

**THE LIGHT OF ASIA; OR, THE GREAT
RENUNCIATION (MAHĀBHINISHKRAMANA):
BEING THE LIFE AND TEACHING OF GAUTAMA,
PRINCE OF INDIA AND FOUNDER RUDDHISM
(AS TOLD IN VERSE BY AN INDIAN BUDDHIST);
NOTICES OF "THE LIGHT OF ASIA.", PP. 1-20**

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EDWIN ARNOLD

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BY
EDWIN ARNOLD, M.A.

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THIS VOLUME
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THE SOVEREIGN, GRAND MASTER, AND COMPANIONS
OF
The Most Exalted Order of the Star of India
BY
THE AUTHOR.



P R E F A C E.

IN the following Poem I have sought, by the medium of an imaginary Buddhist votary, to depict the life and character and indicate the philosophy of that noble hero and reformer, Prince Gautama of India, the founder of Buddhism.

A generation ago little or nothing was known in Europe of this great faith of Asia, which had nevertheless existed during twenty-four centuries, and at this day surpasses, in the number of its followers and the area of its prevalence, any other form of creed. Four hundred and seventy millions of our race live and die in the tenets of Gautama ; and the spiritual dominions of this ancient teacher extend, at the present time, from Nepaul and Ceylon over the whole Eastern Peninsula to China, Japan, Thibet, Central Asia, Siberia, and even Swedish Lapland. India itself might fairly be included in this magnificent empire of belief, for though the profession of Buddhism has for the most part passed away from the land of its birth, the mark

of Gautama's sublime teaching is stamped ineffaceably upon modern Brahmanism, and the most characteristic habits and convictions of the Hindus are clearly due to the benign influence of Buddha's precepts. More than a third of mankind, therefore, owe their moral and religious ideas to this illustrious prince, whose personality, though imperfectly revealed in the existing sources of information, cannot but appear the highest, gentlest, holiest, and most beneficent, with one exception, in the history of Thought. Discordant in frequent particulars, and sorely overlaid by corruptions, inventions, and misconceptions, the Buddhistical books yet agree in the one point of recording nothing — no single act or word — which mars the perfect purity and tenderness of this Indian teacher, who united the truest princely qualities with the intellect of a sage and the passionate devotion of a martyr. Even M. Barthélemy St. Hilaire, totally misjudging, as he does, many points of Buddhism, is well cited by Professor Max Müller as saying of Prince Siddârtha, " Sa vie n'a point de tache. Son constant héroïsme égale sa conviction ; et si la théorie qu'il préconise est fausse, les exemples personnels qu'il donne sont irréprochables. Il est le modèle achevé de toutes les vertus qu'il prêche ; son abnégation, sa charité, son inaltérable douceur ne se démentent point un seul instant. . . . Il prépare silencieusement

sa doctrine par six années de retraite et de méditation ; il la propage par la seule puissance de la parole et de la persuasion pendant plus d'un demi-siècle, et quand il meurt entre les bras de ses disciples, c'est avec la sérénité d'un sage qui a pratiqué le bien toute sa vie, et qui est assuré d'avoir trouvé le vrai." To Gautama has consequently been given this stupendous conquest of humanity ; and — though he discountenanced ritual, and declared himself, even when on the threshold of Nirvana, to be only what all other men might become — the love and gratitude of Asia, disobeying his mandate, have given him fervent worship. Forests of flowers are daily laid upon his stainless shrines, and countless millions of lips daily repeat the formula, "I take refuge in Buddha !"

The Buddha of this poem — if, as need not be doubted, he really existed — was born on the borders of Nepaul, about 620 n.c., and died about 543 b.c. at Kusinagara in Oudh. In point of age, therefore, most other creeds are youthful compared with this venerable religion, which has in it the eternity of a universal hope, the immortality of a boundless love, an indestructible element of faith in final good, and the proudest assertion ever made of human freedom. The extravagances which disfigure the record and practice of Buddhism are to be referred to ~~that~~ inevitable degradation which priesthoods always