

# The Open Court

A MONTHLY MAGAZINE

Devoted to the Science of Religion, the Religion of Science, and the  
Extension of the Religious Parliament Idea

Founded by EDWARD C. HEGELER

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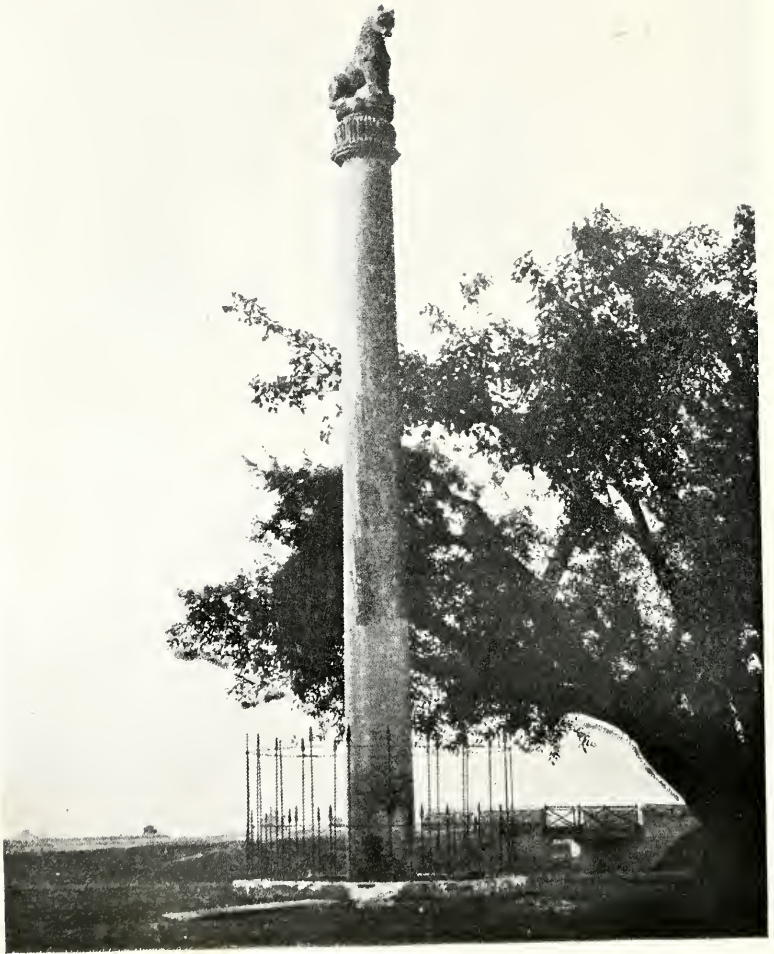
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INSCRIBED ASOKA PILLAR AT LAURIYĀ-NANDANGARH  
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*Frontispiece to The Open Court.*

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## ASOKA: THE PEERLESS MONARCH OF INDIA

BY GLADYS BURRELL KIRBY *and* FRANK M. RICH

“**Q**UICK! Look! The royal hunt! Chandragupta, the King! Make way!” From mouth to mouth, from stand to stand, the warning passed along, electrifying the sleepy Indian market place. Blinking venders, dozing over their wares, leaped to frenzied activity. Cloth merchants bundled off with their rolls of exquisite silk and linen. Lapidaries, with trays of precious stones, jostled snake charmers, basketing their treacherous playthings. Scribes overturned writing boxes, and jugglers their trumpery, in the rush to make room for a stupendous cavalcade.

Good reason the populace had to be agitated at the news. In these huddled quarters a near view of the terrible Chandragupta on a tiger hunt was a spectacle and an adventure.

In any age or country a royal procession has been a sensation for the masses. But probably no age or country ever produced anything quite so sensational as the one of this grim old monarch, who, 321 B. C., wrested authority from the unpopular Nanda king, united the fierce tribes of Northwest India under his standard, defeated the Greeks after the death of Alexander the Great, and made himself undisputed master of Behar, the ancient Indian Empire.

In the presence of the terrific Chandragupta, well might the populace temper their curiosity with discretion. A ruler who dared not shut his eyes to sleep by day, who changed his sleeping place every night naturally took no rash chances in passing through a crowd. He lived in a land where any wife of his, slaying him in his drunken stupor, would, according to an honored custom become the star favorite in the harem of the grateful and appreciative successor; so Chandragupta governed himself accordingly. All his subjects knew by reputation and experience how desirable it was, when their ruler deigned to show himself, to keep at a modest and respectful distance.



They huddled into corners and watched the hunting procession in silence.

The procession was led by a huge array of beaters with drums and gongs. Their duty it was to enclose a vast area of game land, and drive the quarry to the center for the king and his nobles to dispatch.

Next came a gorgeous retinue of attendants with silver censers, to weave an exquisite and intricate harmony of perfumes over the road which the king was to travel. In these days the art of olfactory entertainment had attained the skill and complexity of a musical composition. Chandragupta's band therefore played to his nose rather than to his ears.

