

Friends,

To-day's public meeting is being held under remarkable and unique auspices. For the first time the Thrice-Sacred Anniversary of the Birth, Enlightenment and Nirvana of Gautama, the Buddha, is being observed as a National Day. The Government and People of this great country having declared this auspicious day a Public Holiday, have paid homage to one of India's greatest sons whose teaching had carried the spiritual and cultural message of India far beyond her borders. Buddhism from the very outset transcended racial and political barriers and was the first to preach the unity of mankind regardless of race. In many of the countries once penetrated by Buddhism, it has given place to other creeds and its very name has been forgotten, but its spiritual and cultural heritage remains, often in a new garb. Thus the Sufi madrase, or religious schools, in medieval Bukhara in Central Asia were modelled on Buddhist viharas, and even the very name of Bukhara goes back to vihara, a Buddhist monastic school. Wherever it penetrated, Buddhism moulded the spiritual life and character of the people, enriched their literature and arts, and has given them a certain unity of outlook which is perhaps one of the its greatest contributions. From the very beginning of its propagation, Buddhism, mindful of the words of its Founder - "Go ye and wander forth for the gain, for the welfare of many, in compassion to the World"-inspired and allied itself to movements which strove towards social justice and equity. Buddhism became truly the Culture of Asia, the Light of Asia in the words of Edwin Arnold. To-day in every corner of the vast Buddhist World, in China and far-distant Siberia, in Tibet and Mongolia, and in the countries of South-east Asia, the Day is being celebrated as a day of great dedication, and many hearts and minds will turn to-day towards this country in remembrance



of the Great Founder. We consider that the observance of this day as a National Holiday, marks the beginning of a new epoch. Indeed, few ancient teachings have a greater affinity with modern trends of scientific and philosophic thought. Buddhism with its unique stress on knowledge, its doctrine of the Unity of Mind and Matter, the eternity of the Universe, the principle of relativity, its dialectical approach to the problems of Life, its teaching of equality of men and above all its appeal to serve mankind, stands out as a forerunner of modern trends which agitate our present World. When properly interpreted the words of the Buddha show a remarkable actuality of ideas. In the past great men belonging to the non-buddhist world, such as the German philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer, the great German composer Richard Wagner and the English poet and thinker Edwin Arnold, to mention only a few, have acclaimed Buddhism and have acquainted the Western World with Buddhism as a living faith. The great Russian philosopher of the last century Vladimir Soloviev once said, "to the Buddhist Way of Thinking belongs the future." To all those who battle in the name of a better World, against ignorance and violence, who uphold human dignity and a fearless search for the Ultimate Truth, the teaching of the Buddha has and will have a great appeal. Buddha, the builder of human character, who stressed courage and constant awareness, freedom of thought and tolerance born of it, who battled against prejudices and affirmed the assimilation of the two extremes, will always remain a symbol of constant striving, a beacon towering above humanity.

In dedicating ourselves to these lofty ideals, let us repeat again the words of the Founder, preserved in the Anguttara-Nikaya:

"For lofty virtue, for high endeavour, for sublime wisdom, for these things do we wage war; therefore are we called warriors."