

BOOK THE FIRST

The Scripture of the Saviour of the World,
Lord Buddha-Prince Siddhārtha styled on earth—
In Earth and Heavens and Hells Incomparable,
All-honoured, Wisest, Best, most Pitiful;
The Teacher of Nirvāna and the Law.

Then came He to be born again for men.
Below the highest sphere four Regents sit
Who rule our world, and under them are zones
Nearer, but high, where saintliest spirits dead
Wait thrice ten thousand years, then live again;
And on Lord Buddha, waiting in that sky,
Came for our sakes the five sure signs of birth
So that the Devas knew the signs, and said:
“Buddha will go again to help the World.”
“Yea!” spake He, “now I go to help the World.
This last of many times; for birth and death
End hence for me and those who learn my Law.
I will go down among the Sākyas,

Under the southward snows of Himalay,
Where pious people live and a just King."

That night the wife of King Suddhodana,
Māyā the Queen, asleep beside her Lord,
Dreamed a strange dream; dreamed that a star from heaven—
Splendid, six-rayed, in colour rosy-pearl,
Whereof the token was an Elephant
Six-tusked, and white as milk of Kāmadhuk—
Shot through the void; and, shining into her,
Entered her womb upon the right. Awaked,
Bliss beyond mortal mother's filled her breast,
And over half the earth a lovely light
Forewent the morn. The strong hills shook; the waves
Sank lulled; all flowers that blow by day came forth
As 'twere high noon; down to the farthest hells
Passed the Queen's joy, as when warm sunshine thrills
Wood-glooms to gold, and into all the deeps
A tender whisper pierced. "Oh ye," it said,
"The dead that are to live, the live who die,
Uprise, and hear, and hope! Buddha is come!"
Whereat in Limbos numberless much peace
Spread, and the world's heart throbbled, and a wind blew
With unknown freshness over lands and seas.
And when the morning dawned, and this was told,
The grey dream-readers said: "The dream is good!
The Crab is in conjunction with the Sun;
The Queen shall bear a boy, a holy child
Of wondrous wisdom, profiting all flesh,
Who shall deliver men from ignorance,
Or rule the world, if he will deign to rule."

In this wise was the holy Buddha born.

Queen Māyā stood at noon, her days fulfilled,
Under a Palsa in the Palace-grounds,
A stately trunk, straight as a temple-shaft,
With crown of glossy leaves and fragrant blooms;
And, knowing the time come—for all things knew—
The conscious tree bent down its boughs to make
A bower above Queen Māyā's majesty,
And Earth put forth a thousand sudden flowers
To spread a couch; while, ready for the bath,
The rock hard by gave out a limpid stream
Of crystal flow. So brought she forth her child
Pangless—he having on his perfect form
The marks, thirty and two, of blessed birth;
Of which the great news to the Palace came.
But when they brought the painted palanquin
To fetch him home, the bearers of the poles
Were the four Regents of the Earth, come down
From Mount Sumeru—they who write men's deeds
On brazen plates—the Angel of the East,
Whose hosts are clad in silver robes, and bear
Targets of pearl: the Angel of the South,
Whose horsemen, the Kumbhandas, ride blue steeds,
With sapphire shields: the Angel of the West,
By Nāgas followed, riding steeds blood-red,
With coral shields: the Angel of the North,
Environed by his Yakshas, all in gold,
on yellow horses, bearing shields of gold.
These, with their pomp invisible, came down
And took the poles, in cast and outward garb
Like bearers, yet most mighty gods; and gods

Walked free with men that day, though men knew not:
For Heaven was filled with gladness for Earth's sake,
Knowing Lord Buddha thus was come again.

But King Suddhodana wist not of this;
The portents troubled, till his dream-readers
Augured a Prince of earthly dominance,
A Chakravartin, such as rise to rule
Once in each thousand years; seven gifts he has—
The Chakra-ratna, disc divine; the gem;
The horse, the Aswa-ratna, that proud steed
Which tramps the clouds; a snow-white elephant,
The Hasti-ratna, born to bear his King;
The crafty Minister, the General
Unconquered, and the wife of peerless grace,
The Stri-ratna, lovelier than the Dawn.
For which gifts looking with this wondrous boy,
The king gave order that his town should keep
High festival; therefore the ways were swept,
Rose-odours sprinkled in the street, the trees
Were hung with lamps and flags, while merry crowds
Gaped on the sword-players and posturers,
The jugglers, charmers, swingers, rope-walkers,
The nautch-girls in their spangled skirts, and bells
That chime light laughter round their restless feet;
The masquers wrapped in skins of bear and deer
The tiger-tamers, wrestlers, quail-fighters,
Beaters of drum and twanglers of the wire,
Who made the people happy by command.
Moreover, from afar came merchant-men,
Bringing, on tidings of this birth, rich gifts
In golden trays; goat-shawls, and nard, and jade,

Turkises, evening-sky tint, woven webs—
So fine twelve folds hide not a modest face—
Waist-cloths sewn thick with pearls, and sandal-wood;
Homage from tribute cities; so they called
Their Prince Sarvārthasiddh, All-Prospering,
Briefer, Siddhārtha.