The piece de resistance of the show was the third section—three hundred Greek amazons, huge women of prodigious strength, armed with bows, arrows and naked swords, who cut down without mercy any man or woman who approached the sovereign. In the midst of this company rode Chandragupta, dressed in finest muslin, embroidered with gold and purple, lolling in a golden palankin, festooned with long strings of dangling pearls, a tough old tiger in spite of this feminine finery, cool and commanding, but cruel and debauched. The amazons who accompanied him were the strange product of an outrageous surgical art, practiced upon girls in countries to the west, which altered their feminine form, and made them creatures of extraordinary size, cruelty and fanatical devotion. With such a bodyguard, never wholly absent from him, night or day, their wily master, Chandragupta, managed to protect himself from the kind of murder and intrigue with which he had raised himself to power, and with his fierce and loyal watchwomen saved himself even the irksome necessity of keeping sober.

Other spectacular features of the procession followed in long succession. There were more golden palanquins for subordinate rajahs from the provinces, with courtesans to fan and amuse these worthies, and carry long umbrellas to shade the lordly eyes. Here and there among the guards were men carrying boughs of trees, in which gorgeous parrots and cockatoos perched, and caused great astonishment along the way by the sprightly things they had been taught to say. There was an army of servants with wagons and cattle, ropes by the mile, staging and shelters to be set up in wooded country, and elephants for the hunters to mount in case tigers were encountered on open ground. It was a long and gorgeous cavalcade.

By far the most pleasing figure in the pageant was a young man in a palanquin behind the king's. He was a promising youth of seventeen or eighteen, reflecting in his fine countenance the high intelligence and character that were destined to make him one of the noblest rulers history has ever known. He was Asoka, the favorite grandson of Chandragupta, and already viceroy of the large and important province of Taxila. To be a favorite among Chandragupta's grandsons was indeed an honor, for tradition says that Asoka had ninety-eight brothers and sisters, and at this rate must have had several thousands cousins. The current price of wives was only a yoke of oxen, and eastern potentates invested generously.

The emperor rejoiced in Asoka, for the youth reflected the same quick, aggressive decision, and limitless force and ambition as his own. In return the Young Asoka made Chandragupta his model. He emulated the old grim master of millions, who fought armies and wild beasts for his work; and for his play, set bulls, elephants and rhinoceroses in the arena to fight each other. If a taste for these gory exhibitions was a strange schooling for the greatest humanitarian of all time, it is evidence that human nature is erratic and contradictory. The course pleasures of a brutal and sensuous court were high sport for the fresh young prince. He entered into whatever was afoot—work or war, hunt or entertainment—with a contagious enthusiasm that lent new zest to the jaded grandfather. Even the monotonous panic of crowds, always scurrying in fear, or grovelling in mock servility, became gratifying and amusing when the prince was near. Ordinarily, like grasshoppers, scuttling underfoot, they were an inevitable feature of movement.

Accustomed from birth to his grandfather's crowds, nothing in their behavior this day impressed the prince, till the procession had left the confines of the city proper and made its way through an outlying cemetery where mourning relatives had piously raised domes of stone or carefully wrought vases or stupas over the ashes of their dead. Squatting among the gravestones, and charred bits from funeral fires, a group of men had assembled around a young bhikshu who was addressing them. If he had met an excited throng of plebians, running or cowering in terror, it would have been a commonplace. To the prince, the astonishing thing about this assemblage was that they seemed to take no particular notice of the king's retinue at all. Their eager attention was fastened upon the monk, and upon those among his students who questioned, from time to

time, some point in his discourse. King, amazons and tigers were of no consequence to them.

The sight piqued the curiosity of the young Asoka. A rusty monk in a cemetery—what counter attraction was this that could eclipse a royal cavalcade? Asoka sent for one of the officers whose special duty it was to keep track of the arrival and entertainment of travellers.

“What sort of holy man is this, and what are his fellows doing in this place of the dead?” he demanded.

“He is a strange teacher from the west, Upagupta by name, son of a perfumer in Benares. He preaches the heretical doctrines of a philosopher whom he calls the Enlightened One. He spurns the teachings of the sacred Vedas, and blasphemes against the great gods Siva and Vishnu. Even the wise rule of His Majesty, your royal grandfather, is slandered. He has been forbidden entrance to the city, and so harangues among the tombs.”

A curious smile flitted over the face of the young prince, as he dismissed the officer. Youth can be fond without being reverential. “This fellow’s preaching must be interesting,” he said. “I may wish to hear more of his strange doctrine.

As inconspicuously as possible he put aside his ornaments, and on some slight pretext slipped out of the hunter’s train. He quietly moved round and took a seat among the young Upagupta’s disciples. Upagupta, squatting in the center, was a striking figure in a tattered yellow robe, girdled with a leathern belt, and by his side the empty wooden prayer bowl of the Indian mendicant. His sunken cheeks and starved appearance showed that the bowl was seldom filled, but food was forgotten in the breathless intensity of his message. Young, eloquent, skillful, and aflame with zeal for the new gospel of service, he showed his hearers with consummate clearness the faults of their own lives and the way to better things.

“How common it is,” he was saying, “to find both laymen and priests who think, ‘What wonders I can work! See how I bend others to my will!’ Vain braggarts do not undertake work because of some great purpose in view, some benefit to be accomplished. They think only in terms of their own honor and gain. Everything in their eyes is useful only as a pedestal to set them up above their companions.

