encountered the Steele brothers, relatively wealthy landowning uncles of Henry's, who, after witnessing spiritualist phenomena in Cleveland, Ohio had created their own branch of Spiritualism. During his time in Ohio, Olcott reports having encountered a great variety of

[21] Campbell, *Ancient Wisdom,* 18.

[22] Howard Murphet, *Yankee Beacon of Buddhist Light: The Life of Col. Henry S. Olcott* (Wheaton: Quest Books, 1988), 2.

[23] Prothero, *The White,* 20.

unconventional religions, but he was ultimately drawn into spiritualism. Reportedly, Olcott engaged in séances in which he was able to channel the spirit of an Indian and demonstrate customs.[24] He reports meeting with Andrew Jackson Davis in 1852 who entreated him to become a missionary and reformer for the spiritualist cause. This meeting prompted Olcott to engage in further study and research into spiritualist and occult techniques including mesmerism and psychology, and was found to have a talent at mesmeric healing. In an account by J. M. Peebles, Olcott is referred to as a "healing 'medium,'"[25] a skill that according to Olcott's accounts increased dramatically after study in Ceylon later in life.

The next year found Olcott back in New York City where, following a class on agricultural chemistry, he became an assistant editor to the magazine *Working Farmer* and as the American correspondent to the British *Mark Lane Express.* While in New York, he helped to found the New York Conference of Spiritualist with the goal of further investigating spiritualism, in addition to contributing as a writer to the *Spiritual Telegraph*. His works for the *Telegraph* consisted of reports on spiritualist phenomena that attempted both to stimulate the curiosity of the readers as well as offer a critical and methodical account of the specific happenings. In one article in particular, in an attempt to somewhat fill the lack of a coherent philosophy (something he saw as Spiritualism's greatest weakness), he set out his own personal worldview. This view involved not only theories of religion but also of man's historical development, demonstrating an awareness of historicism that would feature heavily in his later works. His theory of religion was pluralistic but was tinged with hierarchical and sometimes racist notions.[26] As much as later

[24] Ibid., 22.

[25] Quoted in Prothero, *The White*, 23.

[26] Ibid., 28.

writers, both Theosophists and Sinhalese Buddhists hold Olcott as an almost anomalous figure- one who did not engage in the same Orientalist condescension as many other Westerners, Olcott was a product of his time. Prior to his and even during his close involvement with Eastern religions, his writings featured distinctly eroticizing language and depictions of non Western cultures and peoples.

In 1856, Olcott forewent journalism to embark on an agricultural career. In the years between the end of his work with the *Spiritual Telegraph* and the outbreak of the Civil War, Olcott, opened and lost a farming school in Mount Vernon, New York, wrote a book on sorghum and sugar cane[27], and appeared in front of various agricultural committees and horticultural societies as an advocate of agricultural reform. He was awarded two medals of Honor by the U.S. Agricultural Society and was appointed to investigatory committees, and published a self-help text that centered on celery cultivation.[28] This text contained another account of his personal philosophy which saw good fortune as the necessary result of hard work and good deeds. His agricultural career was set aside upon the receipt of a job offer from Horace Greeley and the *New York Tribune*. He worked as the agricultural editor, but reported on other major issues of the day, abolitionism and the John Brown affair, in particular. In his account of the execution, at which he was a witness, Olcott testified that he was "'greatly impressed with the dignity of [Brown's] bearing'" and that Brown had served "'a purpose which to him was holy and noble.'"[29] This appreciation of passionate zeal and willingness to martyr oneself for an important cause once again would be echoed in his later works. During his time at the *Tribune*,

[27] *Sorgho and Imphee, The Chinese and African Sugar Cane;* Ibid., 30.

[28] *How to Cultivate and Preserve Celery;* Ibid.

[29] As quoted in Prothero, *The White,* 32.

Olcott involved himself in the Freemason, Republican and antislavery movements, all of which coalesced in his later recollections of the John Brown affair. According to Olcott's story, while at the execution, he was identified as a Northerner and suspected Republican and was forced to rely on the aid of another Freemason in order to flee the town. While working at the Tribune he was married to Mary Eplee Morgan, but very little is known about his marriage or family life.

