

## SERVICES TO CEYLON BUDDHISTS

ONE of the services for which the Buddhists of Ceylon will be ever grateful to Colonel Olcott is the aid which he gave in getting Buddhism better recognised by the Government of Ceylon. Before 1884, Christian festivals like Christmas and Easter were Government holidays, but not the chief festival of the Buddhists, the Wesak Full Moon. On this sacred day of the Buddhists, missionary schools naturally kept open, but Buddhist boys in them who stayed away on their festival were not infrequently disciplined. In 1883, Buddhists had been wantonly attacked by Christians as a result of missionary instigation, and rioting and bloodshed had ensued which necessitated the calling out of the military. Colonel Olcott was invited to help the cause of the Buddhists. He was deputed by them to present their cause to the Colonial Secretary in London, Lord Derby, and to gain redress for the Buddhists. He was successful in his mission. It was at this time that, owing to his representations, the Full Moon Day of Wesak was made a Government holiday in Ceylon. Soon afterwards, a similar recognition was given to the principal Hindu festival.

It was in 1886 also, that Colonel Olcott rendered another signal service to Buddhists. In a letter which Colonel Olcott received in 1880 from the High Priest Sumangala of Colombo, the High Priest lauded his work as that of a "second Asoka". Like Asoka, Colonel Olcott had very great ingenuity in reviving the spirit of Buddhist institutions. One action of his, though seemingly slight in effectiveness at the time, has been a very valuable factor in the revival of Buddhism. This

