

THE VEDAS

MAX MÜLLER

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BY

FREDRICH MAX MULLER



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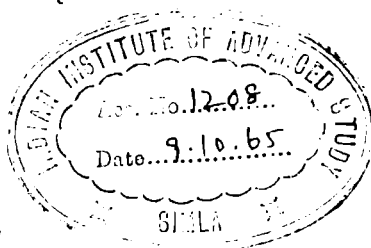


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PUBLISHERS' NOTE

This volume is made up of selections from the writings of Max Muller published in the nineteenth century in various books. "The Vedæ and Zend-Avesta" and "What is the Veda?"—lectures delivered at the Philosophical Institution, Leeds, in March, 1865—appeared originally in *Chips from a German Workshop*, Vol. I, 1868. "Hymns of the Veda" is drawn from *Auld Long Sync*, 1898. "The Religion of the Veda", "Vedic Deities" and "Veda and Vedanta" are lectures delivered by the author before the University of Cambridge, 1882, and subsequently published in his *India—What can it teach us*, 1882.

We have faithfully adhered to the texts chosen for selection, except that it has been found necessary to make slight abridgements here and there.

INTRODUCTION

By

U. N. GHOSH, M.A. (Calcutta), Ph.D. (Heidelberg)

The discovery of Sanskrit in the 18th century by Coeurdeau, a French missionary, and Sir William Jones, a British Judge, was a new wonder in the scholastic world of Europe. It was like the discovery of a new and very important planet by the astronomers. This new light from the East soon reached Germany, which was in an intellectual ferment then. Fredrich Max Muller, (1823-1900) son of the poet Wilhelm Max Muller of Dessau, was one of the first batch of Sanskrit scholars. After having had his preliminary schooling, he went to Leipzig, and then to Berlin where Hermann Brockhaus was the first occupant of the newly created University chair of Sanskrit. In Berlin he met Franz Bopp, the Philologist, and Schelling, the Philosopher, both of whom influenced Max Muller's mental development. Later he went to Paris and worked for some time under Eugene Burnouf, the Zend scholar and savant, on the Rig Veda. His contemporaries were Rudolf Roth, and Theodore Goldstucker, names unforgettable in the history of Sanskrit. From Paris Max Muller went in England, and made Oxford his residence and place of work. He spent the rest of his life—around fifty years—here studying and teaching young people the wisdom of the East. Max Muller's contribution to the study of ancient India is probably the largest in volume.

The difficulty a Western scholar has to face in his study of the Vedas in those days can only be imagined. Though Sayana's commentary was available, yet it helped very little; for the early pioneers in this field regarded Sayana as prejudiced, cut off from the original sense of the texts and so tempted to overrate the importance of what he could not fully explain. These scholars wanted therefore to forge a new apparatus. Wrote Roth, "It would be a disgrace to the criticism and ingenuity of our century which has deciphered the stone inscriptions of the Persian Kings and the Book of Zoroaster, if it did not succeed in reading in this enormous literature the intellectual history of the Hindu race". So it is that they searched for history. It was all an exciting adventure through the rough-hewn tracks of comparative philology, comparative mythology and comparative religion, in search for what sounded like the earliest phase of human civilization. It may be stated that the tradition of the Vedic literature in India never mentions this historical value of the Veda. The Veda of the tradition is the unique store-house of the "supreme knowledge" that can be obtained through revelation only. The key to this knowledge is provided by some established norms only, by certain methods sanctioned by ages of

Vedic scholarship. Other methods, new analytical ones, etymological or otherwise, are not supposed to be adequate for the right or correct interpretation of the Veda. As Sayana remarks, of the three kinds of interpretation of the Rig Veda, the spiritual interpretation is the most important.

But for the western Vedic scholar it is impossible to be a traditionalist. Says A. Weber, "whoever has carefully studied the Indian interpretation of the Rig Veda knows that absolutely no continuity of tradition can be assumed between the production of the Vedas and their interpretation by Indian Scholars." The tradition, he adds, might consist in "only an understanding of a few details through liturgical uses, and words and passages, and perhaps hymns connected with rituals, and beyond these remains of the tradition, which must be estimated at a very low value, the interpreters of the Vedas had no other aids than those which are in a great part at our disposal, e.g. the usage of the classical language, the grammatical, etymological and lexical investigations." He even claimed that the western scholarship possessed a superior advantage in so far as it could go into comparative study and evaluation. This attitude has continued in the West, with a small modification, if any. And it would be surprising if Max Muller had no share in it, in spite of all his genuine admiration for the Veda. This is the given angle of the western mental plane to the Veda. "The Rig Veda" writes Stuart Piggot, "is a curious document. In length it is approximately equal to the Iliad and the Odyssey put together, and consists of over a thousand poems or hymns. These vary from more or less epic chants, hymns of praise, and prayers to gods, to magic spells and fragments of popular songs, all of very varying standard. The language is elaborate and self-consciously literary, and the metrical composition, based on the syllabic verse-forms, is often extremely complicated...it is a laborious and sophisticated anthology, put together with conscious artifice by professional hymnologists at a relatively late stage of the culture of those people who in it are called the Aryans..." "As a source-book it is full of limitations and difficulties. The archaic Sanskrit in which it is written soon lost its precise significance, and by the Middle Ages elaborate commentaries had to be devised to explain the ancient text which often meant elaborately metaphorical interpretations on the misunderstood original." "Even with these limitations, we still encounter considerable difficulties in using the text of the Rig Veda as a source for information on material culture. In the hymns the transition from the more or less literal to the wholly metaphorical is often sudden, and frequently almost imperceptible. (*Prehistoric India*, pp. 265-68). The obscurities and ellipses of the Rig Veda have been explained or sought to be explained by reference to ethnology, anthropology and even archaeology after the Harappa and Mohenjodaro excavations. But the fact remains that the

Western scholarship would not accept the Indian tradition at its face value, and very few of them think with J. G. Herder that "for the real Veda of the Indians as well as the Sanskrit language, we shall probably have to wait long", or with Rene Guenon that "if India possessed a secret, it is necessary to search for the key to her tradition, the exact nature of which escapes the majority of the Westerners despite their sincerity" (*L'Inde dans notre Destin*).

Max Muller's *magnum opus* is his translation of the Rig Veda with Sayana's commentary, (1849-73) in 6 volumes. A second edition came in 1890-92 in 4 volumes. The text alone was published in 2 volumes in 1873, and again in 1877. The text of the Pratisakhya along with a translation appeared in 1856-69. "Six systems of Indian Philosophy" was published in 1899. His studies and lectures on comparative Religion were delivered as Gifford and Hibbert Lectures in 5 volumes. His contributed articles to many of the leading British periodicals were collected into "Chips from a German workshop". He wrote, or collaborated in, many books, or in the translations of many others, and thus did the greatest amount of constructive work among the pioneer Orientalists of Europe. Such wide sweep of work cannot but be a little uncertain in net results, and at a time when the exact methods later developed were unknown. There is a general tentativeness in all of it. His self-diffidence is obvious. "Let it be not supposed" he wrote, "that because there are several translations of the Rig Veda in English, French and German, therefore all that the Veda can teach us has been learned. Far from it. Every one of these translations has been put forward as tentative only. We are still on the mere surface of the Vedic literature." The only outstanding features in Max Muller's studies are his tremendous enthusiasm and his eagerness to learn. "I maintain", he writes in one of his essays, "that for a study of man, or, if you like, for a study of Aryan humanity, there is nothing in the world equal in importance to the Veda. I maintain that to everybody who cares for himself, for his ancestors, for his history or for his intellectual development, a study of the Vedic literature is indispensable, and that as an element of liberal education, it is far more improving than the reigns of Babylonian and Persian Kings, even than the dates and deeds of many of the Kings of Judah and Israel. His eagerness to know is obvious in all his essays. He follows for the meanings of a word its forms in all the Indo-European languages, as is shown in the case of the word, "parjanya". For understanding a certain development in sense, he goes to the mythologies of the races in the far-away Pacific islands. His honest anxiety to avoid errors in the interpretation cannot but be admired. His philosophical training saves him from making hasty conclusions; and that is how he came to discover that the Vedic Religion stands on the Three Beyonds, namely, the devas, the pitris and Rita; that the apparent is not the

real Veda. This is very near an admission of the mystery hinted at in IV.3. 12 Rgv. by Vamadeva or in I.164,38 by Dirghatamas, His workshop had no precision tools in it, but all that he possessed he used diligently and hopefully.

To any modern Vedic student in India the two approaches, the traditional and the western objective-analytic, present a problem in choice. In the later phases of the Western scholarship is found a really admirable discipline, and a high degree of sobriety and sincerity within recognised and accepted limits. Collation and comparison of texts; establishment of scientific etymology; of syntax-metres; concordances and Indexes; all these are very efficient tools the western scholars have put in the hands of any student in any part of the world. The Indian traditionalist may regard these as repetitions,—for in ancient India—‘ancient’, because there can be no exact dating—all these things had also been done by very great scholars. There are the Niruktas, the Pratisakhya, Grammar and Metrics and all that. There are the great commentaries. There are still Vedic teachers who are able to throw light on the dark passages, and reveal the hidden meanings, resolve the ambiguities of the spoken or written word. For it is not merely with the head that one learns but with the heart also; and in this latter case, tradition is the only light. One may call the tradition a method of exclusion also, making of the Veda an esoteric-mysterious affair in the last resort; but then it is believed the Veda is not for many; the supreme knowledge it holds is only for the initiated few.

This, however justified, is a hard attitude. It is scarcely helpful. It is no wonder that the modern mind does not respect this; for the modern mind is shaped by the influence of Western science and criticism, and is prepared to take nothing on trust. They believe that all knowledge is a universal commonwealth for the entire human race. The western intellectualist has done a great thing,—they have distributed the wealth of Indian heritage among the nations of the world, believing that the wisdom of the ancient world would somehow or other help the modern world.

If even after this the traditionalist insists on the exclusive nature of the Veda which history does not support, cannot the western scholar retort, “Well, if our reading is incorrect and inadequate, let us have yours. What is this secret that you say will always elude us? Is it anything outside a way of life? What is exactly there in these Books sealed with the seven seals?”

To such eager queries the traditionalist probably has no convincing answers to give.

Sanskrit belongs to the Indo-European or Indo-Germanic family of languages. Time and space, it is supposed, created many languages out of one. This ‘ur-sprache’ or parent language is however as much speculative as the original home of the people who once spoke it in

some form. Sanskrit is supposed to have probably been the first to split off. The Rig Vedic language may be supposed to contain some of the oldest forms of words, along with subsequently changed ones. In the existing texts however metrical requirement must have been a cause of certain changes, in addition to other causes.

The Vedic language is closer to the Avestic than either is to the other branches of the family. But this fact does not help the dating of either the Veda of the Zend Avesta. Time in pre-historical ages moved very slowly; and the Avesta might have come centuries after the Rig Veda. The community that is responsible for the Rig Veda might have split some time, and a part of it moved west or south-west into Iran: and then after a long run of years, this body of dissenters got a reformed religion, the religion of the Zend Avesta. Such a development is quite possible. If so, the date of the Avesta does not provide any control for that of the Rig Veda, unless the interregnum between the two collections is known.

Very cautiously Max Muller puts the date of composition between 1,500 B.C. and 1,200 B.C., and though the limits, upper and lower, have been pushed up and pushed down by certain writers, there is a sort of general agreement about it. And Max Muller keeps the question open. If it were possible he would assign a more remote antiquity to the Rig Veda. But the internal evidence alone does not produce any definite support to that. External evidence, so far as it is there, cannot be read correctly in relation to the Rig Veda: for example, the Boghaz Koi inscription. Who can say with any reasonable degree of certainty or plausibility when and how it came to refer to some of the Rig Vedic gods? If this enigma persists, how can it be a control for the dating of the Rig Veda? Dating pre-historical events is certainly ticklish. There is no doubt that the archæologic evidence unearthed in the Sind Valley, Mesopotamia, or Susa reveals a very interesting episode of the history of South Asia; but all this does not necessarily connect with the Rig-Veda. So in the present state of our knowledge, the utmost that can be said or written about the date of the Rig Veda is that it stands on the border between prehistory and history, and as such it can never be precisely dated; for it certainly had a very ancient tradition that was maintained and developed and passed down from one generation to another, till the whole thing became simply "revealed knowledge" that only a few could really understand. Yet in the epic age of India the Veda was more widely read than is admitted at present, and entered into the normal curricula for the education of the Brahmans, the Kshatriyas and the Vaishayas. The esoteric and the exoteric Vedas co-existed, though a school of Vedic teachers had already been established firmly in the organised Aryan Communities on the lines of what at this date is called "Closed Shop" or "Closed Union".

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CHAPTER ONE

THE VEDA AND ZEND-AVESTA

The main stream of the Aryan nations has always flowed towards the north-west. No historian can tell us by what impulse these adventurous Nomads were driven on through Asia towards the isles and shores of Europe. The first start of this world-wide migration belongs to a period far beyond the reach of documentary history; to times when the soil of Europe had not been trodden by either Celts, Germans, Slavonians, Romans, or Greeks. But whatever it was, the impulse was as irresistible as the spell which, in our own times, sends the Celtic tribes towards the prairies or the regions of gold across the Atlantic. It requires a strong will, or a great amount of inertness, to be able to withstand the impetus of such national, or rather ethnical, movements. Few will stay behind when all are going. But to let one's friends depart, and then to set out ourselves—to take a road which, lead where it may, can never lead us to join those again who speak our language and worship our gods—is a course which only men of strong individuality and great self-dependence are capable of pursuing. It was the course adopted by the southern branch of the Aryan family, the Brahmanic Aryas of India and the Zoroastrians of Iran.

At the first dawn of traditional history we see these Aryan tribes migrating across the snow of the Himalayas southward towards the 'Seven Rivers' (the Indus, the five rivers of the Punjab, and the Sarasvati), and ever since India has been called their home. That before this time they had been living in more northern regions, within the same precincts with the ancestors of the Greeks, the Italians, Slavonians, Germans, and Celts, is a fact as firmly established as that the Normans of William the Conqueror were the Northmen of Scandinavia. The evidence of language is irrefragable, and it is the only evidence worth listening to with regard to ante-historical periods. It would have been next to impossible to discover any traces of relationship between the swarthy natives of India and their conquerors whether Alexander or Clive, but for the testimony borne by language. What other evidence could have reached back to times when Greece was not yet peopled by Greeks, nor India by Hindus? Yet these are the times of which we are speaking. What authority would have been strong enough to persuade the Grecian army, that their gods and their hero ancestors were the same as those of king Porus, or to convince the English soldier that the same blood might be running in his veins and in the veins of the dark Bengalees? And yet there is not an English jury row-a-days, which, after examining the hoary documents of language, would reject the claim

of a common descent and a spiritual relationship between Hindu, Greek, and Teuton. Many words still live in India and in England that have witnessed the first separation of the northern and southern Aryans, and these are witnesses not to be shaken by any cross-examination. The terms for God, for house, for father, mother, son, daughter, for dog and cow, for heart and tears, for axe and tree, identical in all the Indo-European idioms, are like the watchwords of soldiers. We challenge the seeming stranger; and whether he answers with the lips of a Greek, a German, or an Indian, we recognise him as one of ourselves. Though the historian may shake his head, though the physiologist may doubt, and the poet scorn the idea, all must yield before the facts furnished by language. There was a time when the ancestors of the Celts, the Germans, the Slavonians, the Greeks and Italians, the Persians and Hindus, were living together beneath the same roof, separate from the ancestors of the Semitic and Turanian races.

It is more difficult to prove that the Hindu was the last to leave this common home, that he saw his brothers all depart towards the setting sun, and that then, turning towards the south and the east, he started alone in search of a new world. But as in his language and in his grammar he has preserved something of what seems peculiar to each of the northern dialects singly, as he agrees with the Greek and the German where the Greek and the German differ from all the rest, and as no other language has carried off so large a share of the common Aryan heirloom—whether roots, grammar, words, myths, or legends—it is natural to suppose that, though perhaps the eldest brother, the Hindu was the last to leave the central home of the Aryan family.

The Aryan nations who pursued a north-westerly direction, stand before us in history as the principal nations of north-western Asia and Europe. They have been the prominent actors in the great drama of history, and have carried to their fullest growth all the elements of active life with which our nature is endowed. They have perfected society and morals, and we learn from their literature and works of art the elements of science, the laws of art, and the principles of philosophy. In continual struggle with each other and with Semitic and Turanian races, these Aryan nations have become the rulers of history, and it seems to be their mission to link all parts of the world together by the chains of civilisation, commerce, and religion. In a word, they represent the Aryan man in his historical character.

But while most of the members of the Aryan family followed this glorious path, the southern tribes were slowly migrating towards the mountains which gird the north of India. After crossing the narrow passes of the Hindukush or the Himalayas, they conquered

or drove before them, as it seems without much effort, the aboriginal inhabitants of the Trans-Himalayan countries. They took for their guides the principal rivers of Northern India, and were led by them to new homes in their beautiful and fertile valleys. It seems as if the great mountains in the north had afterwards closed for centuries their Cyclopean gates against new immigrations, while, at the same time, the waves of the Indian Ocean kept watch over the southern borders of the peninsula. None of the great conquerors of antiquity, —Sesostris, Semiramis, Nebuchadnezzar, or Cyrus,—disturbed the peaceful seats of these Aryan settlers. Left to themselves in a world of their own, without a past, and without a future before them, they had nothing but themselves to ponder on. Struggles there must have been in India also. Old dynasties were destroyed, whole families annihilated, and new empires founded. Yet the inward life of the Hindu was not changed by these convulsions. His mind was like the lotus leaf after a shower of rain has passed over it; his character remained the same, passive, meditative, quiet, and thoughtful. A people of this peculiar stamp was never destined to act a prominent part in the history of the world; nay, the exhausting atmosphere of transcendental ideas in which they lived could not but exercise a detrimental influence on the active and moral character of the Indians. Social and political virtues were little cultivated, and the ideas of the useful and the beautiful hardly known to them. With all this, however, they had, what the Greek was as little capable of imagining, as they were of realising the elements of Grecian life. They shut their eyes to this world of outward seeming and activity, to open them full on the world of thought and rest. The ancient Hindus were a nation of philosophers, such as could nowhere have existed except in India, and even there in early times alone. It is with the Hindu mind as if a seed were placed in a hothouse. It will grow rapidly, its colours will be gorgeous, its perfume rich, its fruits precocious and abundant. But never will it be like the oak growing in wind and weather, and striking its roots into real earth, and stretching its branches into real air beneath the stars and the sun of heaven. Both are experiments, the hothouse flower and the Hindu mind; and as experiments, whether physiological or psychological, both deserve to be studied.

We may divide the whole Aryan family into two branches, the northern and the southern. The northern nations, Celts, Greeks, Romans, Germans, and Slavonians, have each one act allotted to them on the stage of history. They have each a national character to support. Not so the southern tribes. They are absorbed in the struggles of thought, their past is the problem of creation, their future the problem of existence; and the present, which ought to be the solution of both, seems never to have attracted their attention, or called forth their energies. There never was a nation believing

so firmly in another world, and so little concerned about this. Their condition on earth is to them a problem; their real and eternal life a simple fact. Though this is said chiefly with reference to them before they were brought in contact with foreign conquerors, traces of this character are still visible in the Hindus, as described by the companions of Alexander, nay, even in the Hindus of the present day. The only sphere in which the Indian mind finds itself at liberty to act, to create, and to worship, is the sphere of religion and philosophy; and nowhere have religious and metaphysical ideas struck root so deep in the mind of a nation as in India. The shape which these ideas took amongst the different classes of society, and at different periods of civilisation, naturally varies from coarse superstition to sublime spiritualism. But, taken as a whole, history supplies no second instance where the inward life of the soul has so completely absorbed all the other faculties of a people.

It was natural, therefore, that the literary works of such a nation, when first discovered in Sanskrit MSS. by Wilkins, Sir W. Jones, and others, should have attracted the attention of all interested in the history of the human race. A new page in man's biography was laid open, and a literature as large as that of Greece or Rome was to be studied. The Laws of Manu, the two epic poems, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, the six complete systems of philosophy, works on astronomy and medicine, plays, stories, fables, elegies, and lyrical effusions, were read with intense interest, on account of their age not less than their novelty.

Still this interest was confined to a small number of students, and in a few cases only could Indian literature attract the eyes of men who, from the summit of universal history, survey the highest peaks of human excellence. Herder, Schlegel, Humboldt, and Goethe, discovered what was really important in Sanskrit literature. Everywhere we find systems, rules and models, castes and schools but nowhere individuality, no natural growth, and but few signs of strong originality and genius.