With the outbreak of the Civil War, Olcott once again faced a change in fortunes. After volunteering for the Union Army, he spent a year as a signals officer under General Burnside in the North Carolina campaign[30] and was involved in several battles. His time on the front was disrupted by a case of dysentery which kept him hospitalized until November 1862. It was at this point that his greatest participation in the war began. Upon the recommendation of Charles A. Dana, Assistant Secretary of War under Edwin Stanton and former colleague of Olcott's, Olcott was offered the position of special commissioner of the War Department. He was tasked with investigating accusations of fraud directed against military supplier Solomon Kohnstamm. Olcott's inquiries resulted in the conviction of Kohnstamm to ten years in Sing Sing Prison for defrauding the Union Army a total of over $300,000.[31] While investigating Kohnstamm, Olcott discovered various other occurrences of fraud and corruption, extending his commission for three years. Following his commission by Stanton, Olcott worked under Secretary of the Navy Gideon Welles to investigate accusations of fraud in naval yards and to enact reforms in various accounting and purchasing procedures. His work with the navy ended at the assassination of President Abraham Lincoln on April 14, 1865, though he remained involved with the military. Olcott swiftly offered his services to Secretary Stanton and was hired as a Special Commissioner

[30] Campbell, *Ancient Wisdom,* 7.

[31] Ibid., 33.

to the Bureau of Military Justice to investigate the assassination.[32] He was involved in the exploration of the possibility of a larger conspiracy and interrogated Mary Surratt, mother of a suspected co-conspirator in the assassination, eventually leading to her execution. In October of that same year, Olcott resigned from his work with the military, with the rank of Colonel[33] to pursue a career in law. In 1868 he was accepted by the New York Bar Association and opened a law office in the city, specializing in insurance law. His reformist tendencies continued into his work in the legal and insurance systems, particularly following his appointment as secretary of the National Insurance Convention of the United States. Some instances of his activism included the co-authoring of tracts calling for insurance reform[34] and for the support of the New York police department.[35] An additional significant work published by Olcott in the 1870s was *The Safety Fund Law of the State of New York, in Relation to Fire Insurance: Its Advantages Explained,* which was written in response to the great city fires of 1872.[36] Olcott vigorously pursued a path of civil service and business reform, and in 1872 this crusading tendency led him to lambast various theatrical productions in New York City as immoral in theatrical reviews published in the *New York Sun*[37] in a campaign for chastity and modesty. In a report in the *New York Tribune* in 1872, Olcott was lauded as the "'most progressive American of the

[32] Prothero, 35.

[33] Campbell, 7.

[34] *Official Revised Edition of the Outline of the Draft of the General Insurance Law* by Henry Steel Olcott and Austin Abbot; Prothero, 195.

[35] "A Memorial of Police Bravery" published in the *New York Times*, July 20, 1871; Ibid., 195.

[36] Ibid., 35.

[37] Ibid., 36.

Americans.'"[38] The search for progress and reform was one of the greatest themes that continued throughout Olcott's entire life. Olcott's law practice continued to grow, with clients as diverse as the Corporation of New York City, the United States Treasury, the New York Stock Exchange,[39] and the Panama Railway Company. His connections in the worlds of business and journalism allowed him entrance into the Lotos Club,[40] where he along with other members engaged in reading circles, French conversation, and discussions on politics, culture and ideas of progressiveness. Unfortunately for Olcott, his private life did not mirror this public success. The Olcott family lost both a son and a daughter, leaving only two surviving children, and the marriage eventually ended in divorce on an unknown date prior to 1874.[41] Very few details are known about what led to the divorce, which was a relatively rare event at that time, but the discussion of the issue found in Murphet's biography of Olcott is an illuminating illustration of the kind of devotion and bias found in many of the depictions of Olcott by sympathetic parties.

> Mary Eplee Olcott was a conservative, narrow, orthodox church-goer. She feared and hated new heresies, such as spiritualism and free-thought. She clung to ideas, beliefs and rituals that were long-established and safe.
>
> Henry, on the other hand, was a blown-in-the-glass pioneer, a scientist at heart, anxious to attack the enigma of life from fundamentals, deeply involved in the new thought, the few liberalizing influences of the day. He could not accept the creed of his forefathers, of his father-in-law, of the established Church generally. Mary could accept nothing else.[42]

In contrast, what mention of it that is made in Stephen Prothero's biography merely points to the fact that little is known, but that Olcott did not expend a great deal of effort on his

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[38] Quoted in Prothero, *The White,* 36.

[39] Campbell, *Ancient Wisdom,* 7.

[40] An elite men's society which focused on art and literature. Prothero, *The White,* 38.

[41] Murphet, *Yankee Beacon,* 23.

[42] Murphet, *Yankee Beacon,* 22.

marriage and was neglectful.[43] Such contrasts in representation are common throughout the whole of both texts. It is at this point in Olcott's life that he returned his attentions to the Spiritualist cause.