'Mongst the strangers came
A grey-haired saint, Asita, one whose ears,
Long closed to earthly things, caught heavenly sounds,
And heard at prayer beneath his peepal-tree
The Devas singing songs at Buddha's birth.
Wondrous in lore he was by age and fasts;
Him, drawing nigh, seeming so reverend,
The King saluted, and Queen Māyā made
To lay her babe before such holy feet;
But when he saw the Prince the old man cried
"Ah, Queen, not so!" and thereupon he touched
Eight times the dust, laid his waste visage there,
Saying, "O Babe! I worship! Thou art He!
I see the rosy light, the foot-sole marks,
The soft curled tendril of the *Swastika*,
The sacred primal signs thirty and two,
The eighty lesser tokens. Thou art Buddh,
And thou wilt preach the Law and save all flesh
Who learn the Law, though I shall never hear,
Dying too soon, who lately longed to die;
Howbeit I have seen Thee. Know, O King!
This is that Blossom on our human tree
Which opens once in many myriad years—
But opened, fills the world with Wisdom's scent
And Love's dropped honey; from thy royal root

A Heavenly Lotus springs: Ah, happy House!
 Yet not all-happy, for a sword must pierce
 Thy bowels for this boy—whilst thou, sweet Queen!
 Dear to all gods and men for this great birth,
 Henceforth art grown too sacred for more woe,
 And life is woe, therefore in seven days
 Painless thou shalt attain the close of pain."

Which fell: for on the seventh evening
 Queen Māyā smiling slept, and waked no more,
 Passing content to *Trayastrinshas-Heaven*,
 Where countless Devas worship her and wait
 Attendant on that radiant Motherhead.
 But for the Babe they found a foster-nurse,
 Princess Mahāprajāpati—her breast
 Nourished with noble milk the lips of Him
 Whose lips comfort the Worlds.

When th' eighth year passed
 The careful King bethought to teach his son
 All that a Prince should learn, for still he shunned
 The too vast presage of those miracles,
 The glories and the sufferings of a Buddh.
 So, in full council of his Ministers,
 "Who is the wisest man, great sirs," he asked,
 "To teach my Prince that which a Prince should know?"
 Whereto gave answer each with instant voice
 "King! Viswamitra is the wisest one,
 The farthest-seen in Scriptures, and the best
 In learning, and the manual arts, and all."
 Thus Viswamitra came and heard commands;
 And, on a day found fortunate, the Prince

Took up his slate of ox-red sandal-wood,
 All-beautified by gems around the rim,
 And sprinkled smooth with dust of emery,
 These took he, and his writing-stick, and stood
 With eyes bent down before the Sage, who said,
 "Child, write this Scripture," speaking slow the verse
 "Gāyatrī" named, which only High-born hear:—

*Om, tatsaviturvarenyam
 Bhargo devasya dhīmahi
 Dhiyo yo na prachodayat.*

"Ācharya, I write," meekly replied
 The Prince, and quickly on the dust he drew—
 Not in one script, but many characters—
 The sacred verse; Nagri and Dakshin, Nī,
 Mangal, Parusha, Yava, Tirthi, Uk,
 Darad, Sikhyani, Mana, Madhyachar,
 The pictured writings and the speech of signs,
 Tokens of cave-men and the sea-peoples,
 Of those who worship snakes beneath the earth,
 And those who flame adore and the sun's orb,
 The Magians and the dwellers on the mounds;
 Of all the Nations all strange scripts he traced
 One after the other with his writing-stick.
 Reading the master's verse in every tongue;
 And Viswamitra said, "It is enough,
 Let us to numbers.

After me repeat
 Your numeration till we reach the *Lakh*,
 One, two, three, four, to ten, and then by tens
 To hundreds, thousands." After him the child

Named digits, decades, centuries; nor paused,
 The round Lakh reached, but softly murmured on
 "Then comes the kōti, nahut, ninnahut,
 Khamba, viskhamba, abab, attata,
 To kumuds, gundhikas, and utpalas,
 By pundarikas unto padumas,
 Which last is how you count the utmost grains
 Of Hastagiri ground to finest dust;
 But beyond that a numeration is,
 The Kātha, used to count the stars of night;
 The Kōti-Kātha, for the ocean drops;
 Ingga, the calculus of circulars;
 Sarvanikchepa, by the which you deal
 With all the sands of Gunga, till we come
 To Antah-Kalpas, where the unit is
 The sands of ten crore Gungas. If one seeks
 More comprehensive scale, th' arithmic mounts
 By the Asankya, which is the tale
 Of all the drops that in ten thousand years
 Would fall on all the worlds by daily rain;
 Thence unto Maha Kalpas, by the which
 The Gods compute their future and their past."