There is, however, one period of Sanskrit literature which forms an exception, and which will maintain its place in the history of mankind, when the name of Kalidasa and Sakuntala will have been long forgotten. It is the most ancient period, the period of the Veda. There is, perhaps, a higher degree of interest attaching to works of higher antiquity; but in the Veda we have more than mere antiquity. We have ancient thought expressed in ancient language. Without insisting on the fact that even chronologically the Veda is the first book of the Aryan nations, we have in it, at all events, a period in the intellectual life of man to which there is no parallel in any other part of the world. In the hymns of the Veda we see man left to himself to solve the riddle of this world. We see him crawling on like a

creature of the earth with all the desires and weaknesses of his animal nature. Food, wealth, and power, a large family and a long life, are the theme of his daily prayers. But he begins to lift up his eyes. He stares at the tent of heaven, and asks who supports it? He opens his ears to the winds, and asks them whence and whither? He is awakened from darkness and slumber by the light of the sun and him whom his eyes cannot behold, and who seems to grant him the daily pittance of his existence, he calls 'his life, his breath, his brilliant Lord and Protector.' He gives names to all the powers of nature, and after he has called the fire Agni, the sun-light Indra, the storms Maruts, and the dawn Ushas, they all seem to grow naturally into beings like himself, may, greater than himself. He invokes them, he praises them, he worships them. But still with all these gods around him, beneath him, and above him, the early poet seems ill at rest within himself. There too, in his own breast, he has discovered a power that wants a name, a power nearer to him than all the gods of nature, a power that is never mute when he prays, never absent when he fears and trembles. It seems to inspire his prayers, and yet to listen to them; it seems to live in him, and yet to support him and all around him. The only name he can find for this mysterious power is Brahman; for Brahman meant originally force, will, wish, and the propulsive power of creation. But this impersonal Brahman, too, as soon as it is named, grows into something strange and divine. It ends by being one of many gods, one of the great triad, worshipped to the present day. And still the thought within him has no real name; that power which is nothing but itself, which supports the gods, the heavens, and every living being, floats before his mind, conceived but not expressed. At last he calls it Atman; for Atman, originally breath or spirit, comes to mean Self and Self alone—Self whether divine or human, Self whether creating or suffering, Self whether one or all, but always Self, independent and free. 'Who has seen the first-born,' says the poet, 'when he who has no bones (i.e. form) bore him that had bones? Where was the life, the blood, the Self of the world? Who went to ask this from any that knew it?'¹ This idea of a divine Self once expressed, everything else must acknowledge its supremacy, 'Self is the Lord of all things, Self is the King of all things. As all the spokes of a wheel are contained in the nave and the circumference, all things are contained in this Self; all selves are contained in this Self.'² Brahman itself is but Self³.

This Atman also grew; but it grew, as it were without attributes. The sun is called the Self of all that moves and rests,* and still more

¹ *Rv.* I. 164. 4.

² *Brihad-aranyaka*, IV. 5, 15, ed. Roer, p. 487.

³ *Ibid.* p. 478. *Chhandogya-upanishad*, VIII. 3, 3—4.

* *Rv.* I. 115, 1.

frequently self becomes a mere pronoun. But Atman remained always free from myth and worship, differing in this from the Brahman (neuter), who has his temples in India even now, and is worshipped as Brahman (masculine), together with Vishnu and Siva, and other popular gods. The idea of the Atman or Self, like a pure crystal, was too transparent for poetry, and therefore was handed over to philosophy, which afterwards polished, and turned, and watched it as the medium through which all is seen, and in which all is reflected and known. But philosophy is later than the Veda, and it is of the Vaidik period only I have here to speak⁴.

In the Veda, then, we can study a theogony of which that of

⁴ *In writing the above, I was thinking rather of the mental process that was necessary for the production of such words as Brahman, Atman, and others, than of their idiomatic use in the ancient literature of India. It might be objected, for instance, that Brahman, neut. in the sense of creative power or the principal cause of all things, does not occur in the Rig-veda. This is true. But it occurs in that sense in the Atharva-veda, and in several of the Brahmanas. There we read of 'the oldest or greatest Brahman which rules everything that has been or will be.' Heaven is said to belong to Brahman alone (Atharva-veda X. 8, 1). In the Brahmanas, this Brahman is called the first-born, the self-existing, the best of the gods, and heaven and earth are said to have been established by it. Even the vital spirits are identified with it (Satapatha-brahmana VIII. 4, 9, 3).*

In other passages, again, this same Brahman is represented as existing in man (Atharva-veda X. 7, 17), and in this very passage we can watch the transition from the neutral Brahman into Brahman, conceived of as a masculine:

*Ye purushe brahma vidus te viduh parameshthinam,
Yo veda, parameshthinam, yas cha veda prajapatim,
Gyeshtham ye brahmanam vidus, te skambham anu samviduh.
'They who know Brahman in man, they know the Highest,
He who knows the Highest, and he who knows Prajapati (the
lord of creatures),
And they who know the oldest Brahmana, they know the
Ground.'*

The word Brahmana which is here used, is a derivative form of Brahman; but what is most important in these lines is the mixing of neuter and masculine words, of impersonal and personal deities. This process is brought to perfection by changing Brahman, the neuter, even grammatically into Brahman, a masculine,—a change which has taken place in the Aranyakas, where we find Brahman used as the name of a male deity. It is this Brahman, with the accent on the first, not, as has been supposed, Brahman, the priest, that appears again in the later literature as one of the divine triad,

Hesiod is but the last chapter. We can study man's natural growth, and the results to which it may lead under the most favourable conditions. All was given him that nature can bestow. We see him blest with the choicest gifts of the earth, under a glowing and transparent sky, surrounded by all the grandeur and all the riches of nature, with a language 'capable of giving soul to the objects of sense, and body to the abstractions of metaphysics.' We have a right to expect much from him, only we must not expect in his youthful poems the philosophy of the nineteenth century, or the beauties of Pindar, or, with some again, the truths of Christianity. Few understand antiquity. If we look in the Veda for high poetical diction, for striking comparisons, for bold combinations, we shall be disappointed. These early poets thought more for themselves than for others. They sought rather, in their language, to be true to their own thought than to please the imagination of their hearers. With them it was a great work achieved for the first time to bind thoughts and words together, to find expressions or to form new names. As to similes, we must look to the words themselves, which, if we compare their radical and their nominal meaning, will be found full of bold metaphors. No translation in any modern language can do them justice. As to beauty, we must discover it in the absence of all effort, and in the simplicity of their hearts. Prose was, at that time, unknown, as well as the distinction between prose and poetry. It was the attempted imitation of those ancient natural strains of thought which in later times gave rise to poetry in our sense of the word, that is to say, to poetry as an art, with its counted syllables, its numerous epithets, its rhyme and rhythm, and all the conventional attributes of 'measured thought.'

In the Veda itself, however—even if by Veda we mean the *Rig-veda* only (the other three, the *Saman*, *Yajush*, and *Atharvana*, having solely a liturgical interest, and belonging to an entirely different sphere)—in the *Rig-veda* also, we find much that is artificial, imitated, and therefore modern, if compared with other hymns. It is true that all the 1017 hymns of the *Rig-veda* were comprised in a collection which existed as such before one of those elaborate

Brahman, Vishnu, Siva.

The word Brahman, as a neuter, is used in the Rig-Veda in the sense of prayer also, originally what bursts forth from the soul, and, in one sense, what is revealed. Hence in later times Brahman is used collectively for the Veda, the sacred word.

Another word, with the accent on the last syllable, is brahman, the man who prays, who utters prayers, the priest, and gradually the Brahman by profession. In this sense it is frequently used in the Rig-veda (I. 108, 7), but not yet in the sense of Brahman by birth or caste.

theological commentaries known under the name of Brahmana, was written, that is to say, about 800 B.C. But before the date of their collection these must have existed for centuries. In different songs the names of different kings occur, and we see several generations of royal families pass away before us with different generations of poets. Old songs are mentioned, and new songs. Poets whose compositions we possess are spoken of as the seers of olden times; their names in other hymns are surrounded by a legendary halo. In some cases, whole books or chapters may be pointed out as more modern and secondary, in thought and language. But on the whole the Rig-veda is a genuine document, even in its most modern portions not later than the time of Lycurgus; and it exhibits one of the earliest and rudest phases in the history of mankind; disclosing in its full reality a period of which in Greece we have but traditions and names, such as Orpheus and Linus, and bringing us as near the beginnings in language, thought, and mythology as literary documents can ever bring us in the Aryan world.

Though much time and labour have been spent on the Veda, in England and in Germany, the time is not yet come for translating it as a whole. It is possible and interesting to translate it literally, or in accordance with scholastic commentaries, such as we find in India from Yaska in the fifth century B.C. down to Sayana in the fourteenth century of the Christian era. This is what H. H. Wilson has done in his translation of the first book of the *Rig-veda*; and by strictly adhering to this principle and excluding conjectural renderings even where they offered themselves most naturally, he has imparted to his work a definite character and a lasting value. The grammar of the Veda, though irregular, and still in a rather floating state, has almost been mastered; the etymology and the meaning of many words, unknown in the later Sanskrit, have been discovered. Many hymns, which are mere prayers for food, for cattle, or for a long life, have been translated, and can leave no doubt as to their real intention. But with the exception of these simple petitions, the whole world of Vedic ideas is so entirely beyond our own intellectual horizon, that instead of translating we can as yet only guess and combine. Here it is no longer a mere question of skilful deciphering. We may collect all the passages where an obscure word occurs, we may compare them and look for a meaning which would be appropriate to all; but the difficulty lies in finding a sense which we can appropriate, and transfer by analogy into our own language and thought. We must be able to translate our feelings and ideas into their language at the same time that we translate their poems and prayers into our language. We must not despair even where their words seem meaningless and their ideas barren or wild. What seems at first childish may at a happier moment disclose a sublime simplicity, and even in helpless expressions we may recognise aspirations after some high and noble

idea. When the scholar has done his work, the poet and philosopher must take it up and finish it. Let the scholar collect, collate, sift, and reject—let him say what is possible or not according to the laws of the Vedic language—let him study the commentaries, the Sutras, the Brahmanas, and even later works, in order to exhaust all the sources from which information can be derived. He must not despise the tradition of the Brahmans, even where their misconceptions and the causes of their misconceptions are palpable. To know what a passage cannot mean is frequently the key to its real meaning; and whatever reasons may be pleaded for declining a careful perusal of the traditional interpretations of Yaska or Sayana, they can all be traced back to an ill-concealed *argumentum paupertatis*. Not a corner in the Brahmanas, the Sutras, Yaska, and Sayana should be left unexplored before we venture to propose a rendering of our own. Sayana, though the most modern, is on the whole the most sober interpreter. Most of his etymological absurdities must be placed to Yaska's account, and the optional renderings which he allows for metaphysical, theological, or ceremonial purposes, are mostly due to his regard for the Brahmanas. The Brahmanas, though nearest in time to the hymns of the Rig-veda, indulge in the most frivolous and ill-judged interpretations. When the ancient Rishi exclaims with a troubled heart, 'Who is the greatest of the gods? Who shall first be praised by our songs?'—the author of the Brahmana sees in the interrogative pronoun 'Who' some divine name, a place is allotted in the sacrificial invocations to a god 'Who,' and hymns addressed to him are called 'Whoish' hymns. To make such misunderstandings possible, we must assume a considerable interval between the composition of the hymns and the Brahmanas. As the authors of the Brahmanas were blinded by theology, the authors of the still later Niruktas were deceived by etymological fictions, and both conspired to mislead by their authority later and more sensible commentators, such as Sayana. Where Sayana has no authority to mislead him, his commentary is at all events rational; but still his scholastic notions would never allow him to accept the free interpretation which a comparative study of these venerable documents forces upon the unprejudiced scholar. We must therefore discover ourselves the real vestiges of these ancient poets; and if we follow them cautiously, we shall find that with some effort we are still able to walk in their footsteps. We shall feel that we are brought face to face and mind to mind with men yet intelligible to us, after we have freed ourselves from our modern conceits. We shall not succeed always: words, verses, nay, whole hymns in the Rig-veda, will and must remain to us a dead letter. But where we can inspire those early relics of thought and devotion with new life, we shall have before us more real antiquity than in all the inscriptions of Egypt or Nineveh; not only old names and dates, and kingdoms and

battles, but old thoughts, old hopes, old faith, and old errors, the old Man altogether—old now, but then young and fresh, and simple and real in his prayers and in his praises.

The thoughtful bent of the Hindu mind is visible in the Veda also, but his mystic tendencies are not yet so fully developed. Of philosophy we find but little, and what we find is still in its germ. The active side of life is more prominent, and we meet occasionally with wars of kings, with rivalries of ministers, with triumphs and defeats, with war-songs and imprecations. Moral sentiments and worldly wisdom are not yet absorbed by phantastic intuitions. Still the child betrays the passions of the man, and there are hymns, though few in number, in the Veda, so full of thought and speculation that at this early period no poet in any other nation could have conceived them. I give but one specimen, the 129th hymn of the tenth book of the *Rig-veda*. It is a hymn which long ago attracted the attention of that eminent scholar H. T. Colebrooke, and of which, by the kind assistance of a friend, I am enabled to offer a metrical translation. In judging it we should bear in mind that it was not written by a gnostic or by a pantheistic philosopher, but by a poet who felt all these doubts and problems as his own, without any wish to convince or to startle, only uttering what had been weighing on his mind, just as later poets would sing the doubts and sorrows of their heart.

Nor Aught nor Nought existed; yon bright sky
 Was not, nor heaven's broad woof outstretched above.
 What covered all? what sheltered? what concealed?
 Was it the water's fathomless abyss?
 There was not death—yet was there nought immortal,
 There was no confine betwixt day and night;
 The only One breathed breathless by itself,
 Other than It there nothing since has been.
 Darkness there was, and all at first was veiled
 In gloom profound—an ocean without light—
 The germ that still lay covered in the husk
 Burst forth, one nature, from the fervent heat.
 Then first came love upon it, the new spring
 Of mind—yea, poets in their hearts discerned,
 Pondering, this bond between created things
 And uncreated. Comes this spark from earth
 Piercing and all-pervading, or from heaven?
 Then seeds were sown, and mighty powers arose—
 Nature below, and power and will above—
 Who knows the secret? who proclaimed it here,
 Whence, whence this manifold creation sprang?
 The gods themselves came later into being—
 Who knows from whence this great creation sprang?

He from whom all this great creation came,
 Whether his will created or was mute,
 The Most High Seer that is in highest heaven,
 He knows it—or perchance even He knows not.

The grammar of the Veda (to turn from the contents to the structure of the work) is important in many respects. The difference between it and the grammar of the epic poems would be sufficient of itself to fix the distance between these two periods of language and literature. Many words have preserved in these early hymns a more primitive form, and therefore agree more closely with cognate words in Greek or Latin. Night, for instance, in the later Sanskrit is *nisa*, which is a form peculiarly Sanskritic, and agrees in its derivation neither with *nox* nor with *nuz*. The Vaidik *nas* or *nak*, night, is as near to Latin as can be. Thus mouse in the common Sanskrit is *mushas* or *mushika*, both derivative forms if compared with the Latin *mus*, *muris*. The Vaidik Sanskrit has preserved the same primitive noun in the plural *mush-as*—Lat. *mures*. There are other words in the Veda which were lost altogether in the later Sanskrit, while they were preserved in Greek and Latin. Dyaus, sky, does not occur as a masculine in the ordinary Sanskrit; it occurs in the Veda, and thus bears witness to the early Aryan worship of Dayus, the Greek Zeus. Ushas, dawn, again in the later Sanskrit is neuter. In the Veda it is feminine; and even the secondary Vaidik form Aurora. Declension and conjugation are richer in forms and more unsettled in their usage. It is a curious fact, for instance, that no subjunctive mood existed in the common Sanskrit. The Greeks and Romans had it, and even the language of the *Avesta* showed clear traces of it. There could be no doubt that the Sanskrit also once possessed this mood, and at last it was discovered in the hymns of the *Rig-Veda*. Discoveries of this kind may seem trifling, but they are as delightful to the grammar as the appearance of a star, long expected and calculated, is to the astronomer. They prove that there is natural order in language, and that by a careful induction laws can be established which enable us to guess with great probability either at the form or meaning of words where but scanty fragments of the tongue itself have come down to us.

CHAPTER TWO¹

WHAT IS THE VEDA?

Many times have I been asked, What is the Veda? Why should it be published? What are we likely to learn from a book composed nearly four thousand years ago, and intended from the beginning for an uncultivated race of mere heathens and savages,—a book which the natives of India have never published themselves, although, to the present day, they profess to regard it as the highest authority for their religion, morals, and philosophy? Are we, the people of England or of Europe, in the nineteenth century, likely to gain any new light on religious, moral, or philosophical questions from the old songs of the Brahmans? And is it so very certain that the whole book is not a modern forgery, without any substantial claims to that high antiquity which is ascribed to it by the Hindus, so that all the labour bestowed upon it would not only be labour lost, but throw discredit on our powers of discrimination, and make us a laughing-stock among the shrewd people of India? These and similar questions I have had to answer many times when asked by others, and some of them when asked by myself, before embarking on so hazardous an undertaking as the publication of the *Rig-veda* and its ancient commentary.

I shall endeavour, therefore, as far as this is possible within the limits of one Lecture, to answer some of these questions, and to remove some of these doubts, by explaining to you, first, what the Veda really is, and, secondly, what importance it possesses, not only to the people of India, but to ourselves in Europe.—and here again, not only to the student of Oriental languages, but to every student of history, religion, or philosophy; to every man who has once felt the charm of tracing that mighty stream of human thought on which we ourselves are floating onward, back to its distant mountain-sources; to every one who has a heart for whatever has once filled the hearts of millions of human beings with their noblest hopes, and fears, and aspirations;—to every student of mankind in the fullest sense of that full and weighty word. Whoever claims that noble

¹ *Some of the points touched upon in this Lecture have been more fully treated in my "History of Ancient Sanskrit Literature." As the second edition of this work has been out of print for several years, I have here quoted a few passages from it in full.*

title must not forget, whether he examines the highest achievements of mankind in our own age, or the miserable failures of former ages, what man is, and in whose image and after whose likeness man was made. Whether listening to the shrieks of the Shaman sorcerers of Tatar, or to the odes of Pindar, or to the sacred songs of Paul Gerhard: whether looking at the pagodas of China, or the Parthenon of Athens, or the cathedral of Cologne: whether reading the sacred books of the Buddhists, of the Jews, or of those who worship God in spirit and in truth, we ought to be able to say, like the Emperor Maximilian, 'Homo sum, humani nihil a me alienum puto,' or, translating his words somewhat freely, 'I am a man, nothing pertaining to man I deem foreign to myself.' Yes, we must learn to read in the history of the whole human race something of our own history; and as in looking back on the story of our own life, we all dwell with a peculiar delight on the earliest chapters of our childhood, and try to find there the key to many of the riddles of our later life, it is but natural that the historian, too, should ponder with most intense interest over the few relics that have been preserved to him of the childhood of the human race. These relics are few indeed, and therefore very precious, and this I may venture to say, at the outset and without fear of contradiction, that there exists no literary relic that carries us back to a more primitive; or, if you like, more child-like state in the history of man² than, the Veda. As the language of the Veda, the Sanskrit, is the most ancient type of the English of the present day, (Sanskrit and English are but varieties of one and the same language,) so its thoughts and feelings contain in reality the first roots and germs of that intellectual growth which by an unbroken chain connects our own generation with the ancestors of the Aryan race,—with those very people who at the rising and setting of the sun listened with trembling hearts to the songs of the Veda, that told them of bright powers above, and of a life to come after the sun of their own lives had set in the clouds of the evening. Those men were the true ancestors of our race; and the Veda is the oldest book we have in which to study the first beginnings of our language, and of all that is embodied in language. We are by nature Aryan, Indo-European, not Semitic: our spiritual kith and kin are to be found in India, Persia, Greece, Italy, Germany; not in Mesopotamia, Egypt, or Palestine. This is a fact that ought to be clearly perceived, and constantly kept in view, in order to understand the importance which the Veda has for us, after the lapse of more than three

² 'In the sciences of law and society, old means not old in chronology, but in structure: that is most archaic which lies nearest to the beginning of human progress considered as a development, and that is most modern which is farthest removed from that beginning.'—J. F. McLennan, *Primitive Marriage*, p. 8.

thousand years, and after ever to many changes in our language, thought, and religion.

Whatever the intrinsic value of the Veda, if it simply contained the names of kings, the description of battles, the dates of famines, it would still be, by its age alone, the most venerable of books. Do we ever find much beyond such matters in Egyptian hieroglyphics, or in Cuneiform inscriptions? In fact, what does the ancient history of the world before Cyrus, before 500 B.C., consist of, but meagre lists of Egyptian, Babylonian, Assyrian dynasties? What do the tablets of Karnak, the places of Nineveh, and the cylinders of Babylon tell us about the thoughts of men? All is dead and barren, nowhere a sigh, nowhere a jest, nowhere a glimpse of humanity. There has been but one oasis in that vast desert of ancient Asiatic history, the history of the Jews. Another such oasis in the Veda. Here, too, we come to a stratum of ancient thought, of ancient feelings, hopes, joys, and fears,—of ancient religion. There is perhaps too little of kings and battles in the Veda, and scarcely anything of the chronological framework of history. But poets surely are better than kings, hymns and prayers are more worth listening to than the agonies of butchered armies, and guesses at truth more valuable than unmeaning titles of Egyptian or Babylonian despots. It will be difficult to settle whether the Veda is 'the oldest of books,' and whether some of the portions of the Old Testament may not be traced back to the same or even an earlier date than the oldest hymns of the Veda. But, in the Aryan world, Veda is certainly the oldest book, and its preservation amounts almost to a marvel.