“Show your true superiority, my brothers, by superior conduct, by the superior judgment you apply. Do not swell our own feelings



of self-esteem in the humiliation of your associates. If they are really inferior, lift them up, by your comfort and your charity.

"Order your lives so that your satisfactions will not depend upon petty bawbles and happenings that surround you, but in the great purposes and creations of your intelligence."

The bhikshu pointed to the tombstones around them.

"Before long this body will sink to the ground, as devoid of sense and worth as a piece of rotting wood. But ideas will remain. They will pass on to others, and others will put them into execution. The good ideas will become a line of virtuous deeds; the bad ones a succession of evil actions. Our duty is to do something not only for our own pleasures, but for the benefit of posterity."

The prince was tempted to put in a word. "Other bhikshus talk much of austerities and penances in this world, to obtain great happiness in the next. Is it to obtain union with Brahma that you lead this meagre existence?"

"I look for no recompense," Upagupta answered gravely, "not even to be born in heaven; but seek the welfare of my fellow men, to bring back those who stray, to elevate those who live in error, and to do away with the sources of sorrow and pain for the world."

"I fear your soft doctrine would be poor counsel for a prince," said Asoka, smiling.

"On the contrary," Upagupta returned, "there is every reason to think it is the only counsel that could possibly enable him to win lasting success. Conquer your foe by force, and you increase his enmity; conquer by charity, and you reap no after sorrow. A loving heart is the great requirement—not to oppress, not to destroy, not to exalt oneself by treading down others, but to comfort and befriend those in suffering. Here one finds the real satisfaction in life—loving among the hateful, sound among the sickly, generous among the greedy."

There was spirited discussion of these doctrines among the auditors and the samanna that would have amused and interested the prince. But tiger hunting, not philosophy, was the order of the day. The prince withdrew and followed the hunting party.

At the edge of the jungle Asoka met the royal company, storing the jewelled palankins and chariots and stalling horses and cattle in temporary shelters erected for their benefit. The favored few mounted the kneeling elephants and penetrated the deep grass and low bushes, where game driven in by lesser mortals might be dispatched. It was a sport of kings, and the young prince always took

his part with relish. But even in the excitement of the chase, the new phrases of the samanna, like the refrain of a foolish song, kept running through his brain. "Vain braggarts—no great purpose—only a pedestal—rotting log of wood—no recompense, not even to be born in heaven—conquer by charity, and you reap no after sorrow."

The hunt was little different from others the prince had enjoyed. The beasts and the beaters took the risks, the riders took the honor and satisfaction of striking the final blow.

Nightfall found the cavalcade returning to the spacious palace grounds, ornamented with stately trees, pools of vari-colored lotus flowers, ponds of goldfish and tortoises, and gardens of roses filled with deer, peacocks and parrots of gorgeous plumage. The prince hastened to his apartments, where he stretched upon a richly inlaid teakwood bed, piled with silken pillows. His personal servants, with jewelled flasks and ebony rollers administered upon his body one of those matchless symphonies of sensual delight, appealing not only to sound and sight, but to muscular sensation and the sense of smell, which were peculiar to the time and country. With all the refinements of their art they massaged his tired muscles, pouring out in careful succession the right proportions of vari-scented oils. As the attendants rolled and kneaded his flesh, an orchestra played, and twelve beautiful nautch girls, with filmy, spangled skirts and pearl-strung waists and shoulders, plaited a series of graceful postures, half dance, half pantomime, about the reclining connoisseur. All was tempered with exquisite harmony—the sheen of pearl against the brown transparency of naked bodies, the gold bands and crowns of flowers about the shapely heads, quiver of bangle, sweep of line and gesture, shrill of reedy pipe—all were part of a carefully wrought invention. Meanwhile the master of the wardrobe appeared with a habit of pure white wool, embroidered with lotus flower designs in threads of gold and silver. Two chamberlains followed with headband and girdle of scarlet silk, gem studded, and scarlet sandals of softest leather. Richly clothed, the young Asoka walked along the latticed galleries, down the stately staircase, across the threshold of alabaster, into the great hall of his grandfather's palace, where many nobles of the realm had gathered to pay homage to the great emperor and report conditions in various parts of the empire.

When gifts had been presented and accepted with all the formalities required by Oriental courtesy, Chandragupta ordered the per-

formers to begin their entertainment. Sword swallows, jugglers, snake charmers, wrestlers, tiger tamers did their best to merit the applause of king and courtiers.

When this program was concluded, a host of waiters entered with such a feast as only an Oriental monarch would provide. Served from golden trays of exquisite workmanship, there were curried peacocks, capon, antelopes, sweet cakes made of rice flour, figs, dates, sweetmeats, honey and wine. The feasters reclined upon couches in oriental fashion, and during the banquet other dancing girls glided among the revellers, with pretty wiles and graceful postures, sprinkling attar of roses over the company. As night deepened, myriads of bronze and silver lamps, hanging from the carved sandal-wood ceiling, gave the hall the appearance of fairyland. When the guests grew weary of amusements and muddled with wine, pearl-strung dancers charmed their departing senses with fondling, music and perfume.