Encounters with Madame Helena Petrova Blavatsky and the Birth of Theosophy

Henry Steele Olcott provides the most thorough source on the history of the Theosophical Society. His *Old Diary Leaves*, written in a very personable autobiographical style, trace his personal move from Spiritualism into the creation of the Theosophical Society in 1875, largely revolving around the figure of Madame Helena Petrova Blavatsky, or H.P.B. as she was typically referred to. The account was explicitly created to combat misconceptions about Theosophy and H.P.B. [44] Olcott demonstrates a very particular sense of historical awareness: "Whether viewed from the friendly or unfriendly standpoint, it is equally strange that such a body should have come into existence when it did, and that it has not only been able to withstand the shocks it has had, but actually to have grown stronger proportionately with the bitter unfairness of its adversaries,"[45] though he does not acknowledge the predecessors to the Spiritualist movement as other Theosophical historians tended to do. He opens his account with his first acquaintance with H.P.B., which occurred in July of 1874 at the Eddy Homestead in Vermont. Olcott was reporting on psychic happenings for the *New York Daily Graphic,* which had drawn a number of spectators including Madame Blavatsky. [46] His account of their meeting; "It was a very prosaic

[43] Prothero, *The White,* 40.

[44] Henry Steel Olcott, *Old Diary Leaves* (London: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1895), v.

[45] Ibid. Iii.

[46] Ibid., 1-3.

incident: I said "Permettez moi, Madame,' and gave her a light for her cigarette; our acquaintance began in smoke, but it stirred up a great and permanent fire,"[47] set the tone for the entire work. He makes a point to acknowledge that there was nothing untoward about their association, declaring that "It was the voice of common sympathy with the higher occult side of man and nature; the attraction of soul to soul, not that of sex to sex. Neither then, at the commencement, nor ever afterwards had either of us the sense of the other being the opposite sex. We were simply chums; so regarded each other, so called each other."[48] This was meant to combat suggestions otherwise that had disparaged the honor of H.P.B. He treats H.P.B. with a great sense of equality, with little attention paid to differences in gender. His assertion that he paid little regard to differences in sex appears true throughout the course of his account.

His account of the development of the Theosophical Society is long and incredibly detailed, providing intricate details of séances and spiritual happenings, often led by H.P.B. who worked as a mystic and an adept. Olcott paid particular attention, as he had in his prior career as a journalist, to the science of spiritualism. His descriptions were delivered in very matter of fact language, almost with an air of scientific detachment. The accounts are not sensationalized, rather discussed in scientific language of experimentation and analysis.[49] In this respect, he was clearly responding to the challenge faced by other religious movements of the time—scientific skepticism. Fairly early on in their acquaintance, H.P.B. and Olcott began to discuss the possibility that a reform of Spiritualism was not enough; that a new form of occult philosophy was necessary. The philosophy developed by Olcott and H.P.B. incorporated the international

[47] Ibid., 1.

[48] Ibid., 5-6.

[49] Ibid., 40-2.

community and Eastern traditions to an extent that had not been seen previously in Spiritualism. Adepts were far more actively involved in manipulating the unseen forces than the earlier mediums had been (as can be seen in the language of their names). The announcement of the new Society was given by Olcott at meeting of Spiritualists in New York City on September 26, 1875.[50]

The Theosophical Society Moves Eastward

In the following years, Olcott and H.P.B. embarked on a literary journey which carried them further East; with the publication of *Isis Unveiled* in 1877, which claimed to trace all western knowledge and religion to ancient Eastern sources. Hindu and Buddhist teachings are central to the work for, as Blavatsky writes, "Nirvana is the ocean to which all tend."[51] That same year, Olcott began a series of correspondences with Hindu and Buddhist reformers throughout India and Ceylon. This communication often involved very virulent attacks on Christianity, at one point suggesting that, "Christianity has nearly run its course, the Popist half is lapsing into Fetishism, the Protestant into Nihilism."[52] It is in letters with Buddhist reformers from Ceylon that he first made his statement of conversion to Buddhism as well as a desire to travel to Asia to learn from Buddhist monks. It swiftly became know within Spiritualist circles in New York that Olcott had converted, and by 1878 he had published a tract in the *Indian Spectator*, defending Buddhism to the Theosophical Society and any other interested readers.

[50] Ibid., 15.

[51] Quoted in Prothero, *The White,* 58.

[52] Quoted in Prothero, *The White,* 64.

Finally, in December of 1878,[53] Olcott and Blavatsky began their journey to India, settling first in Bombay and eventually establishing the Theosophical Society in Adyar, Madras, India. Olcott and the Theosophical Society had a tremendous impact on the Indian nationalist movement, as many of the members of the Indian National Congress established in 1885 were Theosophists, including Allen Hume and Annie Besant.[54] For the purposes of this thesis, however, Olcott's visit and work in Ceylon is a primary focus.