It is nearly twenty years ago since my attention was first drawn to the Veda, while attending, in the years 1846 and 1847, the lectures of Eugene Burnouf at the College de France. I was then looking out, like most young men at that time of life, for some great work, and without weighing long the difficulties which had hitherto prevented the publication of the Veda, I determined to devote all my time to the collection of the materials necessary for such an undertaking. I had read the principal works of the later Sanskrit literature, but had found little there that seemed to be more than curious. But to publish the Veda, a work that had never before been published in India or in Europe, that occupied in the history of Sanskrit literature the same position which the Old Testament occupies in the history of the Jews, the Koran in the history of Muhammadanism,—a work which fills a gap in the history of the human mind, and promises to bring us nearer than any other work to the first beginnings of Aryan language and Aryan thought,—this seemed to me an undertaking not altogether unworthy a man's life. What added to the charm of it was that it had once before been undertaken by Frederick Rosen, a young German scholar, who died in England before he had finished the first book, and that after his death no one seemed willing

to carry on his work. What I had to do, first of all, was to copy not only the text, but the commentary of the *Rig-veda*, a work which when finished will fill six of these large volumes. The author or rather the compiler of this commentary, Sayana Acharya, lived about 1400 after Christ, that is to say, about as many centuries after, as the poets of the Veda lived before, the beginning of our era. Yet through the 3000 years which separate the original poetry of the Veda from the latest commentary, there runs an almost continuous stream of tradition, and it is from it, rather than from his own brain, that Sayana draws his explanations of the sacred texts. Numerous MSS., more or less complete, more or less inaccurate, of Sayana's classical work, existed in the then Royal Library at Paris, in the Library of the East-India House, then in Leadenhall Street, and in the Bodleian Library at Oxford. But to copy and collate these MSS. was by no means all. A number of other works were constantly quoted in Sayana's commentary, and these quotations had all to be verified. It was necessary first to copy these works, and to make indexes to all of them, in order to be able to find any passage that might be referred to in the larger commentary. Many of these works have since been published in Germany and France, but they were not to be procured twenty years ago. The work, of course, proceeded but slowly, and many times I doubted whether I should be able to carry it through. Lastly came the difficulty,—and by no means the smallest,—who was to publish a work that would occupy about six thousand pages in quarto, all in Sanskrit, and of which probably not a hundred copies would ever be sold. Well, I came to England in order to collect more materials at the East-India House and at the Bodleian Library, and thanks to the exertions of my generous friend Baron Bunsen, and of the late H. H. Wilson, the Board of Directors of the East-India Company decided to defray the expenses of a work which, as they stated in their letter, 'is in a peculiar manner deserving of the patronage of the East-India Company, connected as it is with the early religion, history, and language of the great body of their Indian subjects.' It thus became necessary for me to take up my abode in England, which has since become my second home. The first volume was published in 1849, the second in 1853, the third in 1856, the fourth in 1862. The materials for the remaining volumes are ready, so that, if I can but make leisure, there is little doubt that before long the whole work will be complete.

Now, first, as to the name. Veda means originally knowing or knowledge, and this name is given by the Brahmans not to one work, but to the whole body of their most ancient sacred literature. Veda is the same word which appears in the Greek *oida*, I know, and in the English wise, wisdom, to wit³. The name of Veda is commonly given to four collections of hymns, which are respectively known by the names of *Rig-veda*, *Yajur-veda*, *Sama-veda*, and

Atharva-veda; but for our own purposes, namely for tracing the earliest growth of religious ideas in India, the only important, the only real Veda, is the *Rig-veda*.

The other so-called Vedas, which deserve the name of Veda no more than the Talmud deserves the name of Bible, contain chiefly extracts from the *Rig-veda*, together with sacrificial formulas, charms, and incantations, many of them, no doubt, extremely curious, but never likely to interest any one except the Sanskrit scholar by profession.

The *Yajur-veda* and *Sama-veda* may be described as prayer-books, arranged accordingly to the order of certain sacrifices, and intended to be used by certain classes of priests.

Four classes of priests, were required in India at the most solemn sacrifices:

1. The officiating priests, manual labourers, and acolytes; who have chiefly to prepare the sacrificial ground, to dress the altar, slay the victims, and pour out the libations.
2. The choristers, who chant the sacred hymns.
3. The reciters or readers, who repeat certain hymns.
4. The overseers or bishops, who watch and superintend the proceedings of the other priests, and ought to be familiar with all the Vedas.

The formulas and verses to be muttered by the first class are contained in the *Yajur-veda-sanhita*.

The hymns to be sung by the second class are in the *Sama-veda-sanhita*.

The *Atharva-veda* is said to be intended for the Brahman or overseer, who is to watch the proceedings of the sacrifice, and to remedy any mistake that may occur⁴.

3 Sanskrit	Greek	Gothic	Anglo-Saxon	German
<i>veda</i>	<i>oida</i>	<i>vait</i>	<i>wat</i>	<i>ich weiss</i>
<i>vettha</i>	<i>oistha</i>	<i>vaist</i>	<i>wast</i>	<i>du weisst</i>
<i>veda</i>	<i>oide</i>	<i>vait</i>	<i>wat</i>	<i>er weiss</i>
<i>vidva</i>	—	<i>vitv</i>	—	—
<i>vidathuh</i>	<i>iston</i>	<i>vituts</i>	—	—
<i>vidatuh</i>	<i>iston</i>	—	—	—
<i>vidma</i>	<i>ismen</i>	<i>vitum</i>	<i>witon</i>	<i>wir wissen</i>
<i>vida</i>	<i>iste</i>	<i>vituth</i>	<i>wite</i>	<i>ihr wisset</i>
<i>viduh</i>	<i>isasi</i>	<i>vitun</i>	<i>witan</i>	<i>sie wissen.</i>

⁴ *History of Ancient Sanskrit Literature*, p. 449.

Fortunately, the hymns to be recited by the third class were not employed at them. Such treatises would only spring up when collection of hymns, containing all that had been saved of ancient, sacred and popular poetry, more like the Psalms than like a ritual; a collection made for its own sake, and not for the sake of any sacrificial performances.

I shall, therefore, confine my remarks to the Rig-veda, which in the eyes of the historical student is the Veda *par excellence*. Now Rig-veda means the Veda of hymns of praise, for *Rich*, which before the initial soft letter of Veda is changed to *Rig*, is derived from a root which in Sanskrit means to celebrate.

In the Rig-veda we must distinguish again between the original collection of the hymns or Mantras, called the Sanhita or the collection, being entirely metrical and poetical, and a number of prose works, called Brahmanas and Sutras, written in prose, and giving information on the proper use of the hymns at sacrifices, on their sacred meaning, on their supposed authors, and similar topics. These works, too, go by the name of Rig-veda; but though very curious in themselves, they are evidently of a much later period, and of little help to us in tracing the beginnings of religious life in India. For that purpose we must depend entirely on the hymns, such as we find them in the Sanhita or the collection of the Rig-veda.

Now this collection consists of ten books, and contains altogether 1028 hymns. As early as about 600 B.C. we find that in the theological schools of India every verse, every word, every syllable of the Veda had been carefully counted. The number of verses as computed in treatises of that date, varies from 10,402 to 10,622; that of the words is 153,826, that of the syllables 432,000⁵. With these numbers, and with the description given in these early treatises of each hymn, of its metre, its deity, its number of verses, our modern MSS. of the Veda correspond as closely as could be expected.

I say, our modern MSS., for all our MSS. are modern, and very modern. Few Sanskrit MSS. are more than four or five hundred years old, the fact being that in the damp climate of India no paper will last for more than a few centuries. How then, you will naturally ask, can it be proved that the original hymns were composed between 1200 and 1500 before the Christian era, if our MSS. only carry us back to about the same date after the Christian era? It is not very easy to bridge over this gulf of nearly three thousand years, but all I can say is that, after carefully examining every possible objection that can be made against the date of the Vedic hymns, their claim to that high antiquity which is ascribed to

⁵ *History of Ancient Sanskrit Literature, second edition, p. 219 seq.*

them, has not, as far as I can judge, been shaken. I shall try to explain on what kind of evidence these claims rest.

You know that we possess no MS. of the Old Testament in Hebrew older than about the tenth century after the Christian era; yet the Septuagint translation by itself would be sufficient to prove that the Old Testament, such as we now read it, existed in MS. previous, at least, to the third century before our era. By a similar train of argument, the works to which I referred before, in which we find every hymn, every verse, every word and syllable of the Veda accurately counted by Indian scholars about five or six hundred years before Christ, guarantee the existence of the Veda, such as we now read it, as far back at least as five or six hundred years before Christ. Now in the works of that period, the Veda is already considered, not only as an ancient, but as a sacred book; and, more than this, its language had ceased to be generally intelligible. The language of India had changed since the Veda was composed, and learned commentaries were necessary in order to explain to the people, then living, the true purport, nay, the proper pronounciation, of their sacred hymns. But more than this. In certain exegetical compositions, which are generally comprised under the name of Sutras, and which are contemporary with or even anterior to, the treatises on the theological statistics just mentioned, not only are the ancient hymns represented as invested with sacred authority, but that other class of writings, the Brahmanas, standing half-way between the hymns and the Sutras, have likewise been raised to the dignity of a revealed literature.

These Brahmanas, you will remember, are prose treatises, written in illustrations of the ancient sacrifices and of the hymns employed at them. Such treatises would only spring up when some kind of explanation began to be wanted both for the ceremonial and for the hymns to be recited at certain sacrifices, and we find, in consequence, that in many cases the authors of the Brahmanas had already lost the power of understanding the text of the ancient hymns in its natural and grammatical meaning, and that they suggested the most absurd explanations of the various sacrificial acts, most of which, we may charitably suppose, had originally some rational purpose. Thus it becomes evident that the period during which the hymns were composed must have been separated by some centuries, at least, from the period that gave birth to the Brahmanas, in order to allow time for the hymns growing unintelligible and becoming invested with a sacred character. Secondly, the period during which the Brahmanas were composed must be separated by some centuries from the authors of the Sutras, in order to allow time for further changes in the language, and more particularly for the growth of a new theology, which ascribed to the Brahmanas the same exceptional and revealed character which the Brahmanas

themselves ascribed to the hymns. So that we went previously to 600 B.C., when every syllable of the Veda was counted, at least two strata of intellectual and literary growth, of two or three centuries each; and are thus brought to 1100 or 1200 B.C. as the earliest time when we may suppose the collection of the Vedic hymns to have been finished. This collection of hymns again contains, by its own showing, ancient and modern hymns, the hymns of the sons together with the hymns of their fathers and earlier ancestors; so that we cannot well assign a date more recent than 1200 to 1500 before our era, for the original composition of those simple hymns which up to the present day are regarded by the Brahmans with the same feelings with which a Muhammadan regards the Koran, a Jew the Old Testament, a Christian his Gospel.

That the Veda is not quite a modern forgery can be proved, however, by more tangible evidence. Hiouen-thsang, a Buddhist pilgrim, who travelled from China to India in the years 629-645, and who, in his diary translated from Chinese into French by Stanislas Julien, gives the names of the four Veda, mentions some grammatical forms peculiar to the Vedic Sanskrit, and states that at his time young Brahmans spent all their time, from the seventh to the thirtieth year of their age, in learning these sacred texts. At the time when Hiouen-thsang was travelling in India, Buddhism was clearly on the decline. But Buddhism was originally a reaction against Brahmanism, and chiefly against the exclusive privileges which the Brahmans claimed, and which from the beginning were represented by them as based on their revealed writings, the Vedas, and hence beyond the reach of human attacks. Buddhism, whatever the date of its founder, became the state religion of India under Asoka, the Constantine of India, in the middle of the third century B.C. This Asoka was the third king of a new dynasty founded by Chandragupta, the well-known contemporary of Alexander and Seleucus, about 315 B.C. The preceding dynasty was that of the Nandas, and it is under this dynasty that the traditions of the Brahmans place a number of distinguished scholars whose treatises on the Veda we still possess, such as Saunaka, Katyayana Asvalayana, and others. Their works, and others written with a similar object and in the same style, carry us back to about 600 B.C. This period of literature, which is called the Sutra period, was preceded, as we saw, by another class of writings, the Brahmanas, composed in a very prolix and tedious style, and containing lengthy lucubrations on the sacrifices and on the duties of the different classes of priests. Each of the three or four Vedas, or each of the three or four classes of priests, has its own Brahmanas and its own Sutras; and as the Brahmanas are presupposed by the Sutras, while no Sutra is ever quoted by the Brahmanas, it is clear that the period of the Brahmana literature must have proceeded the period of the Sutra literature. There are, however, old and new

Brahmanas, and there are in the Brahmanas themselves long lists of teachers who handed down old Brahmanas or composed new ones, so that it seems impossible to accommodate the whole of that literature in less than two centuries, from about 800 to 600 B.C. Before, however, a single Brahmana could have been composed, it was not only necessary that there should have been one collection of ancient hymns, like that contained in the ten books of the *Rig-veda*, but the three or four classes of priests must have been established, the officiating priests and the choristers must have had their special prayer-books, may, these prayer-books must have undergone certain changes, because the Brahmanas presuppose different texts, called *sakhas*, of each of these prayer-books, which are called the *Yajur-veda-sanhita*, the *Sama-veda-sanhita*, and the *Atharva-veda-sanhita*. The work of collecting the prayers for the different classes of priests, and of adding new hymns and formulas for purely sacrificial purposes, belonged probably to the tenth century B.C., and three generations more would, at least, be required to account for the various readings adopted in the prayer-books by different sects, and invested with a kind of sacred authority, long before the composition of even the earliest among the Brahmanas. If, therefore, the years from about 1000 to 800 B.C. are assigned to this collecting age, the time before 1000 B.C. must be set apart for the free and natural growth of what was then national and religious, but not yet sacred and sacrificial poetry. How far back this period extends it is impossible to tell; it is enough if the hymns of the *Rig-veda* can be traced to a period anterior to 1000 B.C.

Much in the chronological arrangement of the three periods of Vedic literature that are supposed to have followed the period of the original growth of the hymns, must of necessity be hypothetical, and has been put forward rather to invite than to silence criticism. In order to discover truth, we must be truthful ourselves, and must welcome those who point out our errors as heartily as those who approve and confirm our discoveries. What seems, however, to speak strongly in favour of the historical character of the three periods of Vedic literature is the uniformity of style which marks the productions of each. In modern literature we find, at one and the same time, different styles of prose and poetry cultivated by one and the same author. A Goethe writes tragedy, comedy, satire, lyrical poetry, and scientific prose; but we find nothing like this in primitive literature. The individual is there much less prominent, and the poet's character disappears in the general character of the layer of literature to which he belongs. It is the discovery of such large layers of literature following each other in regular succession which inspires the critical historian with confidence in the truly historical character of the successive literary productions of ancient India. As in Greece there is an epic age of literature, where we should look in vain for prose

or dramatic poetry; as in that country we never meet with real elegiac poetry before the end of the eighth century, nor with iambics before the same date; as even in more modern times rhymed heroic poetry appears in England with the Norman conquest, and in Germany the Minnesanger rise and set with the Swabian dynasty—so, only in a much more decided manner, we see in the ancient and spontaneous literature of India, an age of poets followed by an age of collectors and imitators, that age to be succeeded by an age of theological prose writers, and this last by an age of writers of scientific manuals. New wants produced new supplies, and nothing sprang up or was allowed to live, in prose or poetry, except what was really wanted. If the works of poets, collectors, imitators, theologians, and teachers were all mixed up together—if the Brahmanas quoted the Sutras, and the hymns alluded to the Brahmanas—an historical restoration of the Vedic literature of India would be almost an impossibility. We should suspect artificial influences, and look with small confidence on the historical character of such a literary agglomerate. But he who would question the antiquity of the Veda must explain how the layers of literature were formed that are super-imposed over the original stratum of the poetry of the Rishis; he who would suspect a literary forgery must show how, when, and for what purpose the 1000 hymns of the Rig-veda could have been forged, and have become the basis of the religious, moral, political, and literary life of the ancient inhabitants of India.

The idea of revelation, and I mean more particularly book-revelation, is not a modern idea, nor is it an idea peculiar to Christianity. Though we look for it in vain in the literature of Greece and Rome, we find the literature of India saturated with this idea from beginning to end. In no country, I believe, has the theory of revelation been so minutely elaborated as in India. The name for revelation in Sanskrit is *Sruti*, which means hearing; and this title distinguishes the Vedic hymns and, at a later time, the Brahmanas also, from all other works, which, however sacred and authoritative to the Hindu mind, are admitted to have been composed by human authors. The Laws of Manu, for instance, according to the Brahmanic theology, are not revelation; they are not *Sruti*, but only *Smriti*, which means recollection or tradition. If these laws or any other work of authority can be proved on any point to be at variance with a single passage of the Veda, their authority is at once overruled. According to the orthodox views of Indian theologians, not a single line of the Veda was the work of human authors. The whole Veda is in some way or other the work of the Deity; and even those who received the revelation, or, as they express it, those who saw it, were not supposed to be ordinary mortals, but beings raised above the level of common humanity, and less liable therefore to error in the reception of revealed truth. The views entertained of revelation by the

orthodox theologians of India are far more minute and elaborate than those of the most extreme advocates of verbal inspiration in Europe. The human element, called *paurusheyatva* in Sanskrit, is driven out of every corner or hiding-place, and as the Veda is held to have existed in the mind of the Deity before the beginning of time, every allusion to historical events, of which there are not a few, is explained away with a zeal and ingenuity worthy of a better cause.

But let me state at once that there is nothing in the hymns themselves to warrant such extravagant theories. In many a hymn the author says plainly that he or his friends made it to please the gods; that he made it, as a carpenter makes a chariot, or like a beautiful vesture; that he fashioned it in his heart and kept it in his mind; that he expects, as his reward, the favour of the god whom he celebrates. But though the poets of the Veda know nothing of the artificial theories of verbal inspiration, they were not altogether unconscious of higher influences; nay, they speak of their hymns as god-given. One poet says: 'O god (Indra) have mercy, give me my daily bread! Sharpen my mind, like the edge of iron. Whatever I now may utter, longing for thee, do thou accept it; make me possessed of God!' Another utters for the first time the famous hymn, the Gayatri, which now for more than three thousand years has been the daily prayer of every Brahman, and is still repeated every morning by millions of pious worshippers: 'Let us meditate on the adorable light of the divine Creator: may he rouse our minds⁶.' This consciousness of higher influences, or of divine help in those who uttered for the first time the simple words of prayer, praise, and thanksgiving, is very different, however, from the artificial theories of verbal inspiration which we find in the later theological writings; it is indeed but another expression of that deep-felt dependence on the Deity, of that surrender and denial of all that seems to be self, which was felt more or less by every nation, but by none, I believe, more strongly, more constantly, than by the Indian. 'It is He that has made it'—viz. the prayer in which the soul of the poet has thrown off her burden—is but a variation of, 'It is He that has made us,' which is the key-note of all religion, whether ancient or modern, whether natural or revealed.

I must say no more to-night of what the Veda is, for I am very anxious to explain to you, as far as it is possible, what I consider to be the real importance of the Veda to the student of history, to the student of religion, to the student of mankind.

⁶ 'Tat Savitur varenyam bhargo devasya dhimahi, dhiyo yo nah prachodayat.'—Colebrooke, "Miscellaneous Essays," i. 30. Many passages bearing on this subject have been collected by John Muir in the third volume of his 'Sanskrit Texts,' p. 114 seq.

In the study of mankind there can hardly be a subject more deeply interesting than the study of the different forms of religion; and much as I value the Science of Language for the aid which it lends us in unravelling some of the most complicated tissues of the human intellect, I confess that to my mind there is no study more absorbing than that of the Religions of the World:—the study, if I may so call it, of the various language in which his Maker 'at sundry times and in divers manners' spake to man.

To my mind the great epochs in the world's history are marked, not by the foundation or the destruction of empires, by the migrations of races, or by French revolutions. All this is outward history, made up of events that seem gigantic and overpowering to those only who cannot see beyond and beneath. The real history of man is the history of religion: the wonderful ways by which the different families of the human race advanced towards a truer knowledge and a deeper love of God. This is the foundation that underlies all profane history: it is the light, the soul, and life of history, and without it all history would indeed be profane.