The entertainment, which was a tremendous delight for those tired business men, Chandragupta's commissioners, on their infrequent visits to the capital, to be dreamed of and talked about for years, was a stale show for the prince. If tonight it had more than common in it to amuse and stimulate, it was by way of interpretation of the samanna's maxims of the morning. Why did the sword-swallowers paralyze their gullets, and snake charmers slyly extract the poison of their pets upon bits of meat and then provoke stinging bites upon their naked flesh without flinching? Why did jugglers and animal tamers endure years of toil and obscurity? Was it only to say, "See what wonders I can work!" Was it merely the pedestal that set them up above their fellows?

Asoka's mind turned from the overladen baskets of dainties to the little empty praying bowl of the ascetic. He could see the lean, earnest face of the young preacher imploring, "Order your lives so that your satisfactions will not depend upon petty bawbles and happenings that surround you, but in the great purposes and creations of your intelligence. . . . Ideas will outlast death. Duty is to do something, not for mere pleasure, but for the benefit of posterity. . . . Sound among the sickly, generous among the greedy." What a philosophy! The magnificent idealism of the teaching appealed powerfully to the natural idealism of youth; yet the full force and deeper meaning of the doctrine was not to receive serious consideration for years to come. But the words of a humble, outcast samanna had left their stamp upon a noble mind, and the effect was the most

epoch making and far reaching ever imparted by a single mind upon a single occasion in the history of the world.

Often in the days that followed the young prince hunted in the jungles of realm beyond which towered the white peaks of the Himalayas. Sometimes he used dogs after the manner introduced by Alexander the Great in the days when Asoka's grandfather had himself been a young prince. Asoka was interested also in falconry, and brought and trained great numbers of these hunting birds within the grounds of the royal palace. As time advanced, however, the fondness for hunting gave way to the more mature interests of the soldier. With his grandfather's generals in battle he always conducted himself so as to merit the approval of that critical judge. The momentary impression created by the samanna's preaching was apparently cast aside. His mind was upon war and the glories of war. One promotion followed another, first the vice-royalty of Taxila and later of Ujain. These were not given by the exacting king till justly won, as he wished in no way to injure his grandson's chances of becoming a great emperor in his own right. One of his first great independent undertakings was to build a royal road from Taxila to Pataliputra the capital, the first to be built in the empire. The grandfather, at the outset, skeptical about anything so revolutionary in the East, where abominable roads are an institution, finally came to recognize the value of good communication as an essential of good government, and secretly felt great pride in the young prince's enterprize.

In 298 B. C., Chandragupta died, leaving the empire to his son Bindusara, of whom we know very little, except that he died twenty-four years later, passing the empire intact to his son, Asoka. Curiously, the only record that remains of this twenty-four years is a letter from Bindusara to a neighboring Greek governor, Antioches, asking him, as a friendly favor, to buy him some figs, some raisin wine and a Greek professor. Antiochos replied that he was sending the figs and wine with pleasure; as for buying the professor, well, he was petrified with regret, but really that wasn't done among the Greeks.

For ten years after his accession, Asoka was occupied in governing the realm after the manner of his two predecessors. The efficient administration of so vast an empire demanded great industry and extraordinary ability. His grandfather had maintained an army of 600,000 infantry, 30,000 cavalry, 9,000 elephants and a corresponding number of chariots. Asoka continued this organiza-

tion, perfect in discipline and equipment. Chandragupta had imported skilled workmen from Persia and Greece to improve the art and architecture of his kingdom, but like many others with more means than culture, he was not the ideal patron of art. In attempting to control the details of the work, he sometimes gave such ridiculous orders that the workmen, in anger or ridicule, produces monstrosities so grotesque that even the most unlearned had to smile. Asoka, with better taste and finer appreciation, encouraged his workmen to do their best in their own way, and erected masterpieces of architecture that succeeding generations refused to believe had been fashioned by human hands. His workmen, for instance, succeeded in finding a brilliant polish for sandstone which no workmen in modern times have been able to discover.

The army and the extensive building programs necessitated enormous revenues. Taxes at their highest in modern times are trifling compared with the levies in Chandragupta's empire. Irrigating systems were government works, and a third of the crop was requisitioned in payment for water. Everything offered for sale had to be marked with the government stamp, and government inspectors, everywhere on the lookout in the markets, took a tenth of the price paid at every sale. All gambling was under government control. Officers furnished the devices, refereed the games and collected five per cent of the winnings.

