

## 6. THE DISCOVERY OF THE BIRTHPLACE OF THE BUDDHA.

DEAR PROFESSOR RHYS DAVIDS,—As a misleading account of the discovery of this long-lost and important historical site has been widely published, giving the entire credit of it to Mr. Führer, the Archæological Surveyor of the North-West Provinces of India, I have been asked in the interests of accuracy, and in justice to myself, to put on record a statement of the facts as to the manner in which the discovery was really made.

For many years past I had been devoting a portion of my holidays to a search for this celebrated ancient site—Kapilavastu, the birthplace of Prince Gautama Siddharta, the Buddha Sakya Muni—as well as for that of the Buddha's death, Kuṣināra, ever since I had realized that General Cunningham's identification of the villages of Bhula and Kesia with those sites was clearly altogether false. Indeed, the geographical position of these two villages was so palpably out of keeping with that of the ancient sites in question, as recorded by our chief guides, the Chinese pilgrims Fa Hien and Hiuen Tsiang, who had visited India in the fifth and seventh centuries A.D., that Cunningham's identifications were rejected or strongly doubted by Fergusson, Oldenburg, and Beal, although these latter authorities had never themselves even visited these places. And more decidedly so was this my opinion when I visited these spots specially to determine this question. Not only did I find that the geographical position of both these villages was inconsistent with such identifications, but equally so was the topography, as well as the absence of characteristic remains and inscriptions, even after the extensive digging which had been done by Sir Alexander Cunningham and his staff. And a similar adverse opinion was independently formed, as I was afterwards told, by Mr. Vincent Smith and Dr. Hoey, after their visit to these spots. So whatever ancient places Bhula and Kesia might turn out to be, they certainly were not Kapilavastu and Kuṣināra.

Pursuing my search for these two famous lost sites, and attempting to trace the itineraries thither of the Chinese pilgrims, I cross-quartered the greater part of the country in question, which lay within British territory, traversing in this search some thousands of miles, of which several hundreds had to be done on foot. But this tract of plains to the north of the Ganges was so much cut up by the ever-shifting channels of the mighty rivers which debouch from the Himalayas, that it was almost impossible, in the absence of characteristic inscriptions and without digging, to identify conclusively any of the ruins found with any of the particular Buddhist sites described in the Chinese pilgrims' itineraries, when, as in the present case, the latter lay far inland beyond the bank of the Ganges. It seemed even doubtful whether Sahet-Mahet really represented Śravasti. Indeed, almost the only absolutely fixed point in this trans-Gangetic tract from which one could try to locate the two sites searched for, were Banaras and the modern Basarh, the ancient Vaiṣāli, both of which lay over a hundred miles distant from the two sites in question. The results, therefore, of these researches were not, as regards this inquiry, at all satisfactorily definite. Still, in addition to accumulating much minor archaeological information, I formed the opinion, from a close study of the locality, that the line of Aśōka-edict pillars which runs north-westwards from Paṭaliputra seemed intended to mark the route of Buddha's last journey to Kuṣināra, where he died<sup>1</sup>; also that Kuṣināra itself might possibly prove to be Navandgarh with its Aśōka pillar and numerous mounds, to the north of Bettiah, though without digging it was, of course, impossible to be at all certain as to this supposed identity; while the birthplace of Buddha seemed to lie either in the extreme north-west of the modern Gorakhpur district, where I had not visited, or in the Nepalese Terai, where a Tibetan manuscript of mine had placed it.

When, therefore, an inscribed Aśōka pillar was reported in 1893 to have been found in this part of the Nepalese

<sup>1</sup> See my paper in *J.A.S. Bengal*, 1896, p. 279.

Terai by a Nepalese officer on a hunting excursion at Nigliva, on the frontier of the North-West Provinces, I wrote to the Archæological Surveyor of the North-West Provinces, Mr. Führer, asking about the inscription, but I received no reply. Again, when that inscription was published two years later, in 1895, by Professor Bühler,<sup>1</sup> from a paper-impression, said to have been taken by Mr. Führer, I at once saw the clue which this inscription of Konkamana's pillar supplied towards fixing the site of Buddha's birthplace in its neighbourhood. I therefore again wrote to the last-named officer, Mr. Führer, for further particulars; but received no reply, and only after much difficulty and delay did I procure a copy of his report through the Bengal Government. But that report, which I was officially informed was the only one published, made no reference whatever to what was by far the most important indication which this newly-found pillar at Nigliva gave us, namely, that it guided us to the very spot in its neighbourhood where lay the ruins of Buddha's birthplace, for which we had been seeking so long.