On this subject there are some excellent works in English, such as Maurice's *Lectures on the Religions of the World*, or Hardwick's *Christ and other Masters*; in German I need only mention Hegel's *Philosophy of Religion*; out of many other learned treatises on the different systems of religion in the East and the West. But in all these works religions are treated very much as languages were treated during the last century. They are rudely classed, either according to the different localities in which they prevailed, just as in Adelung's *Mithridates* you find the languages of the world classified as European, African, American, Asiatic, &c.; or according to their age, as formerly languages used to be divided into ancient and modern; or according to their respective dignity, as languages used to be treated as sacred or profane, as classical or illiterate. Now you know that the Science of Language has sanctioned a totally different system of classification; and that the Comparative Philologist ignores altogether the division of languages according to their classical or illiterate character. Languages are now classified genealogically, i.e. according to their real relationship; and the most important languages of Asia, Europe, and Africa, that is to say, of that part of the world on which what we call the history of man has been acted, have been grouped together into three great divisions, the Aryan or Indo-European Family, the Semitic Family, and the Turanian Class. According to that division you are aware that English together with all the Teutonic languages of the Continent, Celtic, Slavonic, Greek, Latin, with its modern offshoots, such as French and Italian, Persian, and Sanskrit, are so many varieties of one common type of speech: that Sanskrit, the ancient language of the Veda, is no more distinct from the Greek of Homer, or from the Gothic of Ulfilas, or from

the Anglo-Saxon of Alfred, than French is from Italian. All these languages together form one family, one whole, in which every member shares certain features in common with all the rest, and is at the same time distinguished from the rest by certain features peculiarly its own. The same applies to the Semitic Family, which comprises, as its most important members, the Hebrew of the Old Testament, the Arabic of the Koran, and the ancient languages on the monuments of Phenicia and Carthage, of Babylon and Assyria. These languages, again, form a compact family, and differ entirely from the other family, which we called Aryan or Indo-European. The third group of languages, for we can hardly call it a family, comprises most of the remaining languages of Asia, and counts among its principal members the Tungusic, Mongolic, Turkic, Samoyedic, and Finnic, together with the languages of Siam, the Malay Islands, Tibet, and Southern India. Lastly, the Chinese language stands by itself, as monosyllabic, the only remnant of the earliest formation of human speech.

Now I believe that the same division which has introduced a new and natural order into the history of languages, and has enabled us to understand the growth of human speech in a manner never dreamt of in former days, will be found applicable to a scientific study of religions. I shall say nothing to-night of the Semitic or Turanian or Chinese religions, but confine my remarks to the religions of the Aryan family. These religions, though more important in the ancient history of the world, as the religions of the Greeks and Romans, of our own Teutonic ancestors, and of the Celtic and Slavonic races, are nevertheless of great importance even at the present day. For although there are no longer any worshippers of Zeus, or Jupiter, of Wodan, Esus⁷, or Perkunas⁸, the two religions of Aryan origin which still survive, Brahmanism and Buddhism, claim together a decided majority among the inhabitants of the globe. Out of the whole population of the world, 31.2 per cent are Buddhists, 13.4 per cent are Brahmanists,—44.6, which together gives us 44 per cent for what may be called living Aryan religions. Of the remaining 56 per cent, 15.7 are Muhammadans, 8.7 per cent non-descript Heathens, 30.7 per cent Christians, and only 0.3 per cent Jews. (Based on figures available in the last century.)

Now, as a scientific study of the Aryan languages became possible

⁷ Mommsen, "*Inscriptiones Helveticae*," 40. Becker, "*Die inschriftlichen Ueberreste der Keltischen Sprache*", in "*Beitrage zur Vergleichenden Sprachforschung*," vol. iii. p. 341. Lucan, *Phars.* 1, 445, "*horrensque feris altaribus Hesus*."

⁸ Cf. G. Buhler, "*Über Parjanya*," in Benfey's "*Orient und Occident*," vol. i. p. 214. In the Old Irish, *arg*, a drop, has been pointed out as derived from the same root as *parjanya*.

only after the discovery of Sanskrit, a scientific study of the Aryan religion dates really from the discovery of the Veda. The study of Sanskrit brought to light the original documents of three religions, the Sacred Books of the Brahmans, the Sacred Books of the Magians, the followers of Zoroaster, and the Sacred Books of the Buddhists. Fifty years ago, these three collections of sacred writings were all but unknown, their very existence was doubted, and there was not a single scholar who could have translated a line of the Veda, a line of the Zend-Avesta, or a line of the Buddhist Tripitaka. At present large portions of these, the canonical writings of the most ancient and most important religions of the Aryan race, are published and deciphered, and we begin to see a natural progress, and almost a logical necessity, in the growth of these three systems of worship. The oldest, most primitive, most simple form of Aryan faith finds its expression in the Veda. The Zend-Avesta represents in its language, as well as in its thoughts, a branching off from that more primitive stem; a more or less conscious opposition to the worship of the gods of nature, as adored in the Veda, and a striving after a more spiritual, supreme, moral deity, such as Zoroaster proclaimed under the name of Ahura mazda, or Ormuzd. Buddhism, lastly, marks a decided schism, a decided antagonism against the established religion of the Brahmans, a denial of the true divinity of the Vedic gods, and a proclamation of new philosophical and social doctrines.

Without the Veda, therefore, neither the reforms of Zoroaster nor the new teaching of Buddha would have been intelligible: we should not know what was behind them, or what forces impelled Zoroaster and Buddha to the founding of new religions; how much they received, how much they destroyed, how much they created. Take but one word in the religious phraseology of these three systems. In the Veda the gods are called Deva. This word in Sanskrit means bright,—brightness or light being one of the most general attributes shared by the various manifestations of the Deity, invoked in the Veda, as Sun, or Sky, or Fire, or Dawn, or Storm. We can see, in fact, how in the minds of the poets of the Veda, Deva, from meaning bright, came gradually to mean divine. In the Zend-Avesta the same word Dæva means evil spirit. Many of the Vedic gods, with Indra at their head, have been degraded to the position of Dævas, in order to make room for Ahura mazda, the Wise Spirit, as the supreme deity of the Zoroastrians. In his confession of faith the follower of Zoroaster declares: 'I cease to be a worshipper of the Dævas.' In Buddhism, again, we find these ancient Devas, Indra and the rest, as merely legendary beings, carried about at shows, as servants of Buddha, as goblins or fabulous heroes; but no longer either worshipped or even feared by those with whom the name of Deva had lost every trace of its original meaning. Thus this one word Deva marks the mutual relations of these three religions. But more

than this. The same word *deva* is the Latin *deus*, thus pointing to that common source of language and religion, far beyond the heights of the Vedic Olympus, from which the Romans, as well as the Hindus, draw the names of their deities, and the elements of their language as well as of their religion.

The Veda, by its language and its thoughts, supplies that distant background in the history of all the religions of the Aryan race, which was missed indeed by every careful observer, but which formerly could be supplied by guess-work only. How the Persians came to worship Ormuzd, how the Buddhists came to protest against temples and sacrifices, how Zeus and the Olympian gods came to be what they are in the mind of Homer, or how such beings as Jupiter and Mars came to be worshipped by the Italian peasant:—all these questions, which used to yield material for endless and baseless speculations, can now be answered by a simple reference to the hymns of the Veda. The religion of the Veda is not the source of all the other religions of the Aryan world, nor is Sanskrit the mother of all the Aryan languages. Sanskrit, as compared to Greek and Latin, is an elder sister, not a parent: Sanskrit is the earliest deposit of Aryan speech, as the Veda is the earliest deposit of Aryan faith. But the religion and incipient mythology of the Veda possess the same simplicity and transparency which distinguish the grammar of Sanskrit from Greek, Latin, or German grammar. We can watch in the Veda ideas and their names growing, which in Persia, Greece, and Rome we meet with only as full-grown or as fast decaying. We get one step nearer to that distant source of religious thought and language which has fed the different national streams of Persia, Greece, Rome, and Germany; and we begin to see clearly, what ought never to have been doubted, that there is no religion without God, or, as St. Augustine expressed it, that 'there is no false religion which does not contain some elements of truth.'

I do not wish by what I have said to raise any exaggerated expectations as to the worth of these ancient hymns of the Veda, and the character of that religion which they indicate rather than fully describe. The historical importance of the Veda can hardly be exaggerated, but its intrinsic merit, and particularly the beauty or elevation of its sentiments, have by many been rated far too high. (Large numbers of the Vedic hymns are childish in the extreme: tedious, low, commonplace.) The gods are constantly invoked to protect their worshippers, to grant them food, large flocks, large families, and a long life; for all which benefits they are to be rewarded by the praises and sacrifices offered day after day, or at certain seasons of the year. (But hidden in this rubbish there are precious stones. Only in order to appreciate them justly, we must try to divest ourselves of the common notions about Polytheism, so repugnant not

only to our feelings, but to our understanding. (No doubt, if we must employ technical terms, the religion of the Veda is Polytheism, not Monotheism.) Deities are invoked by different names, some clear and intelligible, such as Agni, fire; Surya, the sun; Usha, dawn; Maruts, the storms; Prithivi, the earth; Ap, the waters; Nadi, the rivers: others such as Varuna, Mitra, Indra, which have become proper names, and disclose but dimly their original application to the great aspects of nature, the sky, the sun, the day. But whenever one of these individual gods is invoked, they are not conceived as limited by the powers of others, as superior or inferior in rank. Each god, is to the mind of the supplicant as good as all gods. He is felt, at the time, as a real divinity,—as supreme and absolute,—without a suspicion of those limitations which, to our mind, a plurality of gods must entail on every single god. All the rest disappear for a moment from the vision of the poet, and he only who is to fulfil their desires stands in full light before the eyes of the worshippers. In one hymn, ascribed to Manu, the poet says: ‘Among you, O gods, there is none that is small, none that is young; you are all great indeed.’ And this is indeed the key-note of the ancient Aryan worship. Yet it would be easy to find in the numerous hymns of the Veda, passages in which almost every important deity is represented as supreme and absolute. Thus in one hymn, Agni (fire) is called ‘the ruler of the universe,’ ‘the lord of men,’ ‘the wise king, the father, the brother, the son, the friend of man;’ nay, all the powers and names of the other gods are distinctly ascribed to Agni. But though Agni is thus highly exalted, nothing is said to disparage the divine character of the other gods. In another hymn another god, Indra, is said to be greater than all: ‘The gods,’ it is said, ‘do not reach thee, Indra, nor men; thou overcomest all creatures in strength.’ Another god, Soma, is called the king of the world, the king of heaven and earth, the conqueror of all. And what more could human language achieve, in trying to express the idea of a divine and supreme power, than what another poet says of another god, Varuna: ‘Thou art lord of all, of heaven and earth; thou art the king of all, of those who are gods, and of those who are men?’

This surely is not what is commonly understood by Polytheism. Yet it would be equally wrong to call it Monotheism. (If we must have a name for it, I should call it Kathenotheism.) The consciousness that all the deities are but different names of one and the same godhead breaks forth indeed here and there in the Veda. But it is far from being general. One poet, for instance, says⁹: ‘They call him Indra, Mitra, Varuna, Agni; then he is the beautiful-winged heavenly Garutmat: that which is One the wise call it in divers manners:

⁹ *Rv. I.* 164, 46.

they call it Agni, Yama, Matarisvan.' And again:¹⁰ 'Wise poets make the beautiful-winged, though he is one, manifold by words.'¹¹

I shall read you a few Vedic verses, in which the religious sentiment predominates, and in which we perceive a yearning after truth, and after the true God, untrammelled as yet by any names or any traditions*:

1. In the beginning there arose the golden Child—He was the one born lord of all that is. He established the earth, and this sky;—Who is the God to whom we shall offer our sacrifice?

2. He who gives life, He who gives strength; whose command all the bright gods revere; whose shadow is immortality, whose shadow is death;—Who is the God to whom we shall offer our sacrifice?

3. He who through His power is the one king of the breathing and awakening world;—He who governs all, man and beast;—Who is the God to whom we shall offer our sacrifice?

4. He whose greatness these snowy mountains, whose greatness the sea proclaims, with the distant river—He whose these regions are, as it were His two arms;—Who is the God to whom we shall offer our sacrifice?

5. He through whom the sky is bright and the earth firm—He through whom the heaven was established,—nay, the highest heaven, —He who measured out the light in the air;—Who is the God to whom we shall offer our sacrifice?

6. He to whom heaven and earth standing firm by His will, look up, trembling inwardly—He over whom the rising sun shines forth;—Who is the God to whom we shall offer our sacrifice?

7. Wherever the mighty water-clouds went, where they placed the seed and lit the fire, thence arose He who is the sole life of the bright gods;—Who is the God to whom we shall offer our sacrifice?

8. He who by His might looked even over the water-clouds, the clouds which gave strength and lit the sacrifice; He who alone is God above all gods;—Who is the God to whom we shall offer our sacrifice?

9. May He not destroy us—He the creator of the earth; or He, the righteous, who created the heaven; He also created the bright

¹⁰ *Rv. X.* 114, 5.

¹¹ *Rv. X.* 121.

* *History of Ancient Sanskrit Literary* p. 569.

and mighty waters;—Who is the God to whom we shall offer our sacrifice¹²?

The following may serve as specimens of hymns addressed to individual deities whose names have become the centres of religious thought and legendary traditions; deities, in fact, like Jupiter, Apollo, Mars, or Minerva, no longer mere germs, but fully developed forms of early thought and language:

HYMN TO INDRA¹³

Rv. I. 53

1. Keep silence well¹⁴! we offer praises to the great Indra in the house of the sacrificer. Does he find treasure for those who are like sleepers? Mean praise is not valued among the munificent.

2. Thou art the giver of horses, Indra, thou art the giver of cows, the giver of corn, the strong lord of wealth: the old guide of man, disappointing no desires, a friend to friends:—to him we address this song.

¹² *A last verse is added, which entirely spoils the poetical beauty and the whole character of the hymn. Its later origin seems to have struck even Indian critics, for the author of the Pada text did not receive it. 'O Prajapati, no other than thou hast embraced all these created things; may what we desired when we called on thee, be granted to us, may we be lords of riches.'*

¹³ *I subjoin for some of the hymns here translated, the translation of H. H. Wilson, in order to show what kind of difference there is between the traditional rendering of the Vedic hymns, as adopted by him, and their interpretation according to the rules of modern scholarship:*

1. *We ever offer fitting praise to the mighty Indra, in the dwelling of the worshipper, by which he (the deity) has quickly acquired riches, as (a thief) hastily carries (off the property) of the sleeping. Praise ill expressed is not valued among the munificent.*

2. *Thou, Indra, art the giver of horses, of cattle, of barley, the master and protector of wealth, the foremost in liberality, (the being) of many days; thou disappointest not desires (addressed to thee); thou art a friend to our friends: such an Indra we praise.*

3. *Wise and resplendent Indra, the achiever of great deeds, the riches that are spread around are known to be thine: having collected them, victor (over thy enemies), bring them to us: disappoint not the expectation of the worshipper who trusts in thee.*

4. *Propitiated by these offerings, by these libations, dispel poverty with cattle and horses: may we, subduing our adversary, and relieved from enemies by Indra, (pleased) by our libations, enjoy*

3. O powerful Indra, achiever of many works, most brilliant god—all this wealth around here is known to be thine alone: take from it, conqueror! bring it hither! Do not stint the desire of the worshipper who longs for thee!

4. On these days thou art gracious, and on these nights¹⁵, keeping off the enemy from our cows and from our stud. Tearing¹⁶ the fiend night after night with the help of Indra, let us rejoice in food, freed from haters.

5. Let us rejoice, Indra, in treasure and food, in wealth of manifold delight and splendour. Let us rejoice in the blessing of the gods, which gives us the strength of offspring, gives us cows first and horses.

together abundant food.

5. *Indra, may we become possessed of riches, and of food; and with energies agreeable to many, and shining around, may we prosper through thy divine favour, the source of prowess, of cattle, and of horses.*

6. *Those who were thy allies, (the Maruts,) brought thee joy: protector of the pious, those libations and oblations (that were offered thee on slaying Vritra), yielded thee delight, when thou, unimpeded by foes, didst destroy the ten thousand obstacles opposed to him who praised thee and offered thee libations.*

7. *Humiliator (of adversaries), thou goest from battle to battle, and destroyest by thy might city after city: with thy foe-prostrating associate, (the thunderbolt,) thou, Indra, didst slay afar off the deceiver named Namuki.*

8. *Thou hast slain Karanga and Parnaya with thy bright gleaming spear, in the cause of Atithigva: unaided, thou didst demolish the hundred cities of Vanarida, when besieged by Rijisvan.*

9. *Thou, renowned Indra, overthrewest by thy not-to-be-overtaken chariot-wheel, the twenty kings of men, who had come against Susravas, unaided, and their sixty thousand and ninety and nine followers.*

10. *Thou, Indra, hast preserved Susravas by thy succour, Turvayana by thy assistance: thou hast made Kutsa, Atithigva, and Ayu subject to the mighty though youthful Susravas.*

11. *Protected by the gods, we remain, Indra, at the close of the sacrifice, thy most fortunate friends: we praise thee, as enjoying through thee excellent offspring, and a long and prosperous life.*

¹⁴ *Favete linguis.*

¹⁵ *Cf. Rv. I. 112, 25, 'dyubhir aktubhik,' by day and by night; also Rv. III. 31, 16. M. M., Todtenbestattung, p. v.*

¹⁶ *Benfey reads durayantah, but all MSS. that I know, without exception, read darayantah.*

6. These draughts inspired thee, O lord of the brave! these were vigour, these libations, in battles, when for the sake of the poet, the sacrificer, thou struckest down irresistibly ten thousands of enemies.

7. From battle to battle¹⁷ thou advancest bravely, from town to town thou destroyest all this with might, when thou, Indra, with Nami as thy friend, struckest down from afar the deceiver Namuki.

8. Thou hast slain Karnaga and Parnaya with the brightest spear of Atithigva. Without a helper thou didst demolish the hundred cities of Vangrida, which were besieged by Rijisvan.

9. Thou hast felled down with the chariot-wheel these twenty kings of men, who had attacked the friendless Susravas¹⁸, and gloriously the sixty thousand and ninety-nine forts.

10. Thou, Indra, hast succoured Susravas with thy succours, Turvayana with thy protections. Thou hast made Kutsa, Atithigva, and Ayu subject to this mighty youthful king.

11. We who in future, protected by the gods, wish to be thy most blessed friends, we shall praise thee, blessed by thee with offspring, and enjoying henceforth a longer life.

The next hymn is one of many addressed to Agni as the god of fire, not only the fire as a powerful element, but likewise the fire of the hearth and the altar, the guardian of the house, the minister of the sacrifice, the messenger between gods and men:

HYMN TO AGNI

Rv. II. 6

1. Agni, accept this log which I offer to thee, accept this my service; listen well to these my songs.

2. With this log, O Agni, may we worship thee, thou son of strength, conqueror of horses! and with this hymn, thou high-born!

3. May we thy servants serve thee with songs, O granter of riches, thou who lovest songs and delightest in riches.

4. Thou lord of wealth and giver of wealth, be thou wise and powerful; drive away from us the enemies!

5. He gives us rain from heaven, he gives us inviolable strength, he gives us food a thousandfold.

¹⁷ For a different translation see Roth, in *Deutsche Monatschrift*, p. 89.

¹⁸ See *Spiegel, Eran*, p. 269, on Khai Khosru = Susravas.

6. Youngest of the gods, their messenger, their invoker, most deserving of worship, come, at our praise, to him who worships thee and longs for thy help.

7. For thou, O sage, goest wisely between these two creations (heaven and earth, gods and men), like a friendly messenger between two hamlets.

8. Thou art wise, and thou hast been pleased; perform thou, intelligent Agni, the sacrifice without interruption, sit down on this sacred grass!

The following hymn, partly laudatory, partly deprecatory, is addressed to the Maruts or Rudras, the Storm-gods:

HYMN TO THE MARUTS¹⁹

Rv. I. 39

1. When you thus from afar cast forward your measure, like a blast of fire, through whose wisdom is it, through whose design? To whom do you go, to whom, ye shakers (of the earth)?

2. May your weapons be firm to attack, strong also to withstand! May yours be the more glorious strength, not that of the deceitful mortal!

3. When you overthrow what is firm, O ye men, and whirl about what is heavy, ye pass through the trees of the earth, through the clefts of the rocks.

¹⁹ H. H. Wilson translates as follows:

1. *When, Maruts, who make (all things) tremble, you direct your awful (vigour) downwards from afar, as light (descends from heaven), by whose worship, by whose praise (are you attracted)? To what (place of sacrifice), to whom, indeed, do you repair?*

2. *Strong be your weapons for driving away (your) foes, firm in resisting them: yours be the strength that merits praise, not (the strength) of a treacherous mortal.*

3. *Directing Maruts, when you demolish what is stable, when you scatter what is ponderous, then you make your way through the forest (trees) of earth and the defiles of the mountains.*

4. *Destroyers of foes, no adversary of yours is known above the heavens, nor (is any) upon earth: may your collective strength be quickly exerted, sons of Rudra, to humble (your enemies).*

5. *They make the mountains tremble, they drive apart the forest trees. Go, divine Maruts, whither you will, with all your progeny, like those intoxicated.*

6. *You have harnessed the spotted deer to your chariot; the red deer yoked between them, (aids to) drag the car: the firmament listens*

4. No real foe of yours is known in heaven, nor in earth, ye devourers of enemies! May strength be yours, together with your race, O Rudras, to defy even now.

