

# **EASTERN STORIES AND LEGENDS**

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Eastern Stories and Legends by Marie L. Shedlock & T. W. Rhys Davids & Annie Carroll Moore

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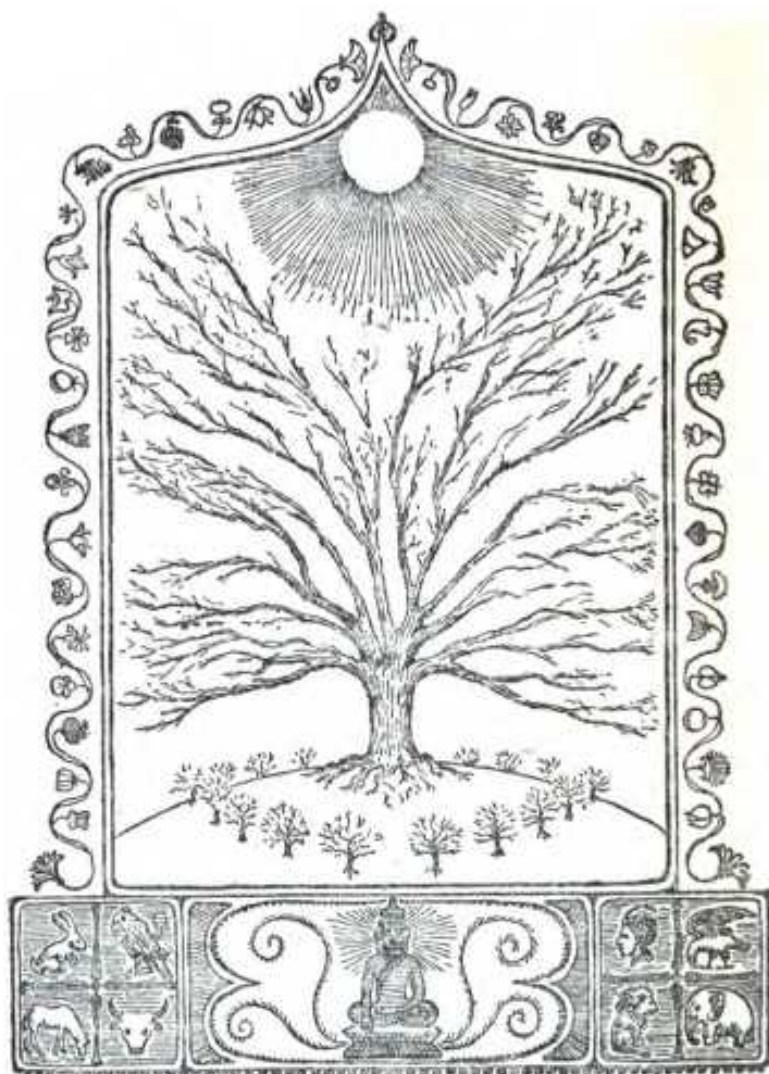
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AND LEGENDS**



# Eastern Stories and Legends

BY:  
**MARIE L. SHEDLOCK**

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INTRODUCTION BY  
**ANNIE CARROLL MOORE**  
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## FOREWORD

I RECOLLECT riding late one night along the high-road from Galle to Colombo. The road skirts the shore. On the left hand the long breakers of the Indian Ocean broke in ripples on the rocks in the many little bays. On the right an endless vista of tall cocoanut palms waved their top-knots over a park-like expanse of grass, and the huts of the peasantry were visible here and there beneath the trees. In the distance a crowd had gathered on the sward, either seated on the grass or leaning against the palms. I turned aside—no road was wanted—to see what brought them there that moonlight night.

The villagers had put an oval platform under the trees. On it were seated yellow robed monks with palm-leaf books on their laps. One was standing and addressing the folk, who were listening to *Bana*, that is

“The Word”—discourses, dialogues, legends, or stories from the Pali Canon. The stories were the well-known Birth-stories, that is the ancient fables and fairy-tales common to the Aryan race which had been consecrated, as it were, by the hero in each, whether man or animal, being identified with the Buddha in a former birth. To these wonderful stories the simple peasantry, men, women and children, clad in their best and brightest, listen the livelong night with unaffected delight, chatting pleasantly now and again with their neighbors; rising quietly and leaving for a time, and returning at their will, and indulging all the while in the mild narcotic of the betel-leaf, their stores of which afford a constant occasion for acts of polite good-fellowship. Neither preachers nor hearers may have that deep sense of evil in the world and in themselves, nor that high resolve to battle with and overcome it, which animated some of the first disciples. They all think they are earning “merit” by their easy service. But there is at least, at these full-moon festivals, a genuine feeling of human kindness, in harmony alike

with the teachings of Gotama and with the gentle beauty of those moonlit scenes.<sup>1</sup>

It is not only under the palm groves of the South that these stories are a perennial delight. Wherever Buddhism has gone they have gone with it. They are known and loved on the plains of Central Asia, in the valleys of Kashmir and Afghanistan, on the cold tablelands of Nepal, Tartary and Tibet, through the vast regions of India and China, in the islands of Japan and the Malay archipelago, and throughout the jungles of Siam and Annam.

And not only so. Soldiers of Alexander who had settled in the East, wandering merchants of many nations and climes, crusading knights and hermits who had mixed with Eastern folk, brought the stories from East to West. They were very popular in Europe in the Middle Ages; and were used, more especially by the clergy, as the subjects of numerous homilies, romances, anecdotes, poems and edifying plays and mysteries. The character of the hero of them in his last or former

<sup>1</sup> See Rhys Davids' *Buddhism* (S.P.C.K.), pp. 57, 58.