Megasthenes, a Greek ambassador to India in the time of Chandragupta, sent back detailed descriptions of the land and its people which give us considerable light on the customs of this distant time and place. If we stick to the reports of his own observations, and leave out some of the wild tales that he says were told him about stones sweeter than figs or honey, serpents with bats' wings, which could pass overhead and rain down ulcers, dogs that bit so ferociously that their eyes fell out, men with eyes in the middle of their foreheads and with ears reaching to their feet, others with feet reversed and no mouths, for they lived on odors, gold-digging ants as big as foxes, who understood the value of their accumulations and chased away all visitors to their gold dust mountains, and like absurdities which are likely to season ancient accounts, we get a picture of a frugal, honest, orderly, temperate people, who safely left their houses unguarded and who had no lawsuits over grievances and disputes. There was a measure of self-government, but with it a strict accountability to the king and his commissioners, for the king had secret agents collect news of everything and pass it on to



their superiors, even criticisms of their own acts and the policies of the king that were in disfavor among the people. There were committees throughout the kingdom to provide accommodations for travellers, and incidentally to keep a sharp lookout upon them; others to register births and deaths, to license dealers, supervise manufactures, attend to government parks, buildings and repairs, etc. As the houses were mostly of wood, there was great need of good fire protection. Government agents saw to it that there was a fire-well for every ten houses, a supply of ladders, axes, hooks, and ropes, and a volunteer fire company always available.

A prodigious task it was to select and sustain reliable, competent appointees in all these positions, who could manage work efficiently and handle funds honestly. Where so much revenue had to be collected and spent, misappropriation was difficult to discern. As a minister of the time records: "Just as with fish moving under water, it cannot be discovered whether they are drinking or not, so it is impossible to detect government servants, employed on official duties, when helping themselves to money."

Asoka, while naturally mild and reasonable, did not lack force and severity when dealing with felons. With perjurers, tax dodgers and assassins, justice was quick and sharp. Cases were tried as they came up, night or day, without waiting, and the sentence executed on the spot. The administration of the sentence cost little and fell on all alike, for it was applied to the culprit's body, and ranged in severity from the cutting of the hair to severe bodily mutilation and death. There was no workman's compensation law, but whoever caused a skilled workman to lose a hand or an eye paid for the injury with his life.

For ten years, therefore, Asoka employed himself in maintaining good government in the realm that his grandfather had subjugated; then he began to look with covetous eyes upon Kalinga, an independent kingdom on the southeast. The longer he studied, the more desirable it seemed, and he could not rest till the way was clear to annex it to his own domain. With strategic speed and secrecy he marshalled his forces in fighting array and led it against the luckless country.

The infantry were armed with the peculiar Indian bows of prodigious size and strength. Too ponderous to be drawn by hand, they were rested with one end on the ground while the archer placed one foot in the middle and drew the nine-foot arrow back with both hands. The arrow left the bow with a force that no armour could

withstand. If the soldiers drew too close to use the bow to advantage, they exchanged them for huge two-handed swords.

Following the infantry came the horsemen, armed with lances and short bucklers, riding without saddles and prodding their horses with spurs and guiding them by reins attached to iron prongs in the horse's mouth. Finally came the 9,000 fighting elephants, clad in brazen armour, some bearing towers upon their backs, in which were concealed warriors, while other elephants followed carrying the army's baggage and supplies.

At the end of the long, six hundred mile advance, with the beating of brass drums and the blowing of conch shells, the mighty forces of Asoka rushed forward to attack. The inhabitants of Kalinga were entirely unprepared for the battle, nevertheless they dauntlessly sallied out to defend their city. The Kalingans were a simple people, in the arts of war inferior to their assailants. Although they knew the use of bows, javelins and slings and had horsemen of fair ability, they had nothing to match the chariots and elephants. Indeed, many among their number were rustics, clad only in the skins of animals and armed with pointed sticks. In an incredibly short time, however, they raised more than 600,000 soldiers, such as they were, and undertook to defend their country.

The two armies met outside the city and horrible carnage ensued. Asoka's scythe bearing chariots mowed down the Kalingan infantry as a reaper mows grain. The prancing horses, four abreast, trampled the almost defenseless Kalingans. Most ruthless and dreadful of all were the Indian elephants and their riders. These monsters in armour were invincible to lance, javelin or sword. The beasts had been taught to cut and thrust with huge scimitars which they carried in their trunks, and thus they annihilated almost as many of the enemy as the chariots. In the brazen towers on the back of each elephant crouched three archers, shooting right and left into the midst of the warriors below.

The Kalingans, beaten in the field, fled to the city and defended themselves as long as possible. But an enemy more deadly even than Asoka's forces stealthily invaded their camp. Famine and pestilence steadily wasted their strength and within a few days the invaders were able to complete their victory. A hundred thousand had been slain, 150,000 were prisoners. The rest were dead of disease, sick or starving. Asoka and his generals rode into the city to see the magnitude of their victory.

It was a personal triumph for Asoka. He himself had directed and won one of the world's great wars. He had gratified his ambition to enrich the state, and to extend the dominions of his empire. What was there to prevent him from becoming another even more glorious Alexander? Nothing, perhaps, but a few words dropped by an obscure beggar. As it was, however, no conqueror ever knew a more heart-breaking triumph.

What sights greeted his eyes! Everywhere he looked, disease and destruction had left their wake of suffering and despair. Bodies of the noble Kalingans, piled in heaps, lay in ghastly horror, gaunt forms struck down by pestilence and hunger. He wandered among endless thousands of blighted homes, unkept and forlorn, only to read a new tale of tragedy in every one. Here a wounded soldier, hacked by scythe or scimitar, had escaped immediate slaughter only to die of disease. There, the lifeless form of a woman, and clinging to her in helpless terror, the starved shadow of a living child. A soldier could endure the sights of battle, but who could look upon these widows dumb with anguish, wondering children, sick and helpless, and the staring, sightless eyes of the dead? A whole virile nation had been crushed and wasted.