5. They make the rocks to tremble, they tear asunder the kings of the forest. Come on, Maruts, like madmen, ye gods, with your whole tribe.

6. You have harnessed the spotted deer to your chariots, a red deer draws as leader. Even the earth listened at your approach, and men were frightened.

7. O Rudras, we quickly desire your help for our race. Come now to us with help, as of yore, thus for the sake of the frightened Kanva.

8. Whatever fiend, roused by you or roused by mortals, attacks us, tear him from us by your power, by your strength, by your aid.

9. For you, worshipful and wise, have wholly protected Kanva. Come to us, Martus, with your whole help, as quickly as lightnings come after the rain.

10. Bounteous givers, ye possess whole strength, whole power, ye shakers (of the earth). Send, O Maruts, against the proud enemy of the poets, an enemy, like an arrow.

The following is a simple prayer addressed to the Dawn:

HYMN TO USHAS

Rv. VII. 77.

1. She shines upon us, like a young wife, rousing every living being to go to his work. When the fire had to be kindled by men, she made the light by striking down darkness.

2. She rose up, spreading far and wide, and moving everywhere. She grew in brightness, wearing her brilliant garment. The mother

for your coming, and men are alarmed.

7. *Rudras, we have recourse to your assistance for the sake of our progeny: come quickly to the timid Kanva, as you formerly came, for our protection.*

8. *Should any adversary, instigated by you, or by man, assail us, withhold from him food and strength and your assistance.*

9. *Prachetasas, who are to be unreservedly worshipped, uphold (the sacrificer) Kanva: come to us, Maruts, with undivided protective assistances, as the lightnings (bring) the rain.*

10. *Bounteous givers, you enjoy unimpaired vigour: shakers (of the earth), you possess undiminished strength: Maruts, let loose your anger, like an arrow, upon the wrathful enemy of the Rishis.*

of the cows, (the mornings) the leader of the days, she shone gold-coloured, lovely to behold.

3. She, the fortunate, who brings the eye of the gods, who leads the white and lovely steed (of the sun), the Dawn was seen revealed by her rays, with brilliant treasures, following every one.

4. Thou who art a blessing where thou art near, drive far away the unfriendly; make the pasture wide, give us safety! Scatter the enemy, bring riches! Raise up wealth to the worshipper, thou mighty Dawn.

5. Shine for us with thy best rays, thou bright Dawn, thou who lengthenest our life, thou the love of all, who givest us food, who givest us wealth in cows, horses, and chariots.

6. Thou daughter of the sky, thou high-born Dawn, whom the Vasishthas magnify with songs, give us riches high and wide: all ye gods protect us always with your blessings.

I must confine myself to shorter extracts, in order to be able to show to you that all the principal elements of real religion are present in the Veda. I remind you again that the Veda contains a great deal of what is childish and foolish, though very little of what is bad and objectionable. Some of its poets ascribe to the gods sentiments and passions unworthy of the deity, such as anger, revenge, delight in material sacrifices; they likewise represent human nature on a low level of selfishness and worldliness. Many hymns are utterly unmeaning and insipid, and we must search patiently before we meet, here and there, with sentiments that come from the depth of the soul, and with prayers in which we could join ourselves. Yet there are such passages, and they are the really important passages, as marking the highest points to which the religious life of the ancient poets of India had reached; and it is to these that I shall now call your attention.

First of all, the religion of the Veda knows of no idols. The worship of idols in India is a secondary formation, a later degradation of the more primitive worship of ideal gods.

The gods of the Veda are conceived as immortal: passages in which the birth of certain gods is mentioned have a physical meaning: they refer to the birth of the day, the rising of the sun, the return of the year.

The gods are supposed to dwell in heaven, though several of them, as, for instance, Agni, the god of fire, are represented as living among men, or as approaching the sacrifice, and listening to the praises of their worshippers.

Heaven and earth are believed to have been made or to have been established by certain gods. Elaborate theories of creation, which

abound in the later works, the Brahmanas, are not to be found in the hymns. What we find are such passages as:

‘Agni held the earth, he established the heaven by truthful words.’

‘Varuna stemmed asunder the wide firmaments; he lifted on high the bright and glorious heaven; he stretched out apart the starry sky and the earth.’

More frequently, however, the poets confess their ignorance of the beginning of all things, and one of them exclaims:

‘Who has seen the first-born? Where was the life, the blood, the soul of the world? Who went to ask this from any that knew it?’²⁰

Or again,²¹ what was the forest, what was the tree out of which they shaped heaven and earth? Wise men, ask this indeed in your mind, on what he stood when he held the worlds?

I now come to a more important subject. We find in the Veda, what few would have expected to find there, the two ideas, so contradictory to the human understanding, and yet so easily reconciled in every human heart: God has established the eternal laws of right and wrong, he punishes sin and rewards virtue, and yet the same God is willing to forgive; just, yet merciful; a judge, and yet a father. Consider, for instance, the following lines, ‘His path is easy and without thorns, who does what is right.’²²

And again: ‘Let man fear Him who holds the four (dice), before he throws them down (i.e. God who holds the destinies of men in his hand); let no man delight in evil words!’²³

And then consider the following hymns, and imagine the feelings without thorns, who does what is right.’²²

HYMNS TO VARUNA

Rv. VII. 89.

1. Let me not yet, O Varuna, enter into the house of clay; have mercy, almighty, have mercy!

2. If I go along trembling, like a cloud driven by the wind; have mercy, almighty, have mercy!

3. Through want of strength, thou strong and bright god, have I gone wrong; have mercy, almighty, have mercy!

²⁰ Rv. I. 164, 4. *History of Ancient Sanskrit Literature*, p. 20, note.

²¹ Rv. X. 81, 4. ²² Rv. I. 41, 4. ²³ Rv. I. 41, 9.

4. Thirst came upon the worshipper, though he stood in the midst of the waters; have mercy, almighty, have mercy!

5. Whenever we men, O Varuna, commit an offence before the heavenly host, whenever we break the law through thoughtlessness; punish us not, O god, for that offence.

And again²⁴:

1. Wise and mighty are the works of him who stemmed asunder the wide firmaments (heaven and earth). He lifted on high the bright and glorious heaven; he stretched out apart the starry sky and the earth.

2. Do I say this to my own self? How can I get unto Varuna? Will he accept my offering without displeasure? When shall I, with a quiet mind, see him propitiated?

3. I ask, O Varuna, wishing to know this my sin. I go to ask the wise. The sages all tell me the same: Varuna it is who is angry with thee.

4. Was it an old sin, O Varuna, that thou wishest to destroy thy friend, who always praises thee? Tell me, thou unconquerable lord, and I will quickly turn to thee with praise, freed from sin.

5. Absolve us from the sins of our fathers, and from those which we committed with our own bodies. Release Vasishtha, O king, like a thief who has feasted on stolen oxen; release him like a calf from the rope.

6. It was not our own doing, O Varuna, it was necessity (or temptation), an intoxicating draught, passion, dice, thoughtlessness. The old is there to mislead the young; even sleep brings unrighteousness.

7. Let me without sin give satisfaction to the angry god, like a slave to his bounteous lord. The lord God enlightened the foolish; he, the wisest, leads his worshipper to wealth.

8. O lord Varuna, may this song go well to thy heart! May we prosper in keeping and acquiring! Protect us, O gods, always with your blessings!

The consciousness of sin is a prominent feature in the religion of the Veda, so is likewise the belief that the gods are able to take away from man the heavy burden of his sins. And when we read such passages as 'Varuna is merciful even to him who has committed sin,'²⁵ we should surely not allow the strange name of Varuna to jar

²⁴ *Rv. VII. 86.*

²⁵ *Rv. VII. 87, 7.*

on our ears, but should remember that it is but one of the many names which men invented in their helplessness to express their ideas of the Deity, however partial and imperfect.

The next hymn, which is taken from the *Atharva-veda*²⁶, will show how near the language of the ancient poets of India may approach to the language of the Bible²⁷:

1. The great lord of these worlds sees as if he were near. If a man thinks he is walking by stealth, the gods know it all.

2. If a man stands or walks or hides, if he goes to lie down or to get up, what two people sitting together whisper, King Varuna knows it, he is there as the third.

3. This earth, too, belongs to Varuna, the king, and this wide sky with its ends far apart. The two seas (the sky and the ocean) are Varuna's lions; he is also contained in this small drop of water.

4. He who should flee far beyond the sky, even he would not be rid of Varuna, the king. His spies proceed from heaven towards this world; with thousand eyes they overlook this earth.

5. King Varuna sees all this, what is between heaven and earth, and what is beyond. He has counted the twinklings of the eyes of men. As a player throws the dice, he settles all things.

6. May all thy fatal nooses, which stand spread out seven by seven and threefold, catch the man who tells a lie, may they pass by him who tells the truth.

Another idea which we find in the Veda is that of faith: not only in the sense of trust in the gods, in their power, their protection, their kindness, but in that of belief in their existence. The Latin word *credo*, I believe, is the same as the Sanskrit *śraddha*, and this *śraddha* occurs in the Veda.

'Sun and moon go on in regular succession, that we may see, Indra and believe.'²⁸

'Destroy not our future offspring, O Indra, for we have believed in thy great power.'²⁹

²⁶ *Rv. IV. 16.*

²⁷ *This hymn was first pointed out by Roth in a dissertation on the Atharva-veda (Tubingen, 1856), and it has since been translated and annotated by John Muir, in his article on the Vedic Theogony and Cosmogony, p. 31.*

²⁸ *Rv. I. 102, 2.*

²⁹ *Rv. I. 104, 6.*

'When Indra hurls again³⁰ and again his thunderbolt, then they believe in the brilliant god.'³¹

A similar sentiment, namely, that men only believe in the gods when they see their signs and wonders in the sky, is expressed by another poet:

'Thou, Indra, never findest a rich man to be thy friend; wine-swillers despise thee. But when thou thunderest, when thou gatherest (the clouds), then thou art called, like a father.'³²

And with this belief in god, there is also coupled that doubt, that true scepticism, if we may so call it, which is meant to give to faith its real strength. We find passages even in these early hymns where the poet asks himself, whether there is really such a god as Indra,—a question immediately succeeded by an answer, as if given to the poet by Indra himself. Thus we read:

'If you wish for strength, offer to Indra a hymn of praise: a true hymn, if Indra truly exist, for some one says, Indra does not exist! Who has seen him? Whom shall we praise?'³³

Then Indra answers through the poet:

'Here I am, O worshipper, behold me here! in might I surpass all things.'

Similar visions occur elsewhere, where the poet, after inviting a god to a sacrifice, or imploring his pardon for his offence, suddenly exclaims that he has seen the god, and that he feels that his prayer is granted. For instance:

HYMN TO VARUNA

Rv. I. 25.

1. However we break thy laws from day to day, men as we are, O god, Varuna,
2. Do not deliver us unto death, nor to the blow of the furious; nor to the wrath of the spiteful!

³⁰ Rv. I. 55, 5.

³¹ *During violent thunderstorms the people of New Holland are so afraid of War-ru-gu-ra, the evil spirit, that they seek shelter even in caves haunted by Ingnas, subordinate demons, which at other times they would enter on no account. There, in silent terror, they prostrate themselves with their faces to the ground, waiting until the spirit, having expended his fury, shall retire to Uta (hell) without having discovered their hiding-place.—Transactions of Ethnological Society, vol iii. p. 229. Oldfield, The Aborigines of Australia.*

³² Rv. VIII. 21, 14.

³³ Rv. VIII. 100, 3.

3. To propitiate thee, O Varuna, we unbend thy mind with songs, as the charioteer a weary steed.

4. Away from me they flee dispirited, intent only on gaining wealth; as birds to their nests.

5. When shall we bring hither the man, who is victory to the warriors; when shall we bring Varuna, the wide-seeing to be propitiated?

[6. They (Mitra and Varuna) take this in common; gracious, they never fail the faithful giver.]

7. He who knows the place of the birds that fly through the sky, who on the waters knows the ships;—

8. He, the upholder of order, who knows the twelve months with the offspring of each, and knows the month that is engendered afterwards;—

9. He who knows the track of the wind, of the wide, the bright, the mighty; and knows those who reside on high;—

10. He, the upholder of order, Varuna, sits down among his people; he, the wise, sits there to govern.

11. From thence perceiving all wondrous things, he sees what has been and what will be done.

12. May he, the wise Aditya, make our paths straight all our days; may he prolong our lives!

13. Varuna, wearing golden mail, has put on his shining cloak; the spies sat down around him.

14. The god whom the scoffers do not provoke, nor the tormentors of men, nor the plotters of mischief;—

15. He, who gives to men glory, and not half glory, who gives it even to our own selves;—

16. Yearning for him, the far-seeing, my thoughts move onwards, as kine move to their pastures.

17. Let us speak together again, because my honey has been brought: that thou mayst eat what thou likest, like a friend.

18. Did I see the god who is to be seen by all, did I see the chariot above the earth? He must have accepted my prayers.

19. O hear this my calling, Varuna, be gracious now; longing for help, I have called upon thee.

20. Thou, O wise god, art lord of all, of heaven and earth: listen on thy way.

21. That I may live, take from me the upper rope, loose the middle, and remove the lowest!

In conclusion, let me tell you that there is in the Veda, no trace of metempsychosis or that transmigration of souls from human to animal bodies which is generally supposed to be a distinguishing feature of Indian religion. Instead of this, we find what is really the *sine qua non* of all real religion, a belief in immortality, and in personal immortality. Without a belief in personal immortality, religion surely is like an arch resting on one pillar, like a bridge ending in an abyss. We cannot wonder at the great difficulties felt and expressed by Bishop Warburton and other eminent divines, with regard to the supposed total absence of the doctrine of immortality or personal immortality in the Old Testament; and it is equally startling that the Sadducees who sat in the same council with the high-priest, openly denied the resurrection.³⁴ However, though not expressly asserted anywhere, a belief in personal immortality is taken for granted in several passages of the Old Testament, and we can hardly think of Abraham or Moses as without a belief in life and immortality. But while this difficulty, so keenly felt with regard to the Jewish religion, ought to make us careful in the judgments which we form of other religions, and teach us the wisdom of charitable interpretation, it is all the more important to mark that in the Veda passages occur where immortality of the soul, personal immortality and personal responsibility after death, are clearly proclaimed. Thus we read:

‘He who gives alms goes to the highest place in heaven; he goes to the gods.’³⁵

Another poet, after rebuking those who are rich and do not communicate, says:

‘The kind mortal is greater than the great in heaven!’

Even the idea, so frequent in the later literature of the Brahmans, that immortality is secured by a son, seems implied, unless our translation deceives us, in one passage of the Veda:—‘Asme (iti) virah marutah sushmi astu jananam yah asurah vi dharta, apah yena su-kshitaye tarema, adha svam okah abhi vah syama.’³⁶ ‘O Maruts, may there be to us a strong son, who is a living ruler of men: through whom we may cross the waters on our way to the happy abode; then may we come to your own house!’

One poet prays that he may see again his father and mother after death³⁷; and the fathers (Pitris) are invoked almost like gods, oblations are offered to them, and they are believed to enjoy, in company with the gods, a life of never-ending felicity.³⁸

³⁴ Acts xxii. 30, xxiii. 6. ³⁵ Rv. I. 125, 56.

³⁶ VII. 56, 24.

³⁷ Rv. I. 24, 1.

³⁸ Rv. X. 15, 16.

We find this prayer addressed to Soma:

'Where there is eternal light, in the world where the sun is placed, in that immortal imperishable world place me, O Soma!³⁹

'Where king Vaivasvata reigns, where the secret place of heaven is, where these mighty waters are, there make me immortal!

'Where life is free, in the third heaven of heavens, where the worlds are radiant, there make me immortal!

'Where wishes and desires are, where the bowl of the bright Soma is, where there is food and rejoicing, there make me immortal!

"Where there is happiness and delight, where joy and pleasure reside, where the desires of our desire are attained, there make me immortal!⁴⁰"

Whether the old Rishis believed likewise in a place of punishment for the wicked, is more doubtful, though vague allusions to it occur in the *Rig-veda*, and more distinct descriptions are found in the *Atharva-veda*. In one verse it is said that the dead is rewarded for his good deeds, that he leaves or casts off all evil, and glorified takes his new body⁴¹. The dogs of Yama, the king of the departed, present some terrible aspects, and Yama is asked to protect the departed from them⁴². Again, a pit (*karta*) is mentioned into which the lawless are said to be hurled down⁴³, and into which Indra casts those who offer no sacrifices⁴⁴. One poet prays that the Adityas may preserve him from the destroying wolf, and from falling into the pit⁴⁵. In one

³⁹ *Rv. IX.* 113, 7.

⁴⁰ Roth, after quoting several passages from the *Veda* in which a belief in immortality is expressed, remarks with great truths 'We here find, not without astonishment, beautiful conceptions on immortality expressed in unadorned language with childlike conviction. If it were necessary, we might here find the most powerful weapons against the view which has lately been revived, and proclaimed as new, that Persia was the only birthplace of the idea of immortality, and that even the nations of Europe had derived it from that quarter. As if the religious spirit of every gifted race was not able to arrive at it by its own strength.'—(*Journal of the German Oriental Society*, vol. iv. p. 427.) See Muir's article on Yama, in the *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, p. 10.

⁴¹ *M. M.*, *Die Todtenbestattung bei den Brahmanen*, *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenlandischen Gesellschaft*, vol. ix. p. xii. *Rv. X.* 14, 8.

⁴² *Rv. X.* 14, 11.

⁴³ *Rv. IX.* 73, 8.

⁴⁴ *Rv. I.* 121, 13.

⁴⁵ *Rv. II.* 29, 6.

passage we read that 'those who break the commandments of Varuna and who speak lies are born for that deep place.'⁴⁶

Surely the discovery of a religion like this, as unexpected as the discovery of the jaw-bone of Abbeville, deserves to arrest our thoughts for a moment, even in the haste and hurry of this busy life. No doubt for the daily wants of life, the old division of religions into true and false is quite sufficient; as for practical purposes we distinguish only between our own mother-tongue on the one side, and all other foreign languages on the other. But, from a higher point of view, it would not be right to ignore the new evidence that has come to light; and as the study of geology has given us a truer insight into the stratification of the earth, it is but natural to expect that a thoughtful study of the original works of three of the most important religions of the world, Brahmanism, Magism, and Buddhism, will modify our views as to the growth or history of religion, as to the hidden layers of religious thought beneath the soil on which we stand. Such inquiries should be undertaken without prejudice and without fear: the evidence is placed before us; our duty is to sift it critically, to weigh it honestly, and to wait for the results.

Three of these results, to which, I believe, a comparative study of religions is sure to lead, I may state before I conclude this Lecture.

1. We shall learn that religions in their most ancient form, or in the minds of their authors, are generally free from many of the blemishes that attach to them in later times.

2. We shall learn that there is hardly one religion which does not contain some truth, some important truth; truth sufficient to enable those who seek the Lord and feel after Him, to find Him in their hour of need.

3. We shall learn to appreciate better than ever what we have in our own religion. No one who has not examined patiently and honestly the other religions of the world, can know what Christianity really is, or can join with such truth and sincerity in the words of St. Paul: 'I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ.'

⁴⁶ *Rv. IV. 5, 5. Muir, article on Yama, p. 18.*

CHAPTER THREE

HYMNS OF THE VEDAS

The Vedas, as we possess them, are four systematically arranged collections of hymns and verses, and the Veda is often used in the sense of these four Vedas taken together. The first and most important Veda is the *Rig-Veda*, which has often, and not without some truth, been called the only true Veda. It contains 1,017, or with some additions, the Valakhilya-hymns, 1,028 hymns, each on an average containing about ten verses. They are all addressed to Devatas or deities, and whatever subject is addressed in these hymns, down to bows, arrows, and stones, is supposed to become, *ipso facto*, a Devata, while the poet is called the seer or Rishi. The metres are numerous and strictly regulated, though there is more freedom in them than in the later artificial poetry of India.

The hymns of the *Rig-Veda* were meant to be recited at sacrifices, and this is no doubt the explanation of their careful preservation during many centuries, by means of a strictly regulated oral tradition.

The second, the *Sama-Veda*, is a much smaller collection of hymns, most of them borrowed from the *Rig-Veda*, but different in character so far as they were meant to be sung at the ancient sacrifices.

The third, the *Yajur-Veda*, consists of sacrificial formulas and of verses to be repeated in a low voice by a class of priests who were entrusted chiefly with the manual work required for the performance of sacrifices.