Ceylon in the 19th Century

Since the early sixteenth century, the island had experienced three separate colonial rulers and three distinct Christian programmes.[55] The arrival of the Portuguese in 1517 brought increased internal conflict amongst various tribes, both Hindu and Buddhist, as well as Catholicism and the Portuguese language. In 1638, a Sinhalese king from the Kandyan Kingdom, the last native Kingdom to be conquered, negotiated a deal with the Dutch—assistance in removing Portuguese colonial rule in exchange for trading privileges- which, though it was successful in forcing the Portuguese, resulted in colonial rule by the Dutch East India Company which lasted until 1795.[56] The Dutch brought with them their language, legal system and religion, the last of which led to fairly strict rules regarding religious practice, though the degree to which they were enforced varied throughout Dutch rule. Roman Catholicism was prohibited as was the practice of Buddhism and Hinduism in urban areas. Conversion to Christianity was a

[53] Ibid., 74.

[54] Ibid., 135.

[55] Chandra De Silva, *Sri Lanka: A History* (New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House PVT, 1987), 1998.

[56] K. M. De Silva, *A History of Sri Lanka* (London: C. Hurst & Co., 1981), 210.

requirement for high office and access to education was restricted to those who agreed to renounce their former faiths and practice a form of Calvinism favoured by the Dutch, as well as to those willing to learn Dutch.[57] The transfer of power from the Dutch to the English in 1795 was a result of the Napoleonic wars on the continent. Though initially unsure as to whether the exchange of power would be permanent after the war, British rule was solidified in 1802 with the Peace of Amiens. Ceylon became the British Crown Colony of Ceylon.[58] It was under the British that the last Kingdom, the Kingdom of Kandy which was seen by many as the last defender of Buddhism and Sinhalese (the majority group on the island) culture, fell, becoming finally incorporated into British territory in 1832. Resistance to this defeat was violent, and ultimately the largest show of resistance to British rule in the Island's history.[59] Conversion to Christianity and the use the language of the colonizers was once again a preference for both accesses to education and employment, and the island experienced a rapid expansion of Christian schools under the direction of various missionary groups.[60] Access to education was very geographically biased, with those areas of the island last to be colonized having the smallest concentration of schools. As a result, the Kandyan province, home to a large number of Sinhalese Buddhists, possessed a disproportionately small number of schools, leaving many Sinhalese at an employment disadvantage. While this was not entirely along ethnic lines, with those Sinhalese in the maritime provinces experiencing similar rates of education and employment as their Hindu Tamil, Christian Burgher and Muslim counterparts, the sense that the

[57] Ibid., 196.

[58] Chandra De Silva, *Sri Lanka*, 145-6.

[59] De Silva, *A History,* 232-5.

[60] The number of pupils in primary schools expanded from 8,751 to 67,750 from 1869 to 1878. Ibid., 340.

Western system was distinctively biased against the Sinhalese Buddhists (not simply the Sinhalese- the Christian minority was increasingly treated as a separate and unequal group to the Buddhist majority throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries[61]), would become a feature in the Sinhalese Buddhist revival and in Sinhalese Buddhist ethno-nationalism.

The Buddhist response to these events was that of resurgence in attention to Buddhism, and Ceylon's role as a holy source of Buddhist history. A Sinhalese publishing company, the Lamkopakara Press was established in 1862. During that same year, the Society for the Propagation of Buddhism was established by Mohottivatte Gunananda, with whom Olcott would eventually establish mutual correspondence. A printed war with polemics and pamphlets against either Christianity or Buddhism led to a series of public debates between Christianity and Buddhism took place in the 1860s and 70s, the most famous of which occurred in 1873. The debate, which featured David DeSilva, a Wesleyan minister, and Gunananda, resulted in a win for the Buddhists and was widely reported on in both Ceylon and the West. This environment of Buddhist revival and increased resistance to English Christian rule was one into which Olcott was to become heavily involved.[62]

Olcott's Ceylon Visits

Olcott's plentiful correspondence with Buddhist monks in Ceylon eventually culminated in travel to and a tour of the island in May of 1880. Olcott and Blavatsky arrived in Colombo,

[61] This separation can be seen in the eventual purge of the armed forces of any Sinhalese Christians by the Buddhist leadership in the 1960s. K. N. O. Dharmadasa, *Language, Religion and Ethnic Assertiveness* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1992), 314-315.

[62] Prothero, *The White,* 95.