Outside the gates of the city groups of weeping mourners were bearing their dead and erecting funeral piles for their cremation. Hundreds of columns of flame shot upward and long wreaths of black smoke commingled and intertwined. To the king's cultivated senses, the horror of the smell was even more appalling than the abomination of the sight. No skilled specialist among the perfumers tonight can concoct a symphony that will mitigate the noisome horror of this one. Asoka asked his generals to proceed without him and sat down alone upon a mound in the Kalingan cemetery. With startling realism the cemetery scene of so many years ago flashed before him, and he could hear the samanna saying, "How common it is to find both laymen and priests who think, 'What wonders I can work! See how I bend others to my will!' Vain braggarts do not undertake work because of some great purpose in view, some benefit to be accomplished. They think only in terms of their own honor and gain. Everything in their eyes is useful only as a pedestal to set them up above their companions."

The words of the samanna were calm and his manner gentle, but the message they carried stung the king like a white-hot sword. Never until this moment had he seriously considered the personal bearing of the instruction. Now every syllable rang with convic-

tion. "What wonders I have wrought! How I have bent others to my will! And, great Siva, what a pedestal!"

In this hour Asoka suffered the blackness of remorse as many another sinner before and since has suffered in the hour of his conversion. Then the more uplifting parts of the message gripped his thought. "Do not swell your feelings of self esteem in the humbling of your associates. If they are below you lift them by your comfort and charity. Conquer your foe by force and you increase his enmity; conquer by love, and you reap no after sorrow."

As he pondered the significance of the words, hope began to mingle with remorse, and resolution moved him to action. Still repeating the words of the samanna, which returned with ever-growing conviction, he started at a brisk pace toward his headquarters. "Show true superiority by superior conduct, by the superior judgment you can apply to living. Order your life so that your satisfaction will be realized in the noble creations of your intelligence." That was it! In the short years left to him, he would devote his authority and ability to intelligent, creative effort, and wipe out the stain of this hateful conquest. The remaining victories must be victories of great ideas. "Ideas will remain. They will be put into execution by others, in a line of virtuous deeds." Was it possible that the millions under his command could be kindled by generous motives as easily as they had been called to war? If so, what a transformation in his empire could be wrought! "A loving heart is the great requirement. Not to oppress, not to destroy, not to exalt oneself by treading down others, but to comfort and befriend the suffering." Already he caught visions of a marvellous revolution. The gloom gave way to a flood of spiritual exaltation. The very stones shouted in ecstasy. This hateful triumph of ambitious cruelty in Kalinga had shown him the way to a spiritual triumph of kindness and service throughout the world.

He returned to the capital, Pataliputra (Patna) an entirely different Asoka from the one that had sallied forth a few weeks before. His life henceforth was devoted to the service of his fellow men, the only military monarch on record who ever abandoned warfare after victory. In haste he sent couriers to find the monk, Upagupta, whose discourse had been instrumental in his great conversion. Upagupta, now like the king, a man of advancing years, explained that his sayings had been those of a more famous master, Gotamo, the Sakya sage, and together the emperor and he set about a study and interpretation of the great doctrines of the "Enlight-

ened One." The more he studied the traditions and the written accounts that were available, the more they captured his mind and heart. Immediately his enormous power and immense resources were employed to carry out the Buddha's teachings.

The first step was to reduce the sum of pain and misery in the world. For the millions of thirsty laborers, toiling over Indian roads in the tropic heat, he planted a continuous line of shade trees, and dug wells at frequent intervals. All over his own kingdom, and neighboring states as well, he set up hospitals, for suffering men and beasts. These became not only refuges for the injured and diseased, but training schools for nurses and physicians, and stations for the growth of healing herbs and the distribution of medicines, the first hospitals and medical schools in history.

Gotamo had said, "If a man will first make himself the model of what he would like others to be, then he can profitably undertake to mold others to his pattern. Perfecting himself, however, will constitute his most difficult task." Asoka therefore set the example in the humane treatment of animals by abolishing the royal hunt, and greatly reducing the use of meat on the royal tables. Sacrifices of most animals were forbidden and wild life protected, though not to the fanatical extreme reached in later centuries.

Other heartless customs of Chandragupta and his predecessors Asoka discontinued. One was the curious horse sacrifice of ancient India. The game was to turn loose a magnificent young stallion, with a hundred older animals following to wander off at will. The king with all his army followed. If any force ventured to interfere, they fell upon them and engaged in battle. The horse, of course, might be judiciously guided into the domains of an enemy and so made the occasion of a welcome quarrel. After the ceremony, the horse was yoked with others to a gold car and sacrificed to the fire spirit. Instead of using these fantastic means to provoke war, Asoka's great concern, after his conversion, was to produce friendship and help for bordering tribes.

