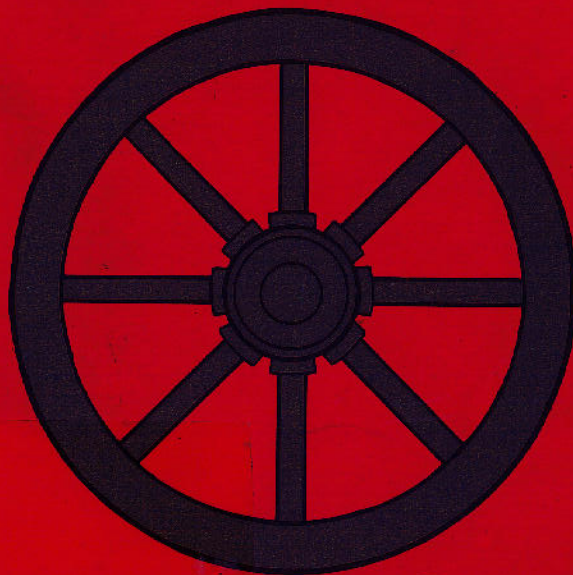


LIGHT OF ASIA



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Sir Edwin Arnold

THE
LIGHT OF ASIA

OR
THE GREAT RENUNCIATION
(MAHABHINISHKRAMANA)

BEING
THE LIFE AND TEACHING OF GAUTAMA
PRINCE OF INDIA AND FOUNDER OF BUDDHISM

By
SIR EDWIN ARNOLD
M.A., K.C.I.E., C.S.I.

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About the Author

Sir Edwin Arnold is a household name in the Buddhist world. He was endowed with a remarkable aptitude for poetry, as a result of which he wrote many a poem. But what took him to the heights of fame was his epic poem - the "Light of Asia", which, besides being a gem of poetic value, carried with it something of greater value, for this poem portrayed the life, character and profound Teaching of that great Son of India - Gautama the Buddha whose Teaching transcended all extreme philosophies prevailing in that country at that time. In England alone this poem ran into over sixty editions and over eighty editions in America. Such was its popularity. Today, as we step into the threshold of the 21st Century, launching a new Millennium, this book has a special niche for itself in the shelves of Buddhist Literature.

Sir Edwin Arnold was born in Sussex, England, on 10th June 1832. His father, Robert Coles Arnold of Whartons Framfield, youngest of twelve children, was a Magistrate. His mother was Sarah Pizzey Arnold. Starting from a private school at Bexley Heath he had his early education at King's Grammar School Rochester and later at King's College London from where he proceeded on to Oxford on a scholarship. At Oxford; in 1852, he won the Newdigate prize for his poem " The Feast of Belahanzzar". He obtained his Master Degree in 1854. In the same year he married Catherine

Biddulph. After a brief spell of teaching at King Edward VI School at Birmingham, in 1856, at the young age of 25, he ventured out East as Principal of the Government Deccan Sanskrit College, Poona, India.

The peace and tranquility of the native Indian landscape, together with the intriguing mystic of the ancient temples and their faiths, stirred in him the thirst for more knowledge of the Orient. It was here in India that Arnold learnt of the oriental culture and philosophies that were so exotic and so vastly different from the western world. His fascination for this took him to the study of the treasures of Pali and Sanskrit literature which opened his eyes to a world of philosophy of the East including the profound Teaching of Gautama the Buddha. This study resulted in the composition of his epic poem "The Light of Asia" in 1879 of this great and meaningful Teaching - BUDDHISM.

His first complete book of verse was " Poems Narrative and Lyrical" in 1853. Among Arnold's other poems and works are Griselda (A collection of poems in 1856), Book of Good Counsels (Translation of the Sanskrit Hitopadesa) in 1861, Indian Song of Songs (Jayadeva's Gita Govinda) in 1875, Indian Idylls (from Mahabharatha) in 1883, Song Celestial (translation of Bhagavat Gita) in 1885, Pearls of the Faith (Religion of Islam), Light of the World (Story of Jesus) in 1891.

In 1861 Arnold returned to England and joined the staff of the then prestigious journal, the Daily Telegraph of which he became the Chief Editor in 1873. It was during his stay at the

Daily Telegraph that, in 1879 he composed the "Light of Asia" which established his fame. This poem was written at Hamlet House, Southend in Essex at leisure intervals, in between his normal daily work at the Daily Telegraph.

Arnold was conferred high honours by the King of Siam (Thailand), the Shan of Persia, The Sultan of Turkey, the Mikado of Japan, He was made "Companion of the Star of India : in 1877 while in 1888 he was honoured with "Knight Commander of the Indian Empire"

In 1886 he visited Sri Lanka (Ceylon at that time) where he was accorded a warm welcome at Panadura, Colombo and the Temple of the Tooth at Kandy. While he was here he sponsored the cause for the taking over of Buddha - Gaya from the Saivite Hindu priest Mahant as he had seen the desecration of this Holy place by the Saivite Hindus.

Arnold travelled far and wide across the seas. He visited America and Japan several times during which he delivered lectures at the Universities in those countries. In Japan he studied Mahayana Buddhism. His deep interest in Buddhism and the appropriate sentiment he expresses in his Buddhist poems and also the interest he took in Buddhist activities compel one to presume that he, at least at heart, was a Buddhist. His third wife was a Japanese lady he met in Japan.

Sir Edwin Arnold passed away on 24th March 1904 at his home in Bolton Garden, London, leaving behind him a

legacy of great beauty, the "Light of Asia" which gives the reader a clear insight into the life, character and philosophical Teaching of that great personage - Gautama, the Buddha the founder of BUDDHISM.

S.B.Tennakoon

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