Ceylon on May 16, 1880 to an exceedingly warm welcome led by Mohottivatte Gunananda. According to Olcott, the scene resembled that of a holiday celebration,

> A white cloth was spread for us from the jetty steps to the road where carriages were ready, and a thousand flags were frantically waved in welcome. The multitude hemmed in our carriages… The roads were blocked with people the whole distance, and our progress was very slow. At the house three Chief Priests received and blessed us at the threshold…Then we had a levee and innumerable introductions; the common people crowding every approach, filling every door and gazing through every window.[63]

Olcott's tracts and writings against Christianity had been translated and fairly widely disseminated through the country prior to his arrival, contributing to his popularity upon arrival.[64] Blavatsky and Olcott engaged in many discussions on Buddhism and Theosophism as wells as demonstrations of psychic powers by Madame Blavatsky. On May 25th, Olcott and H.P.B. "took *pansil*"[65] as a public statement of their conversion to Buddhism at the temple of the Ramany Nikaya, surrounded by a large crowd of observers who were eager participants in the process. According to Olcott, they "made the responses just after us, a dead silence being preserved while we were struggling through the unfamiliar sentences. When we had finished the last of the *Silas,* and offered flowers in the customary way, there came a mighty shout to make one's nerves tingle."[66] They proceeded from Colombo on a tour throughout the country, met with welcoming crowds everywhere they went. Olcott, in his account of their visit, gave an

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[63]Henry Steel Olcott, "Henry S. Olcott- May-July 1880, Ceylon," in *The Occult World of Madame Blavatsky: Reminiscences and Impressions By Those Who Knew Her*, comp. and ed. Daniel H. Caldwell (Tucson: Impossible Dream Publications, 1991), 113.

[64] De Silva, *A History,* 341-342.

[65] Taking *pansil* involved the recitation, in Pali, of the Three Refuges and the Five Precepts of Theravada Buddhism, which involved promises to dedicate oneself to the Buddha, the Sangha (Monastic community), and the Dhamma (teachings). Prothero, *The White,* 95.

[66] Olcott, "Henry S. Olcott", 114.

explanation for the strength of their positive response, declaring himself and H.P.B "the first white champions of their [Buddhist] religion, speaking of its excellence and its blessed comfort from the platform, in the face of the [Christian] Missionaries, its enemies and slanderers."[67] Though the visit was short- their ship for India left on July 13th, its impact was significant, on both Olcott, and a young man with whom they traveled, and who would become an important part of Olcott's Buddhist programme—David Hewavitarne, or as he later became known, Anagarika Dharmapala. Dharmapala discusses Olcott's visit in his work "On the Eightfold Path" published in 1927.[68] According to his recollection, even before their arrival in Ceylon, his "heart warmed toward these two strangers, so far away and so sympathetic, and I made up my mind that, when they came to Ceylon, I would join them."[69] He described their welcome as royal, and declared that he was inspired to dedicate himself to reform after meeting with them. Olcott and Blavatsky were the first European-Americans to formally convert to Buddhism.[70] During the tour, Olcott delivered lectures on his Buddhist philosophy and established several branches of the Buddhist Theosophical Society. Olcott returned to the island in April of 1881, and for a period of eight months, in the company of Gunananda, toured the country giving more lectures against Christianity and promoting Buddhism.[71]

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[67] Ibid., 113-4.

[68] Anagarika Dharmapala, "Anagarika Dharmapala: June, 1880, Colombo, Ceylon," in *The Occult World of Madame Blavatsky: Reminiscences and Impressions By Those Who Knew Her*, comp. and ed. Daniel H. Caldwell (Tuscon: Impossible Dream Publications, 1991), 116.

[69] Ibid., 117.

[70] Prothero, *The White,* 95.

[71] Ibid., 100.

Olcott's Buddhist Programme

Even prior to his arrival in Ceylon, Olcott had begun to formulate his own Buddhist philosophy. In his lectures in Colombo and Kandy, during his first tour, he made a point to differentiate his Buddhism from that practiced by many of the Sinhalese. While he defended the Sinhalese Buddhism against the accusations made by Christian missionaries, he declared the popular Buddhism as "'totally at variance with Buddha's precepts"'[72], and therefore in need of reform. As with many of the causes Olcott had involved himself, he undertook the task of fulfilling the need for reformation and changes himself. Olcott's Buddhist philosophy, and his condemnation of the popular version practiced by the Sinhalese people, reflects a very particular view of religion and practice. For Olcott, "true" Buddhism (and religion in general) was found solely in the teachings and person of the Buddha. The permutations in ritual and performance which developed through centuries of actual practice were seen as a corruption which should be purified. Education in the texts and sayings of the Buddha were a necessary part of the purification process.

Such theories about religion are common to periods of reformation and renewal, from the principle of *sola scriptura* put forth by Luther, Zwingli, and Calvin in the Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century to works of Islamic reformers in India written during the nineteenth century, concurrent with the Buddhist renewal in Ceylon. Stephen Prothero links Olcott's preference for original texts to his Protestant upbringing.[73] This conflation of Protestantism and Buddhism is an idea which has permeated scholarship on the nature of the Buddhist revival, including yet going beyond Olcott's involvement, leading to the concept of "Protestant

[72] Ibid., 97.