"Tis good," the sage rejoined. "Most noble Prince,
 If these thou know'st, needs it that I should teach
 The mensuration of the lineal?"
 Humbly the boy replied, "Ācharya!"
 "Be pleased to hear me. Paramānus ten
 A parasukshma make; ten of those build
 The trasarene, and seven trasarenes
 One mote's-length floating in the beam, seven motes
 The whisker-point of mouse, and ten of these

One likhya; likhyas ten a yuka, ten
 Yukas a heart of barley, which is held
 Seven times a wasp-waist; so unto the grain
 Of mung and mustard and the barley-corn,
 Whereof ten give the finger-joint, twelve joints
 The span, wherefrom we reach the cubit, staff,
 Bow-length, lance-length; while twenty lengths of lance
 Mete what is named a 'breath,' which is to say
 Such space as man may stride with lungs once filled,
 Whereof a *gow* is forty, four times that
 A *yojana*; and, Master! if it please,
 I shall recite how many sun-motes lie
 From end to end within a *yojana*".
 Thereat, with instant skill, the little Prince
 Pronounced the total of the atoms true.
 But Viswamitra heard it on his face
 Prostrate before the boy; "For thou," he cried,
 "Art Teacher of thy teachers—thou, not I,
 "Art Guru. Oh, I worship thee, sweet Prince!
 That comest to my school only to show
 Thou knowest all without the books, and know'st
 Fair reverence besides."
 Which reverence
 Lord Buddha kept to all his schoolmasters,
 Albeit beyond their learning taught; in speech
 Right gentle, yet so wise; princely of mien,
 Yet softly-mannered; modest, deferent,
 And tender-hearted, though of fearless blood;
 No bolder horseman in the youthful band
 E'er rode in gay chase of the shy gazelles;
 No keener driver of the chariot

In mimic contest scoured the Palace-courts;
 Yet in mid-play the boy would oft-times pause,
 Letting the deer pass free; would oft-times yield
 His half-won race because the labouring steeds
 Fetched painful breath; or if his princely mates
 Saddened to lose, or if some wistful dream
 Swept o'er his thoughts. And ever with the years
 Waxed this compassionateness of our Lord,
 Even as a great tree grows from two soft leaves
 To spread its shade afar; but hardly yet
 Knew the young child of sorrow, pain, or tears,
 Save as strange names for things not felt by kings,
 Nor ever to be felt. But it befell
 In the Royal garden on a day of spring,
 A flock of wild swans passed, voyaging north
 To their nest-places on Himāla's breast.
 Galling in love-notes down their snowy line
 The bright birds flew, by fond love piloted;
 And Devadatta, cousin of the Prince,
 Pointed his bow, and loosed a wilful shaft
 Which found the wide wing of the foremost swan
 Broad-spread to glide upon the free blue road,
 So that it fell, the bitter arrow fixed,
 Bright scarlet blood-gouts staining the pure plumes.
 Which seeing, Prince Siddhārtha took the bird
 Tenderly up, rested it in his lap—
 Sitting with knees crossed, as Lord Buddha sits—
 And, soothing with a touch the wild thing's fright,
 Composed its ruffled vans, calmed its quick heart,
 Caressed it into peace with light kind palms
 As soft as plantain-leaves an hour unrolled;

And while the left hand held, the right hand drew
 The cruel steel forth from the wound, and laid
 Cool leaves and healing honey on the smart.
 Yet all so little knew the boy of pain
 That curiously into his wrist he pressed
 The arrow's barb, and winced to feel it sting.
 And turned with tears to soothe his bird again.

Then someone came who said, "My Prince hath shot
 A swan, which fell among the roses here,
 He bids me pray you send it. Will you send?"
 "Nay," quoth Siddhārtha, "if the bird were dead
 To send it to the slayer might be well,
 But the swan lives; my cousin hath but killed
 The god-like speed which throbbed in this white wing."
 And Devadatta answered, "The wild thing,
 Living or dead, is his who fetched it down;
 'Twas no man's in the clouds, but fall'n 't is mine,
 Give me my prize, fair Cousin." Then our Lord
 Laid the swan's neck beside his own smooth cheek
 And gravely spake, "Say no! the bird is mine,
 The first of myriad things which shall be mine
 By right of mercy and love's lordliness.
 For now I know, by what within me stirs,
 That I shall teach compassion unto men
 And be a speechless world's interpreter,
 Abating this accursed flood of woe,
 Not man's alone; but, if the Prince disputes,
 Let him submit this matter to the wise
 And we will wait their word." So was it done;
 In full divan the business had debate,
 And many thought this thing and many that,

Till there arose an unknown priest who said,
 "If life be aught, the saviour of a life
 Owns more the living thing than he can own
 Who sought to slay—the slayer spoils and wastes,
 The cherisher sustains, give him the bird:"
 The judgment all found just; but when the King
 Sought out the sage for honour, he was gone;
 And some one saw a hooded snake glide forth,
 The gods come oftentimes thus! So our Lord Buddha
 Began his works of mercy.