Even greater than Asoka's concern for the physical well-being of man and beast, was his concern for the general moral welfare. He longed to have all men fused, like himself, with Gotamo's ideals of service. Along with his "healing arrangements," therefore, and perhaps as part of it, he founded the greatest missionary enterprise in the history of the world. Eighty-four thousand missionaries he is said to have dispatched to different parts of India and in a surprisingly short time India and Ceylon had been converted to



Buddhist teachings. Through the influence of others sent to countries beyond, Buddhism in some form eventually extended over Burma, Siam, Cambodia, the Indian Archipelago, China, Korea, Japan, Mongolia, Thibet' and other countries of Asia. According to Professor Mahaffy, Buddhist monks were preaching in Palestine and Syria two hundred years before Christ. Asoka's own brother and sister or daughter went as missionaries to Ceylon.

In his own kingdom, missionaries were not only moral instructors, but enthusiastic teachers of reading and writing. Where Megasthenes, two generations before, had found a people notably illiterate, now the ability to read and write was widespread. Through the written word, the king was thus enabled to speak to his subjects directly, and this he did by setting up stone pillars, carved with the messages he wished to convey. Tradition states that 64,000 of these memorial columns were erected, of which only thirty-five widely scattered ones remain. The others have been destroyed in one way and another—often by later Mohammedan fanatics, who could not read the inscriptions, and burst the huge stones with fire, to get the supposedly idolatrous objects out of the way. The remaining pillars, now readily deciphered by modern scholars, give a remarkable picture of this peerless monarch.

On one of them, he says, "In his majesty's opinion, the highest triumph is the triumph of principle. He considers profitable only what effects the future. He has raised this memorial so that his descendents may not feel it their duty to attempt new wars of conquest. If perchance they become involved in war, they should take pride in using patience and mercy toward their foes, always remembering that the only true conquest is the triumph of righteousness. Let your enthusiasm be directed toward constructive labor, for that alone brings happiness in this world and the next."

Again: "On the roads I have had banyan trees set out to give shade to man and beast, and every little way bowers of mango trees planted and wells dug, rest houses erected and watering places provided for the general enjoyment. A small matter, however, is this so-called enjoyment. The real merit in what I have done lies in the features that other men will adopt and emulate. In increasing measure they will learn to accept the wisdom of former generations, they will apply the learning of scholars, respect the aged, the Brahmans, the holy men, the unfortunate, yes, even laborers and slaves."

The time that Asoka had formerly spent in hunting he now devoted to pious tours of his kingdom—not with a company of nobles and huge retinue of retainers, as in his grandfather's day, but often with only a companion or two, going afoot from camp, dressed in the garb of a friar, and preaching along the way. The most famous of these pilgrimages was made about the twenty-first year of his reign, in company with his beloved teacher, Upagupta, to the places associated with Gotamo—his traditional birthplace, the Lumbino gardens, the famous Bo-tree where he received his great inspiration, his burial place, and others. At each shrine visited he had stupas or topes erected and inscribed with the words of Upagupta, as he presented them to his royal disciple. To Asoka and Upagupta, the stupa, or funeral stone, had very deep and sacred associations, hence this emblem became to the Buddhist what the cross became to the Christian. Each found his highest symbol of devotion in the chief memorial of his persecution. A cutting of the Bo-tree he sent to Ceylon, where it is still growing, the oldest tree known, and an object of deepest reverence to the inhabitants.

Asoka was eager to share his belief in the teachings of Gotamo, but he sought converts only by peaceful persuasion and reasonable conviction; he did not press the doctrines upon anybody by authority or the force of arms. Other sects were not only tolerated but assisted. The Jains for example, entertained religious views quite different from Asoka's, but he constructed places of worship according to their wishes, beautiful rock temples, still in existence, carved from solid stone and polished to mirror luster. Of the various beliefs Asoka said, "One ought not to glorify his own creed and belittle others' without reason. Let him be sure of the grounds for his criticism, for the other sects also deserve reverence for one reason or another. By regarding them kindly, he does credit to his own sect and others at the same time. On the other hand, by fanatical opposition, he discredits himself and does disservice to others."

Tolerant as Asoka was of creeds frankly different from his own, he had little sympathy with factions within his own church, who produced disunion on petty doctrinal questions or deceived the people with false beliefs. The king's patronage of religious teachers had induced evil men to assume the yellow robe of friars and give forth their own opinions as the teachings of Buddha. In the eighteenth year of his reign, therefore, Asoka called a council of one thousand leading elders, and with their help collected as much as possible of the actual sayings of Gotamo, in the language of his central kingdom

(Magadha) and this still remains the basic scriptures of southern Buddhists.

Asoka's labors in behalf of his faith does not seem to have interfered with efficient administration of the empire. Asoka followed the wise policy of giving his appointed officers great freedom in the management of their business. He allowed them room to exercise unlimited judgment and enterprize, as their individual genius or circumstances might warrant. He asked only for creditable results, without prescribing in detail how these results were to be brought about. He did not leave results to conjecture, however, but had thorough surveys and investigations of the work of his viceroys and commissioners made by a trusted board of independent inspectors or censors, who, from time to time, reported to the king conditions in every locality, even the morals of his own household. As a further guarantee or check-up on the promptness and virtue of his officers, he had a bell placed over his bed, wherever he slept, and connected by a cord to the outer courtyard, within reach of any citizen. Any one of high or low degree, who failed to get justice through the regular channels, was at liberty to ring the bell, Atri-fashion, and call the king's attention to his grievance. Doubtless, it paid commissioners to see that the king did not have to lose too much sleep on their account.