The fourth, the *Atharva-Veda*, probably collected at a later time, contains, besides many hymns from the *Rig-Veda*, a large number of popular verses used for magical and medicinal purposes, some of them possibly of great antiquity, particularly if we adopt the principle that whatever is very silly is necessarily very old.

Taken as a whole these hymns, particularly those of the *Rig-Veda*, are certainly older than any other poetry we possess in India, nay, older than any literary composition we possess of any of the Aryan nations in Asia or Europe. Their real interest, however, consists not only in their age, but in the simplicity and naturalness of their poetical addresses to the most striking phenomena of nature by which the Aryan settlers found themselves surrounded in India, and in which and behind which they recognised unseen agents by whom both their physical and their moral life were powerfully influenced.

If all books have their fates, the oldest book of the world, the Veda, has certainly had the most extraordinary fate. It was known to exist and people began to write about it, long before it had been seen or handled by any European. I remember Baron Bunsen

telling me how his chief object in arranging to go to India with his pupil, Astor, was to see whether there really was such a book in existence. By consulting the *Lettres edificantes* he might have known that it was in existence as a real book, and had been seen and handled by some of the Catholic missionaries in India. But though seen, not a line of it had ever been published, still less translated, because Indian scholars, willing as they might be to help missionaries and others in reading the Laws of Manu, the Mahabharata and the Ramayana, were most decidedly unwilling to help them to an understanding of the Veda. There were, no doubt, many reasons for it, one of them being possibly that there were few, if any, Brahmans at the beginning of this century who were able to translate the Veda themselves. There were many who knew it or large portions of it by heart, and could recite the hymns at sacrifices and public or private gatherings, but they did not even profess that they understood it. They were proud to know it by heart and by sound, and there were some who actually thought that the hymns would lose their magic power, if recited by one who understood their meaning. Manuscripts were never very numerous, and even when one of them fell into the hands of Europeans, they soon found that, without a commentary, the hymns baffled all endeavours at translation.

During all that time the most exaggerated ideas were spread about the Vedas. The Brahmans themselves declared that they contained the oldest divine revelation, that they were not the compositions of human authors, but the work of Brahman, the Supreme Spirit, who had revealed them to inspired sages or Rishis, seers. European scholars were carried away for a time by the hope that they would find in these Vedas, if not the jabberings of the Pithecanthropoi, at least the earliest flashes of thoughts of an awakening humanity, the faint echoes of a primordial wisdom going back to the very beginning of human life on earth, "when the morning stars sang together and all the sons of God shouted for joy."

When at last not only the texts but the immense Sanskrit commentary also of the most important, the *Rig-Veda*, had been published, people began to see that there was little of primeval, mysterious wisdom to be found in the Vedic hymns, but only the simplest thoughts that must have passed through the minds of the Rishis when they began to ponder on the great phenomena of nature which every morning and night, every spring and winter were unfolded before their eyes. No superhuman revelation was required for that kind of poetry. Nothing could be clearer than that the constant themes of these Vedic songs were sunrise and morning, day and night, earth and the rivers, storms, lightning, rain, sunset and night. Even this was for a time stoutly denied by writers who did not know the Sanskrit alphabet. But what else was there to interest the ancient Aryas? It is true that even the Brahmans themselves

protested against the Western scholars, whose translations seemed to reduce their sacred hymns to the low level of mere descriptions of nature.⁴⁷ We are not and never have been, they said, mere sun-worshippers or fire-worshippers, or rain-worshippers, but sun, fire, and sky were only symbols to us of the Godhead, of one and the same Divine Being in His manifold manifestations. In one sense they were certainly right, but I doubt whether many of the much abused Western scholars had ever denied this. Many things have to be taken as understood, and Western scholars evidently took it for granted that when the Vedic poets addressed their hymns to the dawn, to the sun, the sky, the storm-winds, the earth, or the rain, they did not simply mean the fiery ball that rose in the morning and vanished at night, or the blue sky, or the soil on which they stood, or the rain that had fertilised the soil. The very fact that they addressed these phenomena of nature with the pronoun of the second person, changed them at once into persons, or what were called Devatas, deities, and thus the saying of one of their old grammarians, Yaska, is justified, that whatever object is addressed in these Vedic hymns is to be called its Devata—or deity. Later on it came to be recognised that there was even a deeper ground for this deification, and that the necessities of language, that is, of thought, did not allow at first of any names being formed, except names of agent. Dyaus, masc., for instance, the lighter, was earlier than Dyaus, fem., what is lighted up, the sky.

If we take some of the most ancient and most popular daily prayers, used in the daily Sandhyavandana⁴⁸, we find that one of them is the famous Gayatri, addressed to Savitri, the sun:

“We meditate on the adorable light of the divine Savitri, that he may rouse our thoughts.”

This Savitri, the sun, is, of course, more than the fiery ball that rises from the sea or over the hills, but nevertheless the real sun serves as a symbol, and it was that symbol which suggested to the suppliant the divine power manifested in the sun. Hence almost everything that could be predicated of the sun was predicated of Savitri also, whatever was true of the sky, Dyaus, fem., was supposed to be true of Dyaus, masc., Zeus or Jupiter also. As early an

⁴⁷ *Kamesvar Aiyar, Sandhyavandana*, pp. 58, 105, 113.

⁴⁸ *Sandhya is derived from Sandhi, literally the joining, the coming together of day and night, or night and day. Sandhivela is twilight, and Sandhya has the same meaning. Sandhyavandana was originally the twilight-worship, the morning and evening prayer, to which a third was added (the Madhyahnika) the noon prayer, when the sun culminated. These prayers were once incumbent on every Brahman, though they have now assumed a very perfunctory form, or are omitted altogether.*

authority as Katyayana in his Index to the *Rig-Veda* declared that all the gods invoked in the Vedic hymns can be reduced to three, to Agni, fire and light, on earth, to Vayu, air, in the atmosphere, and to Surya, sun, in the sky, but he adds that all three are in the end meant for one, for Prajapati, the Lord of creation. And later on he says, that there is only one deity, namely the Great Self, Mahan Atma, and some say that he is the sun, (Surya), or that the sun is he. One of the prayers in the Sandhyavandana begins with Asav Aditya Brahma, that Aditya (sun) is Brahman, and in the Taitt. Upanishad⁴⁹, it is said: "He who dwells in man and he who dwells in the sun, are one and the same." The same idea may be likewise deduced from the hymns themselves. In X, 158, 1, we read: "May the sun (Surya) protect us from the sky, the wind (Vayu) from mid-air, and fire (Agni) from the earth;" whereas in another hymn⁵⁰, we read: "the Sun is the Self or soul of all that moves and rests." Here we can clearly watch the gradual transition from the visible sun to the invisible agent of the sun which may have taken centuries to evolve, and if we consider how almost everything on earth is dependent on the sun for its very life, we can understand how a perfectly natural road led from the sun as seen in heaven, to the sun as the highest, the supreme, nay, in the end, as the only deity. This religious and philosophical development of the concept of the sun did not, however, prevent its simultaneous mythological growth. This is the famous Solar Theory, which, no doubt, has been much exaggerated, but which, if properly understood, admits, we know, of cheap cavil, but never of refutation; nay, which, if but rightly understood, has really received more support from its supposed critics than from its originators and supporters. One of the most intelligible names given to the sun was Asva, the racer, or Dadhikravan or Vajin, horse. And while at one time the sun was a racer, at another the sun was conceived as approaching men and standing on a golden chariot which was drawn by horses, as in Greek mythology. Thus we read⁵¹: "The god Savitri (the sun), approaching on the dark-blue sky, sustaining mortals and immortals, comes on his golden chariot, beholding all the worlds."

I have been assured that the noisy cannonade which was directed for years against this explanation of Vedic and Aryan mythology, was really meant as a kind of salute: but I should have much preferred a few twenty-pounders to test the solidity of my entrenched position. When at last I was charged with never having taken any notice of certain illustrious critics, it seemed to me but courteous to respond to that appeal. But there was really little to answer because there was so little difference between my critics and myself. They evidently thought that I was opposed to their anthropological theories, whereas

⁴⁹ VIII, 8.

⁵⁰ 115, 14.

⁵¹ *Rig-Veda* I, 35, 2.

on the contrary I rejoiced in them, whenever they rested on scholarly evidence. I had myself dabbled in the grammar of the Mohawk and Hottentot languages, because I considered grammar a *sine qua non* of mythology, nor was I much disturbed when my Sanskrit scholarship was found fault with by critics who did not know the Sanskrit alphabet. That real Sanskrit scholars should have differed on certain etymologies, was quite another thing, nor was it difficult to come to an understanding with them. Either they were mistaken on certain points or I was, but no real Sanskrit scholar would ever join in the clamour of those who maintained that Greek, Latin, and Teutonic mythology had quite a different origin from that of the Veda. Such things pass and are soon forgotten, and no one who, like myself, remembers the time when Bopp was laughed at by classical scholars for the foolish idea that Greek and Latin grammar should be explained by a comparison with Sanskrit would be much disturbed by those who did not blush to say that there was only one tenable equation between the names of classical and Vedic deities, viz. Dyaus = Zeus. But have those ready writers ever reflected what such an admission would really mean, and how it would disable the whole of their machinery? What would happen if the name of Jehovah, or even of Yahveh, turned up suddenly in the Veda? Thinking is difficult, but it is sometimes useful. Such things will be remembered hereafter among the Curiosities of Literature. No one is infallible, but because we have occasionally a fall on the ice, it does not follow that we must not skate or even cut figures on the ice. There is plenty of work to do for those who are willing to work either at the language of the *Rig-Veda*, or at that of the Maoris, but without some of that grammatical drudgery, I doubt whether mere assertions, or repeating the opinions of others, will really forward our knowledge of the *origines* of our own race.

It is surely as clear as daylight to anybody who will read a number of the hymns of the *Rig-Veda* that they refer to the principal phenomena of nature, and that in that respect they require no antecedents, but are intelligible to any child. Yet for a number of years there has been a constant outcry from certain anthropologists, who asserted that the Vedic hymns were modern in spirit, modern in language, and modern in their pantheon, and that this pantheon had nothing whatever to do with the phenomena of nature, and had no relationship whatever with the gods of the other Aryan nations, particularly of Greeks, Romans, and Teutons. They looked upon the Vedic religion as the last phase in a development, the earlier stages of which had to be studied among savage races.⁵² Have they forgotten this? It is true, no doubt, that the ideas expressed in the Veda presupposed a long development, even a period of savagery, considering that all civilised nations must once have been less civilised or

⁵² Such as the well-known *Kamilaroi*, *Wiraturei*, *Waihwun*, &c.

even savages. There are quite sufficient survivals of savagery even in the Veda itself, only it is Aryan savagery, not savagery of the Pacific Islanders, African negroes, or Dravidians. If only some cases could be produced in which the Australian blacks shared any of ideas of the Veda, or displayed similar ideas, only more savage, every true scholar would welcome them with open arms. Our expectations have been raised to a very high pitch in that direction, and I still hope that in time they may be fulfilled. In the meantime it is fortunate that the mere clamour against the Veda has at last subsided, so that now people only marvel how it could ever have arisen.

Most of the names of the Vedic deities implied at first activity only, but very soon personality also, and what is most important, some of them were found to be exactly the same in Sanskrit, in Greek, Latin, German, and Slavonic, being only changed in every one of these languages according to the phonetic rules peculiar to each. Such verbal coincidences had to be accounted for, and they could not be accounted for except by the admission that there was once a period, a truly historical period, during which the framers of these mythological names and the believers in these physical powers, or, as we are accustomed to call them, these natural Gods or Devas, were still living together as one language, people or nation. Such an admission, inevitable as it was in the eyes of all true scholars, roused at the time a certain dislike and incredulity among those who like to shrug their shoulders at every new discovery. Forgetful of the fact that proper names in all languages undergo certain phonetic changes which do not apply to ordinary appellatives, they thought they could belittle the value of such equations as Sarameya—*Ermeias*, Saranyu—*Erinus*, Haritas—*Kharites* by pointing out that strictly speaking the Greek forms should have been *Ermeias* and *Erinus*, while the Greek *Charites*, though identical in names, seemed to resist all efforts to trace them back to the same source from which sprang the bright horses of the sun-god.

This cheap scepticism, however, or, as it is now called, this higher criticism, may safely be said to belong to the past. I am old enough to remember the conversion of such giants as Gottfried Hermann, Otfried Muller, and Welcker to the principles of scholarship, as taught by Bopp, Grimm, and others. That was indeed a real triumph. In 1825, Otfried Muller, the real founder of a scientific mythology⁵³, was sighing for a translation of the *Rig-Veda*. In 1899, when a great part of it has been made accessible by the patient labours of English, French, and German scholars, some writers, who call themselves mythologists, seem to take a pride in ignoring the existence of the Veda. How far we have advanced since 1825, may be gathered from a statement to which I should be very sorry to

⁵³ *Wissenschaftliche Mythologie*.

affix a name, "that the only generally accepted case of similarity between Vedic and classical mythological names was that of Dyaush-pitar, *Zeus pater* and Jupiter." Has Benfey taught in vain? Even in 1839, Benfey⁵⁴, knew that Ushas was=Eos, Agni (fire)—ignis, (ibid., II, 217), Surya=Helios⁵⁵, to say nothing of later equations which, even if disapproved of, or disproved, would leave the general principles of Comparative Mythology exactly as they were fifty years ago. Has all this been forgotten, or never been learnt?

The discovery of Vedic literature which had retained the clearest traces of a common Aryan mythology, even if no equation besides that of Dyaush-pitar=*Zeus pater* had survived, was really the discovery of a new world, of a *terra antiquis incognita*, and gave us a glimpse at a whole period of thought, of which no relics whatever could be found anywhere else, whether in Greece, Italy, or Germany.

But highly interesting as these Vedic hymns are to us, in spite of, or, I should say, on account of their simplicity and childishness, anybody who came to know them at first hand had to confess that they seem quite unfit to satisfy the religious cravings of a later generation. They contain praises of the physical gods, they implore their help, they render thanks for benefits supposed to have come from their hands, light and life from Dyaus, rain and food from a closely related power, called Indra, warmth and light from Agni, new life every morning from Ushas or Eos. All this is historically and psychologically full of interest, but there is little only, except here and there, of exalted religious thought, of poetry or philosophy, still less of any records of historical events. Besides, their language is so difficult that, as yet, it makes a satisfactory translation of the whole Veda a perfect impossibility. This may seem surprising in the days when hieroglyphic and cuneiform inscriptions have been so readily translated. But the fact is that most of those inscriptions are very straightforward, they hardly contain a conditional or a relative sentence. We read of Kings and Kings of Kings, of their battles from year to year, of the towns they founded, of the conquests they made, the captives they led away, the tribute they received and so on, and yet even such simple statements vary very considerably from year to year according as they are translated by bold or timid scholars. The Vedic hymns on the contrary, even when we understand every word of them, remain very obscure in their structure or construction; and though their texts are very firmly established from the time they were first reduced to writing and made the subject of the most minute grammatical study in India, even before the spreading of Buddhism, it is clear that before that time, when the Vedic texts existed in oral tradition only, they must have been exposed to many vicissitudes. There are verbal emendations so palpable that we can hardly understand how the mistakes could have arisen, and

⁵⁴ *Worterbuck*, II, 334.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, I, 458.

could have been tolerated for one moment. Besides that, there are evidently old and new hymns, yet all of them are recognised as belonging to the Veda, ever since the Vedic hymns were systematically collected.

The attempts that have been made to translate the Vedic hymns may be divided into four periods. The first consisted of those who followed Sayana's great Sanskrit commentary. This was the method followed by Rosen in 1830 and 1838, and again, in 1850, by H. H. Wilson. It was soon found out, however, that highly useful, nay indispensable, as the traditional interpretation of Sayana might be, it was in many places quite impossible to follow him, because the true meaning was too clear, and that adopted by Sayana too absurd. Rosen already used very freely the privilege of the scholar to choose between what is rational and what is not. Wilson had a stronger faith in Sayana, and gave us in his translation the traditional rendering, even where his own sound sense rebelled against it.

There were others again who went into the other extreme, and from sheer despair at Sayana's commentary, translated the Veda according to what they thought it ought to mean. Langlois,* carried this principle very far indeed, yet we find that his translation is still followed by some writers on ancient religion and mythology.

In the meantime a new school was slowly gaining ground who held that the only satisfactory way of translating the Veda was to construct, first of all, a complete *Index Verborum*⁵⁶, to examine every passage in which the same word occurs, and then to assign that meaning to each word which would satisfy the context wherever it occurred. I published such an *Index Verborum* at the end of my edition of Sayana's commentary, and it is easy to see the influence which it exercised at once on the translations of the *Rig-Veda* which we owe to Grassmann, to Ludwig, and to Ralph T. H. Griffith, and to others who tried their hands on single hymns or single verses. Still greater was the influence exercised by the Sanskrit Dictionary

* *A professor of eloquence at Paris.*

⁵⁶ *I still have a letter from the late Bergaigne, in which he asks when my Index would be published, and adds: "Je m'étais décidé pendant ces vacances à écrire tout le Rig-Veda sur des fiches, et à me composer ainsi un index qui put me permettre des essais d'interprétation indépendante. Je suis arrivé à la moitié de ce travail, et grâce à la rapidité que je suis parvenu à atteindre, et aussi à une grande puissance de travail, je puis le terminer en moins d'un mois. . . S'il n'était pas trop exiger, je vous prierais de me dire aussi si vous citez tous les emplois de chaque mot sans aucune exception, ou si vous êtes départi de cette rigueur pour les mots très usuels, et enfin si vous adoptez l'ordre alphabétique pur et simple." I could answer all these questions in the affirmative.*

of Boehtlingk and Roth, and the Vedic Vocabulary of Grassmann, though, of course, neither the one nor the other professed to give a complete index of every word and every form in every passage in which it occurred.

The method which I recommended, and which I followed in the specimens published (in 1859, in my *History of Ancient Sanskrit Literature*, in 1869, in the *Hymns to the Storm-gods*, and again in the *Sacred Books of the East*, 1891), was so tedious, however, that scholars only felt tempted to follow it. Roth, the scholar most qualified, through his lexical labours, to give us a real translation of the Veda, was honest enough to say again and again that such a work belonged to the next generation of Sanskrit scholars, and to the next century. I myself, having accepted the appointment to a new professorship of Comparative Philology at Oxford, had other things to do, and after I had given the best part of my life to supplying the materials necessary for such a task, I hoped that the ambition of younger scholars would have been roused to undertake this no doubt difficult, but very grateful work. I did not go so far as to say, as has been supposed, that every word, whenever it occurred, should again and again be followed by every translator through all its hiding-places. A number of words have once for all been fixed in their meanings, and when that was the case, they were naturally passed, as known to every Sanskrit scholar. Still the mere physical exertion in collecting all parallel passages became too much for me, and I had reluctantly to give it up to younger and more vigorous hands.

We are now at the beginning of a new era in Vedic scholarship whenever the Complete Concordance, promised by Bloomfield and Lanman, shall have been published. This will be a gigantic work, but it is really the *sine qua non* for the Vedic exegesis of the future, and we may expect much help from it. But though many passages may be unravelled by a more complete intercomparison, my own impression is that, through the influence of a long-continued oral tradition a great amount of real corruption has crept into our texts which no amount of conjectural emendation will ever entirely remove. This may sound very discouraging, but fortunately, after deducting ever so much that is hopeless, there remains enough of the 1,017 hymns to give us that insight into the first development of religious thought in India and indirectly among the Aryan nations in general, which is so full of interest to us psychologically, even more than historically. So many conflicting theories have lately been started about the origin of religion, that it must seem to many people as if, like other beginnings, that of religion also was really beyond our grasp. But this is to a great extent our own fault, because philosophers are bent on discovering the origin of religion, instead of being satisfied with studying the origin of religions, or of each

individual religion with which it is possible to do so, that is of which we possess old literary documents. For that purpose the study of the Veda is invaluable. But who would try to discover the origin of Islam, without studying the Koran? or of Buddhism without knowing the Suttas? Who would offer an opinion about the beginning of Christianity, unless he had read the Gospels? Even then, it is well known how far removed the Gospels are from the Nativity, and the Koran from the Hejrah. But if we approach the religions of Greeks and Romans, where shall we find the Sibylline leaves telling us of their real parentage? If there lived many heroes before Agamemnon, there lived many poets and prophets before Homer; but who can pierce through the cruel darkness that hides them from our sight?

And what shall we do when we have to deal with religious customs and mythological lore of savage, uncivilised, and illiterate tribes? A study of their languages is no doubt an immense help towards a correct understanding of their traditions; and we cannot be sufficiently grateful to men like Hahn, Codrington, Tregear, and others who did not shrink from that drudgery, before writing on the myths or customs of uncivilised tribes. The most useful materials may be found where some popular poetry has been preserved to the present day, as among the Maoris or of some of the Ugro-Finnic tribes.