On finding that Mr. Führer had failed to see the most valuable aspect of this pillar, I immediately sent a memorandum to the Bengal Asiatic Society, on May 13, 1896, pointing out the great geographical importance of this pillar, and urging that steps should at once be taken to recover the historic monuments of Kapilavastu and the Lumbini Garden which certainly lay in the jungle at the spot in the neighbourhood, which I indicated from the itineraries of the Chinese and Tibetan pilgrims. But my note was returned to me after twelve days by the acting Secretary, with the intimation that it could not be "read" at the next meeting of the Society in June, for according to some new rules no paper could be "read" until it was in print. Finding that that Society showed so little interest in this important matter,<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Academy* of April 27, 1895.

<sup>2</sup> At the request of one of the members I returned the paper on June 28, 1896, with some alteration in form and title, and it was "read" at the August meeting and duly published thereafter in the *Journal of the Bengal A.S.* 1896, p. 275 et seq.

and in order to arouse public interest in so romantic a subject, I threw my memorandum into popular form as an article to the Calcutta *Englishman*, entitled "Where is the Birthplace of Buddha?" and this was published in that newspaper on June 1, 1896, and it was immediately reproduced in all the leading newspapers of India. In that article, of which I send you a copy for record in the Library, I wrote—

"All this evidence points positively to the one conclusion, namely, that the long-lost birthplace of Sakya Muni, with its magnificent monuments, *certainly lies at a spot in the Nepalese Terai, about seven miles to the north-west of the Nepalese village of Nigliva, which is thirty-eight miles north-west of the Uska Station of the Bengal and North-Western Railway.* The Lumbini or Lumbuna grove (the actual birthplace) will be found three or four miles to the north of the village of Nigliva, and the old town of 'Na-pi-kia,' with its relic-mound and its inscribed Aṣōka's pillar, should be found about five miles to the south-west of that village. That no one has hitherto discovered Kapilavastu and its suburbs, is doubtless owing to its lying within the Nepalese Terai hidden amidst dense jungle; and the long distance at which it lay from any fixed point made its exact position somewhat uncertain. Now, however, that its position is here indicated, and in view of the invaluable historical treasures which it undoubtedly contains, it is desirable that Government should take early steps to procure the sanction of the Nepalese Government to its full exploration. I have no doubt that the present enlightened Government of Nepal will readily grant the necessary permission when it recognizes the non-Brahmanical character of these ruins. And it is to be hoped that the place will soon be made to disclose its secrets which are locked up in sandstone, bricks, and granite. Altogether we seem to be on the verge of one of the most important Indian archæological finds of the century."

This was published on June 1, 1896, and as it aroused so much public interest I addressed the following letter to the Government of India on June 11, 1896 :—

“No. 521A.

“*To the Secretary to the Government of India, General Department.*

“*Dated Calcutta, June 11, 1896.*

“I have the honour to forward for your information an article by me upon one of the most important of all ancient Indian sites, namely, the birthplace of Buddha and its Aṣōka's monuments. This lost site is shown by me to lie almost certainly within the Nepalese Terai at a point within seven miles or so to the north-west of the village of Nigliva, which is about thirty-eight miles to the NNW. of the Uska Station of the Bengal and North-Western Railway in Gorakhpur District.

“As the exploration of this place is likely to yield rich results of the utmost importance to Indian Archæology, I beg to recommend that the Nepalese Government be moved to grant the necessary permission for this work to be done, and the exploration should certainly be undertaken without delay.

“I have, etc.,

L. A. WADDELL.”

To this letter I received a reply stating that the Government of Bengal and the Resident at the Court of Nepal had been requested to take the matter up, and afford the necessary assistance for the exploration. And from these two sources I received the following letters :—

“*To Surgeon-Major L. A. Waddell, LL.D., Professor of Chemistry, Medical College, Calcutta.*

“*The Residency, Nepal.*

*August 7, 1896.*

“DEAR SIR,—Your letter, No. 521A, dated June 11 last, to the Secretary to the Government of India (General Revenue Department), has just been sent me for disposal.