[73] Ibid., 96.

Buddhism".[74] This understanding is an oversimplification of all parties involved and discounts similar tendencies in all manner of reformation, whether it be religious or political. A similar return to texts and an idea of a "true" history and people can be found in the larger Sinhalese nationalist movement (and multitudes of nationalisms throughout history). To attribute this tendency solely to a Protestant Christian experience is simply inaccurate.

Olcott moved quickly to promote his ideas of reform with the establishment of eight branches the Buddhist Theosophical Society during his first tour of Ceylon. The Society was modeled on similar Christian societies with the goal of promoting the spread of Buddhist knowledge and learning. His dedication to education is the primary theme which runs through all of his work on the Buddhist cause. In addition to the Buddhist Theosophical Societies, Olcott organized a number of Buddhist secondary and Sunday schools, combining Western style education with traditional Buddhist teachings. These schools began to correct the great imbalance in the Ceylonese educational system- out of 1200 government schools in 1880, only 4 were Buddhist.[75] By 1890, the Buddhist Theosophical Society had established 40 secondary schools throughout the country.[76] Young Men's and Young Women's Buddhist Associations

[74] First used by anthropologist Gananath Obeyesekere in 1970, this term has gained popular currency in anthropological and religious studies of nineteenth century Ceylon Buddhist revival and is featured heavily in works by Richard Gombrich. Stephen Prothero, "Henry Steel Olcott and 'Protestant Buddhism,'" *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 63, no. 2 (Summer 1995): 281, http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=rfh&AN=ATLA0000904932&site=ehost-live (accessed May 2, 2009), 281.

[75] Prothero, *The White,* 86.

[76] De Silva, *A History,* 345.

were another branch of his education programme. These associations as well as the schools remain today, thought they have been under the control of the government since 1961.[77]
In July of 1880, he established the National Education Fund as a scholarship fund to finance the expansion of the Buddhist school system.[78] In fact it was the desire to raise money for this fund that sent Olcott back to Ceylon in 1881, though his dedication to that trip created a rift between Olcott and H.P.B who insisted that he remain in India to work on the editing of *The Theosophist.* Olcott continued nonetheless, amidst threats that the Theosophical Masters disapproved and would no longer appear to him. Olcott reportedly testified that he would continue his campaign for Buddhist education, even at the expense of never communing with the Masters again. This declaration signifies the degree to which his passion for the Buddhist cause had grown; Olcott was willing to abandon the movement which he helped to found and to which he had devoted years of his life.

In the same year as his second tour of Ceylon, Olcott published his *Buddhist Catechism.* The Catechism first appeared in Sinhalese on July 24th, 1881, and has since been translated into a number of languages and disseminated throughout the world. Copies remain in print even today. The Catechism was first approved by Hikkaduwe Sumangala, the High Priest of Sripada and Galle, who declared it in keeping with the canon of the Buddhist Church and suitable for use in the new Buddhist school system. The structure and questions, and, indeed the very idea of a catechism, drew heavily from the Christian tradition. The Catechism is divided into five sections:

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[77] Richard Gombrich and Gananath Obeyesekere, *Buddhism Transformed: Religious Change in Sri Lanka* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), 205.

[78] De Silva, *A History,* 341-342.

The Life of the Buddha, The Dharma or Doctrine, The Sangha, The Rise and Spread of Buddhism, and Buddhism and Science. The bulk of the Catechism, eighty-five out of one hundred and twenty pages, focus on the figure and doctrine of the Buddha- a reflection of Olcott's view of religion. The very first questions, "Of what religion are you?", "What is Buddhism" [79]are indicative of the tone of the text and the degree to which it draws strongly from the Christian tradition. Such questions about the divinity of the Buddha[80], the use of the words religion, Buddhism and Hinduism[81] are examples of the Westerncentric nature of this text, though it was intended for a Sinhalese audience. None of these terms would be found in a discussion of the Buddha that was not crafted in opposition to another-Christianity. Demands are made throughout for proof, more specifically, proof that the Buddha was a "historical personage,"[82] in accordance with the concept of rebirth. Questions like, "What were his last words to his disciples"[83] could be found in many Christian catechist texts. The project as a whole represented a very systematic and methodical approach to religious education. The lack of attention paid to practice and ritual, except to suggest that they are anti-Buddhist, once again demonstrates Olcott's particular interpretation of what constitutes a true religion. In his response to a question of what observances a pious lay Buddhist should keep, dancing, singing, music, the use of garlands and ornaments are all proscribed.[84] All of the aforementioned activities could be

[79] Henry Steel Olcott, *The Buddhist Catechism*, 45th ed. (1881; repr., Wheaton: Theosophical Publishing House, 1970) ,1.