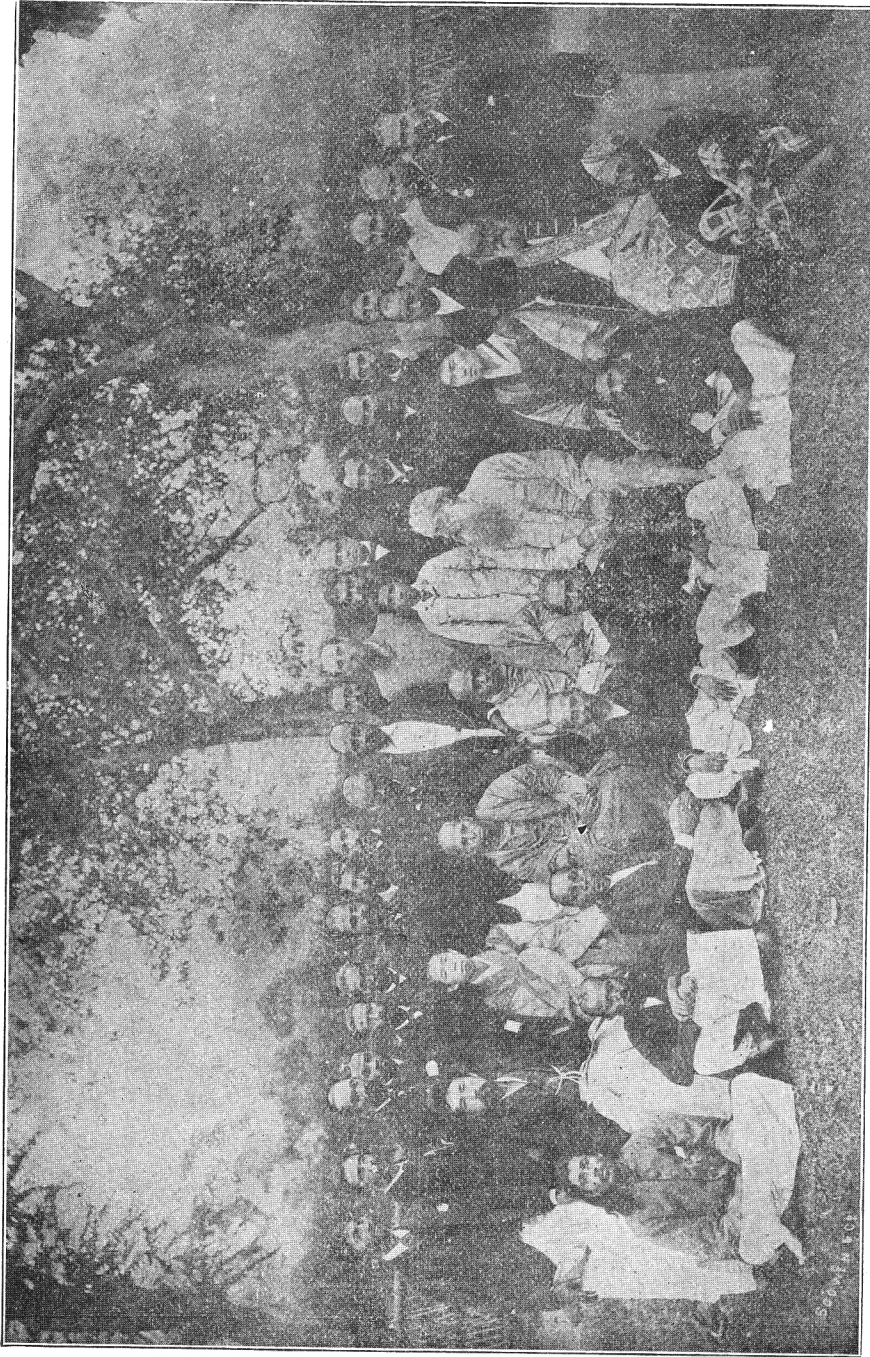


Fig. 107

## BUDDHIST GROUP IN CEYLON, 1889

Left to right standing: —Dullewe, C. Wijayasinghe, —Sirisena, C. D. Bastian, —Wimalasriya, W. F. Wijeyesekera, —Mahagedera, —Cooray, —, C. W. Leadbeater, —, —Pieris, M. C. Perera, Sadrís Silva, —, N. S. Ferrando, “Bob” (servant of Colonel Olcott), H. P. Fernando, James Perera.

Seated on chairs : 2 Japanese monks, Rev. H. Devamitta, Rt. Rev. H. Sumangala, Col. Olcott, Japanese monk, Muhandiram A. P. Dharmagunawardana.

Seated on ground : H. Dharmapala, Wevagama Banda, C. Don Carolis, William de Abrew, C. P. Gunawardana, Robert de Silva, —Aliph (Malay).

was the creation by him of a Buddhist Flag. He found in Buddhist tradition that the sacred books constantly mentioned the colours in the aura of the Lord Buddha. Colonel Olcott took these six colours, and arranged them so as to make a flag. This flag became very quickly a religious symbol for all the Buddhists of Ceylon. To-day its use is widespread in the island. Especially during the Wesak Festival, Buddhist temples and homes are beflagged with the colours of the aura of the Lord Buddha.



FIG. 108

COLONEL OLCOTT AND RT. REV. H. SUMANGALA

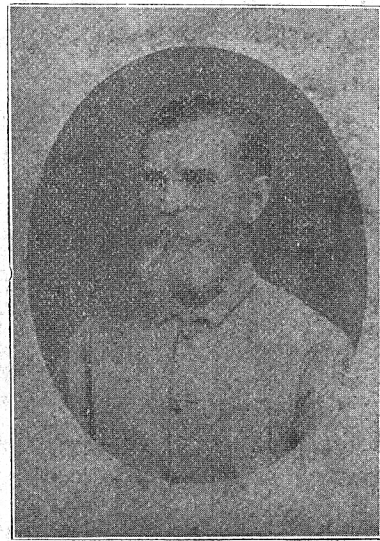


FIG. 109

C. F. POWELL

After C. W. Leadbeater left Ceylon in November, 1889, there came to help in the Buddhist work Charles F. Powell of America (Fig. 109). He was a veteran of the Civil War, a man of simple faith and dedication. His work for the Society was brief, for he died while on a Theosophical lecture tour in South India.