Yet not more
 Knew he as yet of grief than that one bird's,
 Which, being healed, went joyous to its kind.
 But on another day King said, "Come,
 Sweet son! and see the pleasure of the spring,
 And how the fruitful earth is wooed to yield
 Its riches to the reaper; how my realm—
 Which shall be thine when the pile flames for me—
 Feeds all its mouths and keeps the King's chest filled.
 Fair is the season with new leaves, bright blooms,
 Green grass, and cries of plough-time." So they rode
 Into a lane of wells and gardens, where,
 All up and down the rich red loam, the steers
 Strained their strong shoulders in the creaking yoke
 Dragging the ploughs; the fat soil rose and rolled
 In smooth dark waves back from the plough; who drove
 Planted both feet upon the leaping share
 To make the furrow deep; among the palms
 The tinkle of the rippling water rang,
 And where it ran the glad earth 'broidered it
 With balsams and the spears of lemon-grass.

Elsewhere were sowers who went forth to sow;
 And all the jungle laughed with nesting-songs,
 And all the thickets rustled with small life
 Of lizard, bee, beetle, and creeping things
 Pleased at the spring-time. In the mango-sprays
 The sun-birds flashed; alone at his green forge
 Toiled the loud coppersmith; bee-eaters hawked
 Chasing the purple butterflies; beneath,
 Striped squirrels raced, the *mynas* perked and picked,
 The nine brown sisters chattered in the thorn,
 The pied fish-tiger hung above the pool,
 The egrets stalked among the buffaloes,
 The kites sailed circles in the golden air;
 About the painted temple peacocks flew,
 The blue doves cooed from every well, far off
 The village drums beat for some marriage feast;
 All things spoke peace and plenty, and the Prince
 Saw and rejoiced. But, looking deep, he saw
 The thorns which grow upon this rose of life:
 How the swart peasant sweated for his wage,
 Toiling for leave to live; and how he urged
 The great-eyed oxen through the flaming hours,
 Goading their velvet flanks: then marked he, too,
 How lizard fed on ant, and snake on him,
 And kite on both; and how the fish-hawk robbed
 The fish-tiger of that which it had seized;
 The shrike chasing the *bulbul*, which did chase
 The jewelled butterflies; till everywhere
 Each slew a slayer and in turn was slain,
 Life living upon death. So the fair show
 Veiled one vast, savage, grim conspiracy

Of mutual murder, from the worm to man,
 Who himself kills his fellow; seeing which
 The hungry ploughman and his labouring kine,
 Their dewlaps blistered with the bitter yoke,
 The rage to live which makes all living strife
 The Prince Siddhārtha sighed. "Is this," he said,
 "That happy earth they brought me forth to see?
 How salt with sweat the peasant's bread! how hard
 The oxen's service! in the brake how fierce
 The war of weak and strong! i' th' air what plots!
 No refuge e'en in water. Go aside
 A space, and let me muse on what ye show."
 So saying, the good Lord Buddha seated himself
 Under a jambu-tree, with ankles crossed—
 As holy statues sit—and first began
 To meditate this deep disease of life,
 What its far source and whence its remedy.
 So vast a pity filled him, such wide love
 For living things, such passion to heal pain,
 That by their stress his princely spirit passed
 To ecstasy, and purged from mortal taint
 Of sense and self, the boy attained thereat
 Dhyāna, first step of "the path."

There flew
 High overhead that hour five holy ones,
 Whose free wings faltered as they passed the tree.
 "What power superior draws us from our flight?"
 They asked, for spirits feel all force divine,
 And know the sacred presence of the pure.
 Then, looking downward, they beheld the Buddh
 Crowned with a rose-hued aureole, intent

On thoughts to save; while from the grove a voice
 Cried, "Rishis! this is He shall help the world,
 Descend and worship." So the Bright Ones came
 And sang a song of praise, folding their wings,
 Then journeyed on, taking good news to Gods.

But certain from the King seeking the Prince
 Found him still musing, though the noon was past,
 And the sun hastened to the western hills:
 Yet, while all shadows moved, the jambu-tree's
 Stayed in one quarter, overspreading him,
 Lest the sloped rays should strike that sacred head;
 And he who saw this sight heard a voice say,
 Amid the blossoms of the rose-apple,
 "Let be the King's son! till the shadow goes
 Forth from his heart my shadow will not shift."