

The Life Or Legend Of Gaudama, Volume 1

Paul Ambroise Bigandet



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Buddhism and Gautama, the faith and its founder, whose followers are between four and five hundred millions of the human race, were comparatively unknown in Europe but a generation ago, and yet this great faith had continued for four and twenty centuries to spread over the vast lands of the East, taking deep and enduring root in all, from Bhotan, Nepaul, and Ceylon, over Further India to China Proper, Mongolia, Mantchooria, Tibet, and Japan.

Buddhism, as it is found in Burmah, has a particular claim to the attention of a diligent and attentive observer. We there have that religious creed or system as pure from adulteration as it can be after a lapse of so many centuries. Philosophy never flourished in Burmah, and, therefore, never modified the religious systems of the country. Hinduism never exercised any influence on the banks of the Irrawaddy. Chinese and Burmese have often met on battlefields, but the influence of the Middle Kingdom has never established itself in Burmah. In other words, Chinese Buddhism has never been able to penetrate into the customs and manners of the people, and has not attempted to communicate its own religion to its southern neighbours. It would seem that the true form of Buddhism is to be found in Burmah, and that a knowledge of that system can only be arrived at by the study of the religious books of Burmah, and by attentively observing the religious practices and ceremonies of the people. This is what Bishop Bigandet has endeavoured to do throughout his work.

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