One point that Asoka made much of in his instruction to his officers, we of this day could profitably take to heart. He insisted that laws and ordinances were of small account; that good government must depend, not on external regulations, but in improved personal conviction, brought about by a study of moral truths.

If Asoka was exacting in his demands upon his officers, and insistent that they do everything possible for the public good, he was no less exacting with himself. "Whether I am dining," he said, "or in the woman's apartment, or driving, or in bed or in the garden, my agents are to report to me upon the business of the people. If fraud is committed, if by any chance I give a verbal order to one of my officials, and in carrying it out a dispute arises, I have commanded that the whole matter be reported to me at any hour and place. I am never fully satisfied with my efforts. I must do as much as possible for the welfare of mankind. The way to achieve this is by energy and dispatch."

Where Asoka felt that a great principle was at stake, he did not hesitate to go contrary to the popular will. His abolition of animal sacrifices undoubtedly shocked millions of his subjects, who consid-

ered this a deep religious obligation. The slaughter, nevertheless, was stopped. In matters of belief, Asoka let people think as they had a mind to; in matters of behavior, however, they must do as they were told. One of the deepest of popular prejudices which Asoka fought against was one that has crippled India for ages—the caste system. The aboriginal tribes on the borders of Aryan India were considered as less than animals by the Hindus, and treated with cruelty and disdain. Asoka's proclamation was: "If you ask what is the king's command with regard to the unconquered tribes on the frontiers or what does he desire these people to understand, the answer is—the king desires that they shall not be afraid of him, that they should trust him, and should receive from his hand benefits—not misfortune. They should grasp the fact that the king will have patience with them, and that for his sake they should do right, and so profit in this world and the next. Now it is for you to do your part to make the people trust me, and show them that the king loves them as himself, and that they are as his children." It is hard to see how this delicate matter could be handled in a more firm yet tactful way.

As the years advanced Asoka turned over the affairs of state more and more to his successors, and devoted more of his own time to the enjoyment of his religion. For long periods he even adopted the yellow robes of a begging friar, setting aside all worldly care, devoted his waning strength to spreading his favorite gospel of "love of duty, self-examination, obedience to principle, reverence for others, and hard work."

Where he died or how we have no means of knowing. The great builder and marker of shrines had no lasting tombstone over his own grave. Unfortunately Asoka's descendents were unable to maintain his spirit nor his power. Within fifty years, the last of the Maurya dynasty was slain by his commander-in-chief and the empire crumbled to pieces. The forces of reaction set in. Culture declined. Buddhism, with its rejection of magic, cruelty, caste and superstition, and its emphasis upon right ideals and practical philanthropy, died out of popular favor in the land of its origin, though continuing to spread in lands of its adoption.

The wonder is not that Asoka's life and influence were so soon forgotten but they lasted as long as they did. If the downward recoil of his people from the high standards he set for them seems sudden, it is only because of a principle that the great Gotamo made plain, and Asoka often repeated: "It is what people do for them-

selves that counts, not what others do for them." Asoka, in a reign of over two score years, did great things for his nation and for the world, attaining centuries of progress in as many years, but even his long reign and his heroic exertion were not enough to teach the world to adopt and carry out these policies on their own initiative. Thanks to a few other men like Asoka, it is a lesson we are slowly and unsteadily learning to apply.

Through the dim distance of the ages, then, we glimpse the noble figure of one of the greatest kings in history—a strong man of high ideals, unflagging diligence and pious devotion. Reared himself in an atmosphere of colossal intrigue, cruelty, extravagance, voluptuousness and oppression, he became a paragon of honor, humanity, simplicity, purity and service. He put himself at the head of an unpopular reform begun by an obscure sect in his own country, and made it a world religion numbering more nominal believers than any other. The enormous taxes that he levied were returned to the people in magnificent buildings, monuments, and other useful public works. Not only was he centuries ahead of his own times in establishing hospitals, roads, groves, schools, disarmament, and the fruits of industry and tranquility, but perhaps centuries ahead of our times in promoting speedy justice, universal industry, democratic toleration, mobilization of initiative and intelligence of subordinate officials, and charging them not merely with responsibility for the detection and punishment of wrongdoing, but with the obligation of using anticipatory instruction and guidance by which wrongdoing could be prevented. The admonition that we find oftenest repeated by him is, "Let small and great exert themselves."

The most modest estimate of his life work and statement of his ideals is the one he makes himself: "Former kings have brought divers blessings to mankind as well as I. My special thought has been to educate men to a devotion to principles of honor. What are these principles of honor? Reverence, useful labor, kindness of heart, liberality to others, loyalty to fact and personal integrity.

"There is no charity like the charity founded upon these principles; no such friendship, no such brotherhood.

"Both this world and the next are hard to master, save by intense love of duty, searching self-examination, strict obedience to principle, deep reverence for others and plenty of hard work."

His last words were, "Through exertion comes the great reward; it cannot be obtained by position or influence. The humblest man, if he will exert himself somewhat, can win great future bliss."