“Will you please forward me a copy of your article on the ‘Birthplace of Buddha and its Aṣōka's Monuments.’ This will, I presume, enable me to see more clearly what you want and

render you more efficient help. . . . The Terai cannot be entered with any degree of safety by Europeans before the end of November at earliest.

“Yours, etc.,

H. WYLIE, Colonel.”

“No. 209.

“*Bengal Secretariat, General Department.*

*Calcutta, August 11, 1896.*

“Your letter, No. 521A, dated June 11, 1896, regarding the exploration of the site of the supposed birthplace of Buddha in the Nepalese Terai, has been referred by the Government of India to this Government for an expression of opinion. In the event of your being deputed to carry out the exploration, I am to inquire in what length of time you would expect to finish it. What would be the probable cost? It is believed that it will not be advisable to undertake the work until the cold weather is well advanced, as till then the Terai is exceedingly unhealthy.

“Yours, etc.,

E. M. KONSTAM,

Under-Secretary to the Government of Bengal.”

“*To Surgeon-Major L. A. Waddell, LL.D.*”

To these communications I replied on August 11, 1896, sending the information asked for, and giving a detailed statement of the establishment and equipment which were necessary for carrying out the exploration. The Government of Bengal, with its characteristic generosity in patronizing scientific investigations, agreed to bear the entire expense of these operations, and it asked the Government of India to set me free for six weeks in the cold weather to conduct this work. But it so happened that the latter Government could not at that time spare my services, and then, and only then, *Mr. Führer was sent to follow out the exploration which had been arranged by me, as is stated in the following letter:—*

“No. 42.

“*Bengal Secretariat, General Department.*

*Calcutta, February 5, 1897.*

“I am desired to inform you that the Government of India could not undertake to find a substitute to act for you; and, as it therefore seemed uncertain whether your services would be available for the exploration in the Nepal Terai, the Government of India decided to allow Dr. Führer, Archæological Surveyor, North-West Provinces and Oudh, to carry out the work.

“Yours, etc.,

E. M. KONSTAM,

Under-Secretary.”

“*To Surgeon-Major L. A. Waddell, LL.D.,*

*Professor of Chemistry, Medical College.”*

The sequel is well known. At the last moment, owing to its having been found impossible for me to go in person, Mr. Führer was sent to carry out the exploration which had been suggested and planned by me; and, using the machinery which I had set in motion, he proceeded to the spots which I had indicated, and there found the ruined monuments of Kapilavastu city and the Lumbini grove, with their numerous inscriptions, including amongst others one by the great emperor Piyadassi (Aṣōka) himself, recording, says Professor Bühler, that twenty years after his (Aṣōka's) accession (i.e. the latter half of the third century B.C.) he came to this very spot and there worshipped, saying, “Here was the Buddha, the Sakya ascetic, born,” and that he had erected this stone pillar, which records that “Here the Venerable One was born.”<sup>1</sup>

But, strange to say, Mr. Führer, with characteristic forgetfulness, has in all his reports on this subject studiously suppressed all reference to my important share in this discovery. It is not, however, I am sorry to say, the first

<sup>1</sup> Compare my article on *Upagupta as the High-Priest of Aṣōka* in J.A.S. Bengal, February, 1897, for some details as to the circumstances under which Aṣōka visited the Lumbini Garden and erected this very pillar.

time that he has appropriated wholesale the work of others without acknowledgment, as a reference to the *Athenæum* of September 28, 1895, p. 423, will show.

The above letters and extracts, nevertheless, speak for themselves. They (if I may be pardoned the apparently egotistical form of statement which has been forced on me by Mr. Führer's attitude) conclusively prove—

*Firstly*—That it was I who first pointed out the clue which the Nigiliva pillar gave us for fixing with absolute certainty the place of Buddha's birth, and where the latter was actually found.

*Secondly*—That it was I who moved the Government of India to have the spots explored.

*Thirdly*—That it was I who arranged details for the exploration.

*Fourthly*—That it was I who was to have conducted the exploration to recover the inscriptions, etc.; but at the last moment, when I was by adverse circumstances prevented from proceeding, and Mr. Führer was sent to carry out the exploration arranged by me, he found the Lumbini grove, etc., with their inscriptions at the very spots pointed out by me.

I am, etc.,

L. A. WADDELL.

*Corrie, Arran, N.B.*

*June 11, 1897.*