It is well known how much labour has been spent on establishing the date and the authenticity of the Vedic hymns. Their authenticity is now admitted by all Sanskrit scholars. Their date has been fixed by me in my *History of Ancient Sanskrit Literature* (1859) at about 1,200 to 1,500 B.C. But though this date has met with very general acceptance, I am the very last person to consider it as firmly established, and I have again and again given my reason why I should gladly escape from the force of my own arguments. If other scholars have clamoured for a higher age, for 2,000 or 5,000 B.C., they are quite welcome to these dates if they can establish them by any kind of historical evidence, and not merely by their wishes; but as yet these guesses are outside the sphere of practical scholarship quite as much as the date assigned by a Babylonian scholar to the immigration of the Aryas into India, so late as 500 or at the utmost 600 B.C.!

But no literary or traditional documents which we possess, whether in Greek or Latin or in any other Oriental language, to say nothing of barbarous dialects, bring us so near, if not to the origin, at least to the early historical development of any of the ancient religions of mankind as the hymns of the Veda. If the study of single religions must precede the study of religion in general, nowhere can we get so near to the origin of any single religion as in the hymns of the Rig-Veda. Other religions may be older, and

religion by itself may be beyond all conception old, but no single religion, as far as I know, has been preserved in documents so old, and so near to the very cradle of a religion as that which we see growing before our eyes in the Veda. Let those who want to know the origin of religion, *a priori*, take refuge in metaphysics; but those who care to understand the origin of one single religion will find no better oracle to consult than the poems of the Vedic Rishis.

The chronological date of the Vedic hymns, which has been fixed by some at 1,200, by others at 2,000, nay at 4,500 B.C., are, no doubt, very uncertain, and can be no more than constructive. But though Egyptian and Babylonian dates go far beyond any date in India, we can see more of the real beginnings of religion in India than even in Egypt or Babylon. Nor would anybody accept the principle laid down by students of the religion of savages, that whatever is savage or barbarous in religion, must be old. This is a major premiss that would play fearful havoc with our chronology.

What is quite clear is that, between the Vedic hymns and the next period, that of the prose Brahmanas, there is a great gulf. The hymns of the three Vedas had not only been collected, such as we have them, but had already been invested with a divine authority, such as is seldom ascribed to works of recent date. Besides, it is clear that the language of the hymns had often been completely misunderstood by the authors of the Brahmanas, and that a new style had sprung up in the place of that of the old poetical compositions. From the time of the Brahmanas, which precede the rise of Buddhism (500 B.C.), to the present day, the old hymns of the Veda have retained their unique position in India. Invested with the character of a divine revelation, they have been to the people of India what the Bible has been to us.

And yet how different is this Bible of India from all other Bibles! No doubt we meet in the Veda with some exalted, and some very abstract ideas also, but its general character is very different. It is simple, straightforward, natural, without any attempt at systematic treatment, without any effort for poetical beauty. When we take day and night, spring and winter, as they come and go, we shall find in the hymns thoughts such as would naturally spring up in the minds of any unsophisticated observers who felt that there must be something behind the visible world, some powers or persons directing the course of nature, possibly some power even beyond the powers, whom they called *Devas* or Bright ones. It was chiefly the phenomena which recurred regularly that impressed themselves on their minds and evoked in time the idea of order and law as pervading the whole of nature, even its very thunderstorms and lightnings.

There is hardly a language in which sun and moon, day and night, dawn and fire have not received their names, many of which,

on account of their multiplicity, led almost inevitably to mythological metamorphosis. Anthropology has clearly shown that the idea that exceptional events such as meteors, earthquakes, hurricanes, lightning, eclipses of sun or moon, furnished the first impulses to religion and mythology is no longer tenable, even though it has, or rather seemed to have, the often quoted support of Seneca. If we may judge by what has been observed among uncivilised as well as civilised races—for even civilised races must once have been uncivilised—regularity attracts attention first and irregularity follows, or, as it has been more tersely expressed, the Gods come first, the Devils second, though it is quite true that in later times Devil-worship may have become more important, or, at least, more prominent than the worship of the Gods. Of these so-called prehistoric periods of human thought, however, we must always speak with great reserve. We must never forget that they are constructions of our own, and that we shall never be able to appeal to historical facts in support of our theories. Facts are given us for the first time during the Etymological Period of languages, and afterwards, but at a much later time, by the scant remains to be gathered from the Sacred Books of the East. And here the Vedic hymns will always hold their foremost place. However late we may place this systematic collection, their composition carries us back far beyond the chronological limits reached by any other documents. And what gives an additional interest to these Vedic fragments is that they allow us an insight into the earliest development not only of religion, but of mythology also. We see superstitions springing up by the side of religion, demons by the side of gods, agriculture by the side of the chase, bows and arrows by the side of the stone-weapons (Asani), such as Indra hurled against Vritra in his fight against the powers of darkness. Though the conception of the rainbow being the bow of the god of the sky is not to be found in the Rig-Veda, bows and arrows were well known to the worshippers of the Vedic gods. The Science of Mythology, after tossing about for centuries on the ocean of mere conjectures, has at last found its compass. We no longer see in it, like Bacon, mere lessons of morality in the disguise of fables, or broken rays of a primeval revelation, or misunderstood fragments of the Old Testament, still less recollections of a period of savagery to be studied in the myths and customs of modern savages, or survivals of a belief in amulets and magic incantations, generally the very latest outcome of mythology in its historical development, though I believe there are still survivals of defenders of every one of these time-hallowed theories. We know now, and we know it chiefly from the lessons taught us by the Veda, that our Aryan mythology, and to a certain extent our ancient Aryan religion also, took its origin from a poetical interpretation of the great phenomena of nature, personified and named as the chief agents of the eternal physical

drama, enacted before us every day, every month, every season, every, year, and we know also that this broad stream of mythology, when once started, was open to ever so many tributaries, superstitions, customs, vain genealogies, sorceries, idolatries of every kind, whether springing from fancies and imaginations, or from downright falsehoods and impositions. All these things are apt to be absorbed by mythology, and must be taken into account when we attempt a scientific analysis of it. It must not be supposed, however, that the attempt to find the key of Aryan mythology in fetishism, totemism, shamanism, and wherever it was *not* to be found, have been entirely wasted. A reconnoitring party, even though it return disappointed, has rendered real service by showing where the enemy is not to be found, and that service has certainly been rendered by the exploring parties who thought they could discover in Africa, America, or Australia what was ready to hand in India, Greece, Italy, and among Celtic, Teutonic, and Slavonic races.

People continue to write as if there was still some mystery about the Rig-Veda. There may have been when we began, in the days of Rosen and Burnouf, but there is no longer. The tools are there, all that is now required is honest work, and there is plenty of it, even if there were more real labourers and not merely gleaners than we have at present. It would be by no means difficult to put together a number of hymns which would at once settle the question by showing us the Hindu mind such as it really was during the Vedic period, and impressed by the grand sights of nature that passed before it day and night.

The same story is told again and again, and wherever we open the *Rig-Veda*, the same daily drama in its successive stages seems enacted before our eyes. Some people, more particularly the late M. Bergaigne, have been disconcerted by the many allusions not only to the sights of nature, but to the daily sacrifices also which occur in these hymns, but they evidently did not realise that, however complicated and technical the sacrifice had become before the time when these Vedic hymns were collected, there is nothing incongruous between praise and sacrifice. Sacrifice was a very natural occupation for the Vedic savages, as it is among savages at the present day. Whether a man who can describe the daily sunrise in artificial metres belongs to a more primitive humanity than a man who marks the stations of the sun, the phases of the moon, or the return of the seasons to say his prayers and pour out his libations, Sanskrit scholars would gladly leave to members of Ethnological Societies to determine. Whether the Veda is primeval or not, is another question that may likewise be left to those who know what primeval really means.

The grave mistake to be guarded against is to suppose that the Veda is an exclusively liturgical book, monotonous throughout, and belongs therefore to a late liturgical age. Savages, as ethnologists

themselves have told us, are often very punctilious ritualists, and if we only consider how essential the Vedic sacrificial system was to the Aryas of India in determining times and seasons, in fact, in laying the first foundations of a well-regulated society, we shall no longer be surprised at the numerous liturgical allusions which occur in the Vedic hymns, nor on the other hand see more of liturgy in them than there really is. Whoever has read if only the first hymn of the *Rig-Veda*⁵⁷, will know how many words in it have a liturgical meaning, but nowhere have those liturgical ideas obscured the original character of the Vedic gods, as being the agents or actors in the physical drama of nature which first made the simple sons of nature ponder on the meaning of day and night, of sun and moon, of earth and sky, in fact of all that made them wonder, and turn their thoughts beyond the horizon of the visible world.

I think it may be best if I give here a few of those Vedic hymns. They have a right to a place among my Indian Friends. They have been with me for many years. They have often roused me in the morning, they have soothed me in the evening. I have tried to make them out as one tries to make out the character of a friend, even when at times one feels puzzled with him. I have always trusted them with good intentions, and if some of their utterances for a long time remained dark and still remain dark, are there not some dark corners in most of our friends, nay, even in ourselves?

It has been truly said that books are our best friends. We see more of them than of any other friends, and even if we get tired of them at times, they are always ready to renew their friendship. People of the world may wonder what we can see to attract us in such books as the *Rig-Veda* and to keep us faithful to them to the end. But if they tried, they would find that there are few of the great books of the world which are not worth knowing, and that there are many which deserve our friendship, our love, and our lasting gratitude.

I shall select these Vedic friends at random, following, however, the guidance of an old grammarian, Yaska, who tells us in what succession the Vedic gods appear on the heavenly stage every day, and particularly in the morning. It is in the morning, when light and life return that the bright beings, the Devas, are seen, and the daily revelation of another world takes place, while the various aspects of the new light are personified in the principal gods of the Veda. The order in which they appear, according to Yaska, is: Asvinau, day and night, Ushas, dawn, Surya, wife of the sun, Vrishakapayi, wife of Vrishakapi, doubtful, Saranyu, early dawn, Erinys, Savitri, the enlivening sun, Bhaga, the sun before sunrise, Surya, the risen sun.

⁵⁷ *Giuseppe Turrini, "Raccolta degli Inni del Veda," Libro I, Fascicolo I, Bologna, 1890.*

We begin with the two Asvins whom Yaska places at the head of the daily procession of the Devas, the Bright Ones.

HYMN TO THE ASVINS, DAY AND NIGHT

No Vedic gods have been so completely misunderstood as these heavenly twins, and misunderstood by the Brahmans themselves. Still even these misunderstandings are instructive. The Asvins were taken for a pair of horsemen, though it is well known that riders on horseback occur very seldom in the Veda, so that some scholars have wrongly maintained that riding on horseback was altogether unknown in Vedic times. The Asvins were taken by native exegetes for old heroes or kings, and why they should have formed part of the Vedic gods who appear in the morning and the evening⁵⁸, was never so much as asked. Besides, Asvin would be a very strange name for rider, and would much rather convey the meaning of a descendant or connection of Asva, or Asvā, i.e. the Horse, or the Mare, one of the many mythological names, as we saw, of the sun and the dawn. Being a couple the Asvins were really the oldest representatives of the couple of day and night, travelling always on their ordained path from morning till evening, the same path on which Agni also travels⁵⁹ in his character of the light of day. Thus they were very naturally mixed up with many of the daily adventures of the Sun and the Dawn.⁶⁰ Dayus is called the father of the Asvins⁶¹, the Dawn their mother, while under another name, as Surya, she is represented as the daughter of Savitri and as the beloved of the Asvins⁶². Another poet says that the Dawn is born, when the Asvins have harnessed their chariot, and that Day and Night, again the Asvins, spring from the Vivasvat⁶³, the shining sun. As Saranyu, Erinys, also is called the mother of the Asvins, she must likewise have been another form of the Dawn in her varying aspects.

The stories about the Asvins when they have once become mythological characters, heroes, saviours, and physicians, are endless, but they need not detain us. The important point is to perceive their physical background, and that can always be discovered even behind the thick veil of legend. Nothing is more instructive for the student of mythology than to see how this natural conception of Day and Night, of Light and Darkness, as the Asvins, becomes the germ from which spring in time ever so many half-legendary and even half-historical fables, the so-called Itiharas.

Most of the hymns addressed to the Asvins are very tedious, and repeat again and again the numerous miracles which they performed and the kindnesses which they showed to their friends and worshippers.

⁵⁸ *Rig-Veda* X, 39, 1.

⁶⁰ *Rig-Veda* III, 20, 1.

⁶² *Rig-Veda* I, 116, 17.

⁵⁹ *Rig-Veda* III, 29, 6.

⁶¹ *Rig-Veda* X, 61, 4.

⁶³ *Rig-Veda* X, 39, 12.

I give here one short hymn only⁶⁴, enough, however, to show what physical background there was for them, a background which in many cases had entirely vanished from the purview of the Vedic Rishis, but which is clear enough to the student of mythology.

I have endeavoured in these translations to keep strictly to the metre of the original, which is not always easy. I must therefore crave the indulgence of my readers for certain infelicities of expression which I could not avoid without departing too much from the original.

HYMN TO THE ASVINS, DAY AND NIGHT

1.

Agni shines forth, the shining face of Ushas⁶⁵,
The priests' god-loving voices have ascended,
O Asvins, on your chariot hither tending,
Come to our overflowing morn-libation.

2.

The quick do not despise our ready offering;
They have been praised, and are now near beside us;
Early and late they hasten to our succour,
The worshipper's best friends against all evil.

3.

Come, hither then at milking-time, at breakfast,
Come here at noon, and come at sunset also,
By day, by night, come with your happy succour;
Our draught has always brought the Asvins hither.

4.

This place, forsooth, has always been your dwelling,
The houses here, O Asvins, and this shelter;
Come from high heaven then, and from the mountain⁶⁶,
Come from the waters, bringing food and vigour.

5.

May we attain the Asvins' newest blessings,
Their happy guidance, health and wealth bestowing;
Immortals, bring us riches, bring us heroes,
And all that here on earth can make us happy.

If we remember that these twins were originally meant for morning and evening, the process by which they gradually became

⁶⁴ V, 76.

⁶⁵ *Dawn.*

⁶⁶ *The cloud.*

what they are in this hymn and in other hymns more full of personal legends, is most instructive to watch. That the Asvins were originally meant for morning and evening, or for the two halves of the diurnal twenty-four hours, cannot be called in question, unless another germ-idea is first suggested for them. But then, is it not instructive to see how day and night simply by being addressed in the second person became personified, became human and even divine, and were called by a name which would be unintelligible unless we remembered that the sun had once been called Asva, the runner, and that Asva, the mare, had been used as a not uncommon name of the Dawn. These beings who seemed to move on the same daily path as the sun, or to have been born of the Dawn, called Asva, were then called the sons or friends of the Dawn, Asvinau, or the horesmen, as representing the two phases of the sun, or of the horse; or, as Yaska says,⁶⁷ the sun of night and the sun of morning. Their three-wheeled chariot is golden, and in a single day goes round heaven and earth. And when that first metamorphosis had once been effected, when Day and Night had once become a pair of runners, ever returning to the same spot in the morning, almost every blessing that comes from day and night, particularly health and length of days, would naturally be ascribed to them. Thus they gradually assumed the general character of saviours and of physicians, and ever so many beings who were rescued from dangers or from death, whether the setting sun, or the setting moon, or the setting year, were supposed to have been rescued by them. Their chief work is to restore life, and to renew youth, or to give sight to the blind. In many cases the names of the heroes rescued or helped by them speak for themselves, and leave no doubt, in the minds of Sanskrit scholars at least, that they represent physical phenomena, a fact admitted in this case even by so great a sceptic as Bergaigne. Only it must not be supposed that, because we can explain some of their names, we ought to be able to explain them all. The Brahmans themselves had long forgotten the original purport of these names, and when that was the case, they did not hesitate to give us as facts what were merely their conjectures. As one of the characteristic features of the Asvins was that they always returned, Nasatya, the returning⁶⁸ would seem a very applicable name. But ancient grammarians quoted by Yaska,⁶⁹ explained it by Na+Asatya, not untrue, or by Nasika-prabhava, born of the nose. Yet Yaska himself had a very just perception of the nature of the Asvins. He quotes various opinions of his predecessors who saw in them heaven and earth, or day and night, or sun and moon, or, lastly, two pious kings. Only this is

⁶⁷ *Nir.* XII, 2.

⁶⁸ *Nostioi* from *nostos*, homeward journey.

⁶⁹ VI, 13.

not a question so much of *aut—aut*, as of *et—et*. They were all this, only from different points of view, and this comprehensiveness is one of the most important features of ancient mythological thought. However startling this may sound to those who form their theories without any reference to historical facts, it is really one of the most important keys for unlocking the riddles of the most ancient periods of mythology, and should be carefully distinguished from what is meant by the syncretism of much later times.

HYMN TO USHAS, DAWN

Next follows Ushas, the Dawn, identical in name, *pace* Reinach, with the Greek Eos. She is represented as the most beautiful heavenly apparition among the gods in their procession from East to West. She is called the daughter of Dyauś, the sister of Agni, also his beloved, according to the changing aspects in which the sun of the morning and the dawn presented themselves to the fancy of the Vedic poets. I subjoin the translation of a hymn addressed to Ushas from the first mandala, hymn 123.

1

Dakshina's⁷⁰ roomy chariot has been harnessed,
And the immortal gods have mounted on it,
The growing Dawn, free from the dark oppressor,
Stepped forth to spy for the abode of mortals.

2

The mighty woke before all other creatures,
She wins the race, and always conquers riches;
The Dawn looks out, young and reviving ever,
She came the first here to our morning prayers.

3

When thou, O Dawn, to-day dividest treasures,
Thou goddess, nobly born, among all mortals,
May Savitri⁷¹, the god, the friend of homesteads,
Proclaim us innocent before the sun-god!

⁷⁰ Name of the Dawn. It requires a considerable acquaintance with phonetic laws to doubt the identity of the names Ushas in Sanskrit and Eos in Greek. Yet I believe that even this has been achieved by those who seem to imagine that scepticism is the best proof of knowledge.

4

To every house is Ahana⁷¹ approaching,
 Giving to every day its name and being,
 Dyotana⁷² came, for ever bent on conquest,
 She gets the best of all the splendid treasures.

5

Varuna's sister, sister thou of Bhaga,
 O Sunrita⁷², O Dawn, sing first at daybreak;
 May he fall back, the man that plotteth mischief,
 With Dakshina and car let us subdue him.

6

Let hymns rise up, let pray'rs rise up together,
 The fires have risen, clad in flaring splendour,
 The brilliant Dawn displays the lovely treasures,
 Which had been hidden by the night and darkness.

7

The one departeth and the other cometh⁷³,
 Unlike in hue the two march close together;
 One secretly brought night to earth and heaven,
 Dawn sparkled forth on her refulgent chariot.

8

Alike to-day, alike to-morrow also,
 They ever follow Varuna's⁷⁴ commandment;
 They one by one achieve their thirty Yojans⁷⁵,
 And without fail achieve their lord's (Varuna's)
 commandment⁷⁶.

⁷¹ Savitri, the sun-god, but distinct from Surya, the sun and sun-god.

⁷² Name of Dawn.

⁷³ Day and Night, Dawn and Twilight are conceived as sisters, and spoken of as Ahani, the two days, one bright, the other dark, like the Asvins.

⁷⁴ Varuna, sometimes the highest god, whose laws have to be obeyed by all creatures.

⁷⁵ Their appointed course.

⁷⁶ Kratu, thought, will, here command.

9

She knows the first day's name, and brightly shining,
 White she is born to-day, from out the darkness;
 The maiden never breaks th' eternal order⁷⁷,
 And day by day comes to the place appointed.

10

Proud of thy beauty, maiden-like thou comest,
 O goddess to the god⁷⁸ who thee desireth;
 A smiling girl, thou openest before him
 Thy bosom's splendour, as thou shinest brightly.

11

Fair as a bride, adorned by loving mother,
 Thou showest forth thy form, that they may see it;
 Auspicious Dawn, shine forth more wide and brightly,
 No other dawns⁷⁹ have ever reached thy splendour.

12

With horses, cows, and all delightful treasures,
 And striving with the rays of yonder Surya,
 The Dawns depart and come again with splendour,
 Bearing auspicious names and forms auspicious.

13

Obedient to the reins of law eternal,
 Grant us auspicious thoughts for our endeavours,
 Shine thou upon us, Dawn, thou swift to listen,
 May we and all our liberal chieftains prosper!

In spite of all the angry and ill-natured words of Bergaigne, I ask once more whether this address to the Dawn is not perfectly natural and intelligible. Whether it required a priest to compose it, or whether any father of a family could have done so, who can tell? And who can tell whether the first priest was not simply the father of a family, who had his fire always burning on the domestic hearth, and who felt grateful for the return of the dawn, which coincided

⁷⁷ *The order in which the heavenly bodies come and go, which gave the first intimation of order in the universe.*

⁷⁸ *The sun.*

⁷⁹ *Dawn is often spoken of in the plural, being conceived as new every day, or being considered manifold in her wide expanse.*

with the kindling of the fire on his hearth? If the morning service was called Purvahuti, what is that more than the early calling, Huti being derived from the same root, Hve, from which we had before Hotri, the invoker, the priest.

