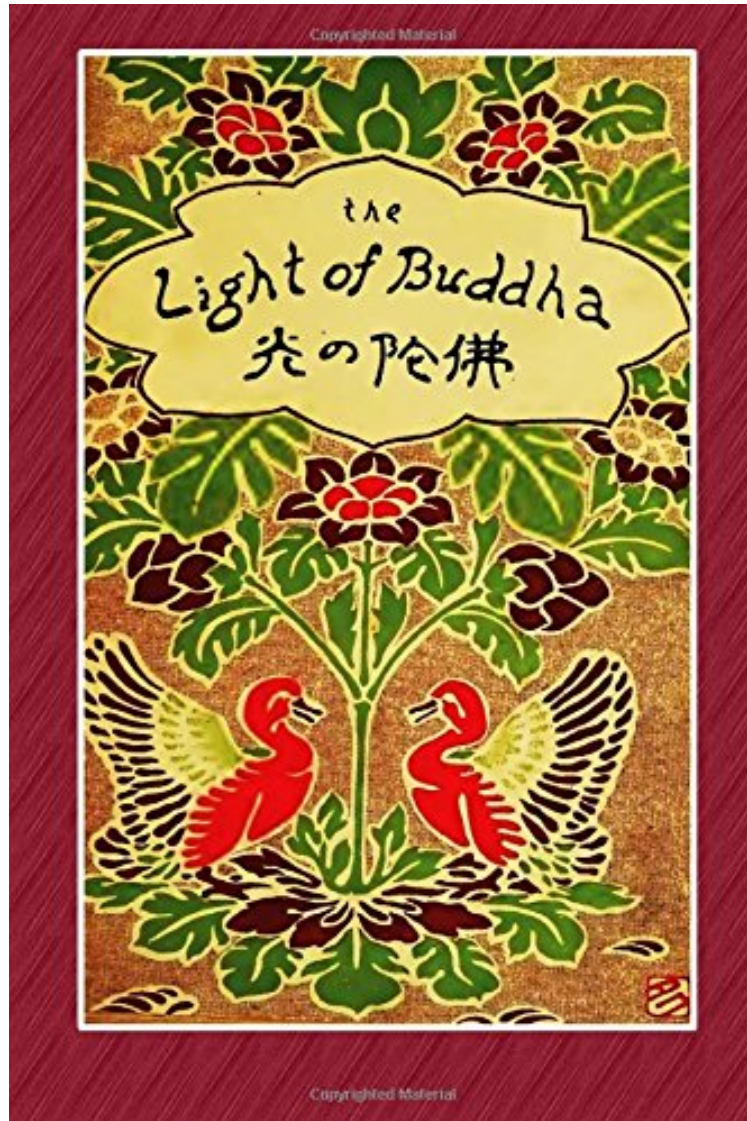


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The Light of Buddha

S. Kuroda

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From the INTRODUCTION. Buddhism is one of the greatest religions of the world. During the three thousand years of its existence, it has been the means of converting innumerable multitudes throughout the East, and in addition to the widely spread religious influence that it has exercised has penetrated into the very depths of philosophical speculation.

Whatever there is in Buddhism is all due to the teachings of Sakya-Muni, our Lord. According to the tradition prevalent amongst us, the great Sage was born on the 8th. of April, 1027 B. C, in the garden of Lumhini, in Kapilavastu, a kingdom of Northern India, his parents being Suddhodana, the King of that country, and his Queen Maya. When he was nineteen years old he left his palace in order to study the perfect way ; when thirty, he awoke to perfect Enlightenment, and, after fifty years of preaching his doctrines, he died at an advanced age. Now, a few words about Japanese Buddhism. Buddhism entered China A. D. 67, about five centuries later it came into our country through Korea. In the 13th. year of the reign of the Mikado Kimmei (A. D. 552) an image of Buddha and some sacred books were presented to our court by Seimei, King of Kudara, one of the three ancient divisions of Korea, and some fifty years later, the Prince Imperial, Umayado or Shotoku, becoming an earnest believer in Buddhism himself, strongly urged the people, by constitutional edicts to embrace Buddhism, erected a large number of temples, induced a large number of both sexes to take the vows of religions, and thus propagated the Gospel of Buddha. Thirteen centuries have elapsed since then and now the tree of Buddhism has struck its roots deeply into the soil of our national life and thought while its branches cover the land. The Sacred Books of Buddhism are divided into three divisions (the so-called Tripitaka or three baskets). Precepts (Sutra), Rules of Discipline (Vinaya) and Metaphysics (Abhidharma, or Sastra). We have in our country 1521 Chinese texts, which including the commentaries thereon compose a library of 6589 volumes. In addition to these there are numerous works by Chinese and Japanese Divines. The life of Buddha and the teachings of his disciples have all been carefully and lucidly expounded for us in these Scriptures. We can further compare our Chinese versions with the writings of primitive Buddhism and see that there is neither radical difference of doctrine nor breach of continuity between the so-called Mahayana (Greater Vehicle) and the Hinayana (Lesser Vehicle) Schools of doctrine. Primitive Buddhism was one and undivided. Controversy did, however, break out in the reign of King A solca some 200 years after Buddha, and, as a result, the Hinayana was broken up into some twenty sects. At a later period (600 A. B.) a Sage of the name of Asvaghosha promulgated the doctrines of the Mahayana, silenced the quibbling sects which troubled the Hinayana School, and put fresh life and vigour into the Buddhist Church. He was followed by the prominent priests Nagarjuna, Deva, Asanga and Vasubandhu all of whom laboured for the spread of Mahayana principles. A casual observer would perhaps think that the doctrine of Buddha which in its principle is one and consistent had now been divided into the two conflicting doctrines of the Hinayana and Mahayana, and indeed party spirit ran very high and there was a wide departure from the true purpose of Buddha. But, in reality, it may be said with more truth the doctrines of the Mahayana are based upon those of Hinayana and that the latter contains the buds and germs of which the fully opened flowers stand revealed in the former. The two doctrines have indeed no essentially different characteristics, as will be seen from the following paragraphs in which we hope to demonstrate the truth of our assertion.