



Gotama Buddha: A Biography, Based on the Canonical Books of the Theravadin (Classic Reprint)

Kenneth J. Saunders

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Excerpt from Gotama Buddha: A Biography, Based on the Canonical Books of the Theravadin

The style carries the thought with limpid ease and at times ripples with genial humor. Attention is purposely focused upon the life of Gotama, with only incidental references to the Teaching and the Order, but fortunately these subjects are fully set forth in Mr. Saunderson's earlier studies, "The Story of Buddhism" and "Buddhist Ideals," as well as in many standard works.

Buddhism has well-nigh died out in Gotama's own country and the forms which prevail in Tibet, China, Korea, and Japan would hardly be recognized by the founder himself. Yet his example and teaching, however distorted, are the nucleus around which all the later encrustations have formed. Just as the Christian Church has dug down through the layers of scholastic dialectic and replanted its pillars on Christ, so it is not inconceivable that even Northern Buddhism may rediscover its founder and cry, "Back to Gotama Buddha."

It was a Japanese disciple of Gotama who called him "a king of the spiritual in the mask of beggary," and it is to be hoped that this volume will find readers also in Japan, for although there are several lives of Buddha written in Japanese, no one of them so happily as this combines a popular presentation with the results of recent historical criticism.

Although Mr. Saunders discloses warm admiration for Gotama's character, as a faithful friend he points out his shortcomings and his fatal inability to rise above the limitations of his age. It would seem that Gotama himself realized to some degree his own limitations. Like other prophetic souls, he looked for the coming of a Buddha greater than himself, who should be called Maitri. Mr. Saunders's fine poem, "St. Francis and Gotama," shows true insight when it represents Gotama as joyfully recognizing that in Christ his highest hopes regarding Maitri had been fully realized.

Mr. Saunders might well have called h...

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