But whatever we may think on that point, it seems perfectly clear that the different names by which the Dawn is here addressed, Ushas, Ahana, Dyotana, Dakshina, and Sunrita, were understood as names of the Dawn. But will it be believed, that when the Dawn is addressed in the very first verse by the name of Dakshina, when her chariot is mentioned, and her stepping forth out of darkness to come to the morning-prayer of the people, Bergaigne, always on the look-out for priest-craft and ritual, sees in Dakshina, not the Dawn, but *le salaire du sacrifice*? He thinks it not impossible that *le salaire du sacrifice* might have been the name of the Dawn, *consideree comme le don celeste accorde pour recompense a l'homme pieux*. But he declines even this small concession, and if I understand him rightly, he actually takes Dakshina in the first and fifth verses of our hymn as the salary of the priests. Now it is quite true that Dakshina has this meaning of salary or gift due to the priest who performs that sacrifice, but that meaning is clearly impossible here. Our hymn contains several unusual names of the Dawn, such as Ahani, Dyotana, Sunrita, all *apaz legomena*, as names of the Dawn, then why not Dakshina? Dakshina means right, *dexter*, evidently from Daksha, strength, the right hand being the strong or clever hand. It then means southern. It also means the cow, the strong cow which has calves and gives milk⁸⁰, and as such a cow was the most primitive payment⁸¹, it may well have become the regular name for the fee due to the priest. She is celebrated as such in one of the Vedic hymns⁸². But however prominent a place may have been assigned to this Dakshina, the salary of priests, how could the Dawn have been called the salary? We can hardly explain why even that salary was called Dakshina, unless we suppose that it was meant for the right hand, or *la bonne main*, and in that case Dakshina, Dawn, might have been meant for the liberal goddess. But whatever the evolution of the meaning of Dakshina may have been⁸³, when she was invoked as Dakshina, she could not have been invoked as Salary. I am glad to see that even Bergaigne has not been bold enough to translate "*Le large char du Salaire a ete attelé,*" but "*Le large char de la Dakshina.*" If Dakshina were really in that

⁸⁰ *Dakshina gavah, Laty. VIII, 5.*

⁸¹ *Fee and pecu.*

⁸² X, 107.

⁸³ *Perhaps it should be remembered that in the Mahabharata the wife of Kasyapa, the mother of the Adityas, was called Dakshayani; see Pramatha Nath Mullick, Origin of Caste, p. 33.*

sense an *apaz legomenon*, surely it is not the only *apaz legomenon* in the scanty survivals of Vedic poetry. When we read that Dakshina was the daughter of Dyaus and the mother of Agni⁸⁴, we need no more to feel convinced that she was meant for the Dawn. Besides, who is the Putro Dakshinayah, the son of Dakshina, if not Agni, the same who brings Dyotani⁸⁵? Another name of the Dawn is Dyotana, and who can doubt that it meant the brilliant, i.e. the Dawn. More difficult are the other names Ahana and Sunrita.

Ahana is clearly connected with Ahan, day, just as our dawn is connected with day. It has long been known that day is not connected with *dies*, as was formerly supposed, but that the root of Goth, dags, day, can only have been dah, or dhah, with double aspirate, to burn, to shine. The loss of an initial d is no doubt quite irregular⁸⁶, though it can be matched by Goth, tagr, Gr. *dakhu*, tear, which in Sanskrit appears as Asru, instead of Dasru. I pointed out long ago, and I have never seen any valid reason to retract it, that in the Greek *daphue*, laurel tree, the name of a matutinal goddess, we have the root with its initial d, and that another derivation of the same root, without the initial d, may be recognised in Athana or Athene.

No one, I thought, could have supposed that I meant to see in this Ahana one of the grandest Greek goddesses, Athene. Why will people so often misunderstand, and then place their misunderstanding on the shoulders of those whom they misunderstand? When I said that Zeus is Dyaus, that Eos is Ushas, that Agni is Ignis, surely I could not have meant that these gods and goddesses migrated bodily from India to Greece and from Greece to India. Why must what seems perfectly clear be said again and again, that the Greek and Indian gods were not beings that ever existed in heaven or on earth, but were mere names, mere creations of the human mind. In all comparative mythological studies we have to look for the germs only, and I see in Ahana and Athene a common germ, that withered on Indian soil, while it assumed the grandest development in Greece.

Surely not even Deva is the same as Deus; though it may be the same sound, it does not represent the same meaning, so that strictly speaking we cannot translate the one by the other. The Greek concept of Zeus also was very different from that of the Vedic Dyaus, as that of Eos from that of Ushas. I never went so far as to claim for Greek and Vedic deities what might be called personal or bodily identity. I was simply looking for germs which after

⁸⁴ *Rig-Veda* III, 58, 1.

⁸⁵ *Rig-Veda*, III, 58, 1.

⁸⁶ Cf. "*Chips*," IV, p. 385.

thousands of years might have developed into a Surya in the Veda, and into a Helios in Homer. These very modest claims may possibly surprise my adversaries, for, to judge from their remarks, they evidently imagined that I recognised in Zeus a heavenly king who had migrated from India to Greece, and in the Haritas the horses of the morning who in their journey to Greece had been metamorphosed into the brilliant children of Helios and Aigle. I even begin to see why what some critics supposed to have been my idea, should have ruffled their temper so much, and I say once more, and I hope for the last time, that I never believed that *Athene lived in the thoughts of Vedic Rishis, nor Varuna in the prayers of Greek priests. No, I am and always have been satisfied with far less. All I stand up for is that, given the sky, the Greeks raised Dyu, sky, to become their Zeus, while the Vedic Rishis made the sky their Dyaus. This Dyaus is superseded in the Veda by his own son, Indra, whereas Zeus in Greece remained to the end the *Thean upatos kai aristos*. What is common to both is the word, that is, the concept of Dyaus, or Greek Zeus, the sky as a person and as an agent. I may not always have spoken quite guardedly, and have taken certain things for granted which are understood by themselves among scholars. The important lesson is always the same. If Ahana is phonetically identical with Greek Athana and if Ahana is a name of the Dawn, it follows that the first conception of Athene was the Dawn and that, as such, she sprang from the East or from the forehead of Zeus or Dyaus, the sky. If in the Veda she brings light and wakes and stirs up the thoughts of men, she became in Homer also the goddess of wisdom and the *Tekhnan meter poluolbos*. All this was perfectly known to Otfried Muller when in 1825 he wrote: "Because the name of the goddess was originally a word of the language and always remained so, Charis glided from poem to poem and preserved by means of the word her general meaning in every individual manifestation"⁸⁵.

Sunrita, another name of the Dawn, is more difficult to explain. Sunrita in the sense of true, seems to me to have been formed in mistaken analogy to An-rita⁸⁶, untrue, and to have meant originally true, then sincere, gentle, agreeable. As applied to the Dawn it would have meant true, kind, auspicious.

But whatever obscurity there may still be left as to the meaning of single words in our hymn, can any one doubt that the whole of it was simply an address or a prayer to the Dawn, without any reference, as yet, to any complicated ceremonial, as described in the Sutras and Brahmanas, and alluded to in some of the hymns also? And why this persistent searching for allusions to ceremonial? No one ever denied the presence of real allusions in the Vedic hymns. But it is

⁸⁵ p. 249.

⁸⁶ *The two words are used together, as ubhaya antaram veda, sunritanritayor api, Mahabh. V, 5667.*

a matter of degree, a question of more or less, and these ceremonial details, so far from proving our hymns to be very modern and the work of professed priests, serve only to prove, what was well known from other sources also, that savage or uncivilised races adhere at all times with great punctiliousness to their ceremonial customs and traditions. Bergaigne has done excellent work in pointing out traces of the same punctiliousness among Vedic poets, but he has allowed himself to be carried away much too far by his own system, without either paying sufficient attention to native commentaries or allowing sufficient credit to his predecessors, particularly in Germany. To speak of *ces philologues d'outre Rhin*, is entirely out of place in the republic of letters, and encourages a literary *chauvinisme* which will never find favour with the best scholars of France.

Leaving out Surya, the female representative of the sun, and more or less of Dawn again, and Vrishakapayi, because her character is not quite clear as yet, and Saranyu = Erinyes, because she is only mentioned in a few verses, we proceed now to Savitri, the rising sun. Though Savitri is a name applied to the sun in general, it is most frequently used as the name of the rising and life- and light-giving sun. Nor must it be supposed that Savitri is simply an appellative of the globe. Savitri has become a divine name or a divine *numen* as full of life and personality as any other Deva. He can therefore be asked, as he is in verse 9, to hale and bring back the real sun. We shall easily recognise his character in the following hymn⁸⁷:

HYMN TO SAVITRI, SUN

1

I first call Agni⁸⁸ hither for our happiness,
I then call Mitra-Varuna⁸⁹ to shield us here,
I call on Ratri⁹⁰, sending all the world to rest,
I call for help on Savitri, the brightest god.

2

Approaching on the darkest path of heaven,
Setting to rest both mortal and immortal,
God Savitri, on golden chariot standing,
Comes hither and beholdeth all creation.

⁸⁷ *Rig-Veda* I, 35, 2.

⁸⁸ *Agni, fire, is here, as often, taken for the light of day.*

⁸⁹ *Mitra and Varuna stand for morning and evening, or day and night.*

⁹⁰ *Ratri, night, sometimes called the black day, Krishnam ahar, opposed to Argunam ahar, the bright day. Cf. Rig-Veda VI, 9, 1.*

3

The brilliant god moves upward and moves downward,
 The worshipful, drawn by his brilliant racers,
 And from afar god Savitri approaches,
 Driving away from us all that is evil⁹¹.

4

God Savitri stepped on his jewelled chariot,
 The strong, the many-hued, its pins all golden⁹²,
 And he, the worshipful, in brightest splendour,
 Displays his strength across the darkness welkin.

5

Black with white hoofs the horses shone upon us,
 Dragging along the golden-shafted chariot;
 All men, all creatures here for ever rested,
 Safe in the lap of Savitri in heaven.

6

Three skies are there of Savitri, two places,
 And one in Yama's realm that holds our heroes⁹³,
 Immortals⁹⁴ mounted on the chariot's axle,—
 Let him speak out who understands this saying.

7

The glorious bird⁹⁵ has lighted-up the heaven,
 The guide divine, whose wings are deeply sounding;
 Where is the sun? Who knows it now, to tell us,
 Which of the heavens his ray may have illumined?

8

The earth's eight quarters has the sun illumined,
 Three miles of land, and all the seven rivers,
 God Savitri, the golden-eyed, has neared us,
 And brought choice treasures to the liberal mortals.

⁹¹ *Evil, physically darkness, morally sin.*

⁹² *Pins of the chariot.*

⁹³ *The departed.*

⁹⁴ *Explained as stars.*

⁹⁵ *The sun.*

9

The golden Savitri, who never rested,
Is moving forward, straight 'tween earth and heaven.
He strikes disease, and hales the sun from yonder;
Through darkest clouds up to the sky he hastens.

10

The guide divine, with golden arms appearing,
May come to us, the rich and gracious giver,
Praised every night, the god did come towards us,
Chasing away the noxious evil spirits.

11

O Savitri, come hither on thy pathways,
The old, well-made ones, dustless in the heavens,
And on those paths be thou our sure protector,
And grant to us to-day thy gracious blessing!

Is there one verse in this hymn that is not perfectly clear and intelligible, as belonging to a hymn addressed to the personified deity of the sun? Let us once understand that Savitri was a name of the sun, and why should he not be invoked for protection and for every kind of blessing? Of course, as soon as the sun was addressed by a poet, he ceased to be a mere sight. He became subjective, personal, and human, whether we like it or not. After that it does not require a great effort of imagination to address him as standing on a golden chariot, drawn by brilliant horses and all the rest. Surely the Vedic poets stood not alone in indulging in such imagery.

The sixth verse is no doubt difficult to understand in its minute detail, but its general sense is clear, and we must remember that the whole verse was really meant as a kind of riddle, a kind of amusement in which uncivilised races all over the world seem to have delighted.

Everything else is exactly what any poet might say of the sun. The sun might well be called a bird with golden wings, and if he is thanked for the treasures which he brings, surely the mere light of the morning and the warmth of the day are treasures sufficient for those whose very life must often have depended on the return of light and warmth after a cold and dark night, or on the return of spring after a severe winter. I cannot think that even Indian scholars could discover anything beyond what we ourselves see in this hymn, and as to Bergaigne, he must surely have been dazzled by his own system if he could perceive many, nay, any allusions to a highly developed system of sacrifice in any hymn like this. That such allusions exist in other hymns, I am very far from denying; what I deny is that liturgical thoughts ever obscured the broad physical

features which formed the background of the ancient Vedic religion⁹⁶, nay, of the Vedic ceremonial also, built up at first for the sake or regulating the times and seasons of the year. I am the very last to deny to Bergaigne and his pupils the merit of having made the sacrificial system of the Vedic hymns more intelligible, but they have not sufficiently resisted the temptation of trying the key that opened one drawer, on all the drawers that still remained to be unlocked.

These hymns would suffice for the gods of the morning, and may help to open the eyes of our mythological Paravrigas, who cannot see the light because there is too much of it.

I shall, however, add one more matutinal hymn addressed to Agni, not simply as the fire, but as the god of light which brightens the world every morning, and is in fact very difficult to distinguish from the sun. This Agni is sometimes called the first of all the gods. The word itself is the general name of fire in Sanskrit. It is phonetically the same as the Latin *ignis*, though the change of *a* into *i* is phonetically irregular. No one, however, is likely to be so bold an agnostic as to deny that the Aryas, before they separated, had made the discovery of fire, and given a name to it, such as Agni or *ignis*. What is most interesting in the development of this word is that while in India it entered into a very rich, religious, and mythological career, it remained a simple appellative in Italy, and was almost entirely lost and forgotten among the other Aryan nations. Should we be justified then in saying that the Latin *ignis* cannot possibly be the same word as Agni, because the latter is one of the greatest gods in the Veda, while *ignis* is no god at all? In the Veda Agni is a most prominent deity, though his character has often been misunderstood. Agni was, no doubt, the fire on the hearth and on the altar, and as such had his own development in India⁹⁷. But Agni was also light in general, and more especially the light of the sun, whether in the morning, or at noon, or in the evening. Thus we read:⁹⁸

Agni, accept our offering, the cake, at the *morning libation!*

Agni, eat the cake offered to thee when the *day is over!*

Agni, accept here the cake at the *midday libation!*

Here Agni is clearly the sun, or the sunlight, or some power dwelling in the sun, all of which are very natural ideas with people in a nomadic or even agricultural state of society, nor do the three daily libations seem to me to point to any elaborate ceremonial. They

⁹⁶ Bergaigne, Vol. II, p. 277: 'Les interprétations purement naturalistes, appliquées à l'analyse des mythes du Rig-Veda, laissent toujours, ou presque toujours, un résidu liturgique, et ce résidu, le plus souvent négligé jusqu'alors, en est précisément la partie la plus importante pour l'exégèse des hymnes.'

⁹⁷ See Max Müller: *Physical Religion*, p. 120.

⁹⁸ *Rig-Veda* III, 28, 1.

are hardly more than the beginnings of the Sandhyavandana and they could easily be matched among Semitic, nay, even among savage races.

In many hymns the solar character of Agni is merged in his domestic character, as the fire on the domestic hearth, as the centre of each family. Thus we read:⁹⁹

HYMN TO AGNI, FIRE

1

High¹⁰⁰, at the head of Dawn, he stood, the mighty,
With light he came, emerging from the darkness,
Fair-bodied Agni with his radiant splendour,
Has filled, when born, all human habitations.

2

Thou, being born, art child of Earth and Heaven,
Agni, the fair one, spread among the flowers¹⁰¹,
The brilliant child by night and through the darkness,
Shouts for the cows¹⁰² from far, above his mothers.

3

Then knowing well the highest place in heaven,
As Vishnu, he, when born, protects the third place¹⁰³,
And when their milk¹⁰⁴ has in his mouth been offered,
They sing to him with one accord their praises.

4

And then the mothers, bringing food, approach him,
They bring him viands and they watch his increase;
Though they have changed, thou goest again to see them,
And art a priest¹⁰⁵ among the tribes of mortals.

⁹⁹ *Rig-Veda* X, 1.

¹⁰⁰ *I have tried to preserve some of the Vedic rhythm in these translations, but I must apologise for these poetic efforts of mine in English. I have consulted, of course, the translations of Grassmann, Ludwig, Griffiths, and Bergaigne, and others where accessible, and have adopted some of the renderings which seemed to me particularly happy.*

¹⁰¹ *Flowers and plants in general are supposed to be supported by warmth within them.*

¹⁰² *The clouds that give their milk, the rain.*

¹⁰³ *The culminating point of the sun, between sunrise and sunset.*

¹⁰⁴ *The milk of the clouds, or the rain.*

¹⁰⁵ *The fire on the hearth, in which oblations were offered.*

5

Then hail to Agni, as the guest of mortals¹⁰⁵,
 The priest of holy rites on glittering chariot,
 The brilliant signal¹⁰⁵ of all sacrifices,
 Of any god, by might divine, the equal.

6

Then, dressed in raiment beautiful, and standing,
 In morning light, a priest on earth's old centre,
 Thou born in Ila's place¹⁰⁶, a king and high priest,
 Shalt hither bring the gods to our oblation.

7

For thou hast ever spread both earth and heaven¹⁰⁷,
 Again our friend, a true son to thy parents,
 Come hither, youthful god, to us who call thee,
 And bring the gods, O son of strength¹⁰⁸, to usward!

Now, I ask once more, can anything be more simple and natural? And can we not, without any great effort on our part, transport ourselves into the position of the Vedic poet who uttered these words, and follow his thoughts, as he gazed on the rising sun? No one would suppose that this poet was the first on earth who ever addressed the rising man, and that it was he who coined all the names by which the sun is addressed in these short songs. We can easily see what a long distance lies behind him, behind his words and behind his ideas. He was certainly not the first who invented priests and their sacrificial work. Only let us remember that, if we use such terms as priest or high priest, or king, we must not allow ourselves to assign to these terms, however unconsciously, all the meanings these words have with us.

These are very important cautions for people ignorant of Sanskrit, who have been led to imagine that the Vedic Aryas had kings like Solomon or Louis Quatorze, or High Priests like Samuel or Bossuet. The word which I translate by priest, is hotri, which meant originally no more than shouter or invoker, and which in due

¹⁰⁵ See the previous footnote.

¹⁰⁶ On the altar or the omphalos of the earth.

¹⁰⁷ Made visible.

¹⁰⁸ The rubbing of the fire-sticks required great strength and skill to bring out the fire that was supposed to be hidden in the wood. The fire, when lighted on the hearth, was supposed to bring the gods to their offerings; nay, by a change of cause and effect the fire kindled on the hearth was identified with the light kindled in the sky at the approach of the dawn.

time became the technical name of one of the sixteen Ritvijas or Season-priests. The other word Purohita means *praepositus*, or provost, and was at first no more than the priest who had to assist or to replace the father of a family, and had to see that all the offerings to the gods were made at the proper times and seasons, which probably was in the beginning no more than a contrivance for marking the essential divisions of the year.

Much depends here, as elsewhere, on the words which we use. Every act of worship may be called a sacrifice, and every sacred poet a high priest. To us these are very grand names and full of meaning. But let us look at some of the hymns addressed to Agni which are called sacrificial, and it seems to me that any peasant in his own cottage could have performed what is called a sacrifice, as presupposed, for instance, in the following hymn¹⁰⁹.

HYMN TO AGNI, FIRE

1

Agni, accept this log of wood,
This service which I bring to thee,
Hear graciously these prayers and songs!

2

With this log let us honour thee,
Thou son of strength, the horse's friend,
And with this hymn, thou nobly born.

3

And let us servants with our songs,
Serve thee, the lover of our songs,
Wealth-lover, giver of our wealth!

4

Be thou our mighty, generous lord,
Thou lord and giver of our wealth,
And drive all hatred far from us!

5

He gives us rain from heaven above,
He gives inviolable strength,
He gives food a thousandfold.

¹⁰⁹ *Rig-Veda* II, 6.

6

Come here, most youthful messenger,
To him who lauds and craves thy help,
Most holy priest¹¹⁰, called by our song.

7

Agni, between both worlds¹¹¹, O sage,
Thou passest, as a messenger
Between two hamlets, kind and wise.

8

Thou hast befriended us before,
Bring hither always all the gods,
And sit thou on this sacred turf¹¹².

But whether these so-called sacrifices were in the beginning as complicated as they certainly were in the end, they are perfectly intelligible, and probably well become much more so when we know more of the literature in which they are described. How much of their development is presupposed in the Vedic hymns, I tried to explain, however shortly, as long ago as 