

METTANANDA CRITICS

MY critics, Havanpola Ratanasara Thero, Talpawila Seelawansa Thero and Mahapitigama Buddharakkhita Thero, bring to my mind the old fairy tale of Hans Andersen where a foolish king duped by clever imposters paraded the streets

naked thinking that he was wearing the most gorgeous apparel. Everyone anxious to please the king praised the imaginary clothes until a child brought all the pretence to an end by shouting "Why, he is quite naked." Substitute dussila monks for the king, their yellow robes for the imaginary clothes and me for the child and there is a modern version of the story. There is, however, a difference, the king in the fairy tale was discreet enough to turn and run and saved further problems. No one asked the child to recant.

The thesis I sought to establish in my letter of 4th September was that the immoral government having been expelled by the bhikkhus, it was time for them to cleanse their own ranks of immoral monks. A yellow robe no more makes a Buddhist monk than the proverbial black cow his Christian counterpart. I have not been told I am wrong, but I have been ordered to recant.

Let me see what I can recant of the statement I made in my letter. Shall I stoutly deny that the Buddha placed a high value on the discipline of his order? If my critics help me with a declaration that the Vinaya is apocryphal, I would have some chance of recanting my statement. Shall I say that the Arahants at the First Council did not declare that the Vinaya was the life of the Buddha's religion and as long as there was Vinaya, the religion would last? If my critics would re-write the early history of Buddhism omitting this incident, I would have some chance of recanting.

Coming down to more recent events, it is certainly not possible for me to recant my statement that certain bhikkhus sent a letter to the Prime Minister using the signature-franks of certain other bhikkhus, who were at the time over a thousand miles away. Nor is it possible for me to recant what I said about the application for a Buddhist monk to go on a scholarship to a number of places including the Papal Seminary at Rome which cited as a qualification that he was the joint secretary of the E.B.P. And lastly can I honestly say that the Buddhists do not disapprove the conduct of the dussila monks? As these are facts, I do not see what I can possibly recant.

Therefore, I can only repeat my thesis which was not denied — those who claim to lead the Sangha must have the qualification for such a lofty role. I could have looked on like the men in the fairy tale and said, What a grand display! and perhaps all would be well. Or would it? There lies the rub. Was the child not right for having spoken what he saw to be true? The public must judge. I shall pass on to other things.

I find that my critics have hurled a torrent of abuse at me. This is in keeping with the practice of the bad advocate who believes when you have no case, abuse. I am told I have undergone a metamorphosis of late. I am a buffoon, a tiger, a clown, a hypocrite, a laughing-stock, an eccentric opportunist, an ultra-extremist-nationalist. I am mad for revenge, boiling with anger, bursting with hatred, scorching with envy, now attacking the Catholic Church, now the Prime Minister and now the Sangha. I am a dangerous man, disrupting society, disrupting the government, disrupting the Sangha. This last is a sad insult to the Sangha, if my critics think that my statement that the Sangha should be cleansed of dussila monks is going to cause disruption!

The reason alleged for this metamorphosis is that I failed to get into the Cabinet through the backdoor. I am grateful that Hemitadepa Gnanaseeha Thero has nailed this canard to the counter and he knows me better than any other of the Peramuna. Gnanaseeha Thero, who went to see the Prime Minister at Horagolla on April 9 wrote to the Press on September 9 as follows:—

"Mr. Mettananda did not summon the bhikkhus to his residence for the purpose of getting himself recommended for the office of Minister of Education nor did he make any endeavour towards that end."

I am accused of hypocrisy, the allegation being that although I publicly declare that I have no personal ambition to achieve, yet I am secretly seeking office. The facts are these. In early May, I was offered the post of Minister Plenipotentiary in Burma, carrying an annual salary of Rs. 33,350 with other allowances and diplomatic privileges. The idea of serving in a Buddhist country which has done so much for Buddha was appealing to me. But I pointed out to the Prime Minister at the two main issues, the

I am also accused of giving every encouragement to Mr. F. R. Jayasuriya in his fast and of expecting the EPB to follow me. This is another canard like the story of the Education Ministry. I did not ask Mr. Jayasuriya to fast nor did I ask any bhikkhu to support him. I was in sympathy with Mr. Jayasuriya in the object for which he fasted. But for his fast, the clause in the official language Bill giving option to local bodies to select the language of local administration would have gone through, and places like Colombo, Moratuwa, Negombo, Nawalapitiya, Kandy, Matale and many others would have become areas where Tamil would have eventually become an official language. All I did was to ask the Prime Minister to intervene to stop the fast. Although Mr. Jayasuriya and I saw eye to eye on the language issue, it is entirely wrong to assume that I had anything to do with him on any of the other issues which he recently espoused.

My second critic, Talpawila Seelawansa Thero, has cited an incident of over twenty years ago to discredit me. In 1936, a mass meeting of Buddhists was held at Ananda College under the chairmanship of the late Mr. Sri Nissanka to protest against the degradation of an ancient statue at Polonnaruwa by a group of St. Joseph's College students who had sat upon it and got themselves photographed. I, too, joined in this protest. At the meeting, the chairman read out a letter of apology from the Roman Catholic Hierarchy. After several speeches had been made, a committee was appointed to deal with the question. When the matter was discussed in committee some of its members including myself suggested that the apology be accepted and on further action be taken. Was this unbuddhist? But the others including Talpawila Seelawansa Thero decided to prosecute the students and to hold a meeting later at Ananda College to discuss, among other things, plans to collect money to finance the prosecution. Then I, as the head of Ananda College, wrote to the Secretary, Talpawila Seelawansa Thero, saying that I would not allow Ananda College to be associated with the prosecution of the students of a sister institution on whose behalf an apology was tendered by proper authority. And when an effort was made to hold the meeting by force, I ordered the College gates to be locked. I am reminded that on that occasion I supported St. Joseph's College but today I have developed a hatred towards the Roman Catholics.

I must offer a word of explanation to my Catholic friends. I was their friend in 1936. I admit, I am their friend even today. But I am against the functioning of Roman Catholic Church as a State within a State, on the one hand, seducing Buddhist children from the faith of their fathers, and on the other hand drawing away our Roman Catholic fellow-countrymen from their loyalty to the country and making them, instead, the subjects of a foreign power, the Vatican, thus endangering the security and unity of our common fatherland.

Of the third critic, Mahapitigama Buddharakkhita Thero, I have very little to say. In his reply he has given himself a certificate as a bhikkhu who is "noble, religious and responsible... sincere, wise and self-sacrificing."

I make no comment. And so I may return to my thesis which I feel has been discreetly left alone by my critics. The mass of abuse that has been hurled may have obliterated it somewhat out of my reader's mind and that is why I have re-stated it. The Dasa Panatha or Ten Point Programme to which the three worthies mentioned above subscribed has as the second point.

"To fight against evil, wherever and in whatever guise it presents itself."

I am sure many Buddhist laymen share with me the view that we would like to fight evil most when it appears disguised within the folds of a yellow robe. Let us fight the evil in the palatial mansion in which we may meet it, in the limousine car and on broad acres which are very remote from the path Buddha trod. Let us rather die fighting than yield to this evil, for as the Buddha said:

"සංගමෙ මෙ මනං සෙ යො
යංවෙ ජීවෙ පරාජිතො"

(In the struggle (with Mara), I prefer to die rather than to live as his slave.)

May this Buddha Jayanthi year, a year of prophesy, fulfil itself as regards all matters both within and without the Sangha.

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