

## WAS GAUTAMA BUDDHA AN HISTORIC PERSON?

Professor Wilson, in his essay on Buddhism, considers it doubtful whether any such person as Gautama Buddha ever actually existed. He notes the fact that there are at least twenty different dates assigned to his birth, varying from 2420 B.C. to 453 B.C. He says the very names of persons connected with Buddha are allegorical. His father's name means "pure food," his mother's name is "illusion," his own name means "enlightened one." The birthplace named for him (Kapilavastu) has no geographical place that can be reasonably suggested. It may mean only the substance of Kapila or the substance of the Sakhya philosophy, called Kapila Muni. It seems not impossible that Sakhya Muni is an unreal being, and all that is related of him is as much a fiction as is that of his preceding migrations and the miracles that attended his birth, his life, and his departure. Senart's "*La Légende du Buddha*" thinks it legend and only a reproduction or migration of the mythical being, the *sun hero*, presented in semi-human shape, "No more one of ourselves than the Greek Heracles, for instance;" and Kern, in his recent work, "*History of Buddhism in India*," emphasizes this view on a broader scale. He says Sakhya Muni is a creation of European scholars, and Kuenen himself cites quotations from Buddhist literature asserting that what the sun does Buddha does, and without committing himself wholly to the myth theory, says it is not possible now to say if any part of it is historical. We are not now free to explain Buddhism by its founder. Oldenberg says that "a biography of Buddha out of antiquity—that is, from out of the sacred Pali texts—has not reached us, and we may say with confidence has never existed." It is almost impossible to find a manuscript of Buddhism written five hundred years ago. Monier Williams says no authoritative scripture gives any trustworthy clew to the exact year of Buddha's birth. No reliable information exists of the extent and character of the Buddhist scriptures, said to have been finally settled by the Council of Kanishka in the first century, which were handed down orally from generation to generation. The Buddhist historian Māhānāmā (A.D. 459) affirms that the doctrines were first committed to writing in the reign of Vatagamini, B.C. 86 and 87, and Max Müller seems disposed to accept this. Thus touching the Man and the Book the testimony is equally defective.

Max Müller, however, reviews Wilson item by item, and says we may be sure Buddhism has a real founder, and that he was not a Brahman by birth, but belongs to the second or royal caste. Kuenen thinks Gautama is essential to Buddhism. The legend must be accounted for, and the most natural way to account for it is this supposition of the pre-eminent incorporation of the philosophical thought in the character and career of Gautama Buddha.

But the legends of Buddhism are the wildest extravaganza. They are divided into three periods: First, of his pre-existent states through several