[80] Ibid., 3.

[81] Ibid., 13.

[82] Ibid., 27.

[83] Ibid., 26.

[84] Ibid. 48.

found in many of the popular festivals and rituals of lay Buddhists in Ceylon. The inclusion of proscriptions like these can be interpreted as a direct attack on the impure "folk" religion practiced by many Sinhalese, and perhaps on the comingling of Hindu and Buddhist religious traditions in Ceylon society. The sections on the rise of Buddhism and on science, and their inclusion in what is meant to be an essential collection of Buddhist knowledge is also telling. The section on Buddhism and science was very pointed, openly asking such questions as "Is Buddhism opposed to education, and to the study of science?"[85] This section is clearly a product of its time, as every faith grappled with the challenge of science and modern technology. In an a response to a question regarding creation, Olcott explicitly states that "everything is in a state of constant flux, and undergoing change and reformation, keeping up the continuity according to the law of evolution."[86] Many of the questions with regards to history are set in a very Christian context,[87] with dates written in terms of B.C and A.D. A sense of history and self-awareness as a member a particular historical tradition is intimately combined with doctrine and Buddhist identity. This could be seen as a part of Olcott's larger philosophy of religious universalism, and his preference for unification. With the publication of the *Catechism*, Olcott sought to create a uniform text on which all Buddhists regardless of sect or nationality could agree. This did not occur, but a second text, which can be found in the appendices of the *Catechism*, was slightly more successful. This text, the "Fourteen Fundamental Buddhistic Beliefs" affirms principles of

[85] Ibid, 110.

[86] Ibid, 110.

[87] "284. Q. How long before the Christian era did this happen?"; Ibid., 97.

tolerance, a desire for education and enlightenment and a belief in evolution.[88] It was approved by delegates from Japan, Burma, Ceylon, and Bangladesh.[89]

Henry Olcott pursued other tactics in his promotion of Buddhism in Ceylon society outside of the educational system. Olcott played a part in designing the universal Buddhist Flag,[90] though the extent to which he was involved in the creative process is disputed.[91] Olcott, again in an obvious response to Christianity, worked to develop carols modeled on Christmas carols for Vesak, as well as promoted the custom of sending "Vesak cards". (page 205) Olcott played a vital role in the Kotahena riot controversy. On March 25, 1883, the Catholic neighborhood of Kotahena in Colombo, was ripped apart by bloody riot between Buddhists and Catholics. Investigation into the matter by Governor Longden and the Riots Commission determined that it had been initiated by the Catholic participants, though in actual practice, Catholics were not tried for their crimes. The Sinhalese, monks and lay people alike protested the result and requested the Olcott represent them. On January 27th, 1884, the Buddhist Defence Committee was organized to deal with any such cases in the future, and Olcott was elected to travel to London to represent the Sinhalese Buddhists to the Colonial Office. The colonial officials within Ceylon demonstrated a willingness to agree with the complaints of the Buddhists, but were unable to act due to "the passage of time".[92] Sir Arthur Gordon, then Governor of Ceylon commented in a letter to Lord Derby, the Colonial Secretary, that "There can be no

[88] Ibid., 128-130.

[89] Gombrich and Obeyesekere, 205.

[90] Ibid.

[91] Susantha Goonatilake, *Anthropologizing Sri Lanka : A Eurocentric Misadventure* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), 63, in NetLibrary, http://www.netlibrary.com (accessed May 2, 2009).

[92] Quoted in Prothero, *A White,* 111.

question that Colonel Olcott really possesses considerable influence among the Buddhist Community; that he, to a great extent, enjoys their confidence; and that he may fairly claim to be a representative authorized by them on his present mission," though he went on to suggest the possibility that Olcott overestimated his own understanding of Buddhism and the Sinhalese cause. This suggestion echoes a criticism that can be leveled at Olcott, namely that he embraced and promoted a very particular view of Buddhism, leaving little regard for the culture of the Religion or for its practitioners—a common complaint against Orientalism. Olcott arrived in London in May of 1884. Governor Longden had previously discussed Olcott's role in the matter of Buddhist revivalism which he attested could be seen in nearly all aspects of life, and had sent a copy of the *Buddhist Catechism* to the London Office. In another dispatch, Longden had identified Olcott as a possible political activist who would be able to take a position of leadership in a Sinhalese Buddhist nationalist movement. As a result, the London Office was well prepared to receive Olcott and his demands. Upon his arrival, Henry Olcott sent a memo to the Colonial Secretary containing six demands. The demands, which were accompanied by letters and petitions suggesting the possibility of rebellion[93] consisted of the following:

1) That Catholics accused of instigating the riot be brought to trial;
2) That Buddhists be guaranteed the right to exercise their religion freely;
3) That Wesak [Vesak]—the full moon day on which the Sinhalese commemorate the Buddha's birth, enlightenment, and death—be declared a public holiday;
4) That all restrictions against the use of tom-toms and other musical instruments in religious processions be removed;
5) That Buddhist registrars be appointed;
6) And that the question of the Buddhist temporalities (the supposedly negligent control of Buddhist properties by monks) be resolved.[94]

[93] Edward F. Perera wrote, "We are as a community living over a social volcano, which at any moment may appall us with some bloody outburst." Quoted in Prothero, *A White,* 113.

[94] Ibid., 113.

Perhaps surprisingly, Olcott was able to win several concessions from the London Office, including a statement that if any new evidence came to life, the Catholics would be brought to trial, a willingness to enforce the Proclamation of Religious Neutrality, which had been made when the English acquired Ceylon from the Dutch. Veska was declared a National Holiday on April 28, 1885, and officials promised to allow the use of musical instruments in religious processions.[95]

This victory marked the end of Olcott's particular focus on Ceylon, as he moved on to a different project of reform, as he had so many times previously. Olcott continued to produce tracts on Buddhism[96] as he pursued the goal of uniting the southern Theravada Buddhist sects, and the northern Mahayana sects (leading to travel to Burma and Japan in efforts to revitalize Buddhism), but his willingness to work with the Hindu cause in India and a general lack of attention paid to the Sinhalese Buddhist cause, distanced him from his fellow Sinhalese activists. Dharmapala, one of the Sinhalese activist with whom he worked intensively, but with whom his relationship soured, carried on the specific struggle for Sinhalese Buddhist rights. The association of a particular idea of one's own place in history and religious identity, which was featured in Olcott's *Buddhist Catechism,* was discussed further by Dharmapala in his enunciation of a Sinhalese Buddhist nationalism. In his theory, Buddhism and a particular idea of Sinhalese identity and history are conflated.[97] Dharmapala became a vital figure in the Sinhalese

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[95] Ibid., 114.

[96] "Golden Rules of Buddhism"; "The Life of Buddha and It's Lessons"; "Common Foundation of All Religions". Henry Steel Olcott, ed., *Adyar Pamphlets* (Adyar, Madras, India: Theosophical Publishing House , 1931).

[97] Patrick Grant, *Buddhism and Ethnic Conflict in Sri Lanka* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2009), 59.

nationalist movement, as well as in the further creation of a revitalized Buddhism. It has been suggested that Olcott be seen as a patron and Dharmapala the father of the Buddhist Revival.[98] Today, Henry Steel Olcott is honoured in both India and Sri Lanka, with the erection of a statue in his honor, as well as a series of lectures, publications, celebrations, and even the issue of a commemorative stamp in honor of the centenary anniversary of his arrival in Ceylon.[99] His death is commemorated every February 17th on the Island, while is birth is celebrated every February 2nd in India.[100]

Conclusion

Henry Steel Olcott is an individual who led a fascinating and varied life, and who was at the forefront of religious movements which both provide insight into the global religious environment of the nineteenth Century, as well as had a profound impact on the progression of nationalist movements in South Asia. There has, however, been an unfortunate lack of scholarly research into his life and work, though not for lack of sources. In his personal accounts, a constant leaning towards religious universalism, a trait perhaps inherited by the Transcendentalist tradition, as well as a growing attraction towards Eastern faiths, can be traced. Another feature of his work was preoccupation with the conflict between Science and Religion, arising in his work on Theosophy, Buddhism and Hinduism, which again is a reflection of a larger global conflict faced by religious individuals of all creeds. Olcott was first and foremost, a

[98] Gombrich and Obeyesekere, 205.

[99] E.L.B. Hurulle, "Message from the Hon. Minister of Cultural Affairs," preface to *Olcott's Contribution to the Buddhist Renaissance (Abridged from Old Diary Leaves)*, by Henry Steel Olcott, comp. Saddhamangala Karunaratne (Colombo, Sri Lanka: Ministry of Cultural Affairs, 1980), xi.

[100] Prothero, *The White*, 1.

reformer and activist, almost regardless of the issue, but of all of his work, his activity in Ceylon had perhaps one of the most significant effects. There, his contributions, particularly when further developed by Anagarika Dharmapala eventually resulted in a changed Sinhalese Buddhist identity—one which strongly influenced the development of Independent Ceylon and even the ethnic conflict present in Sri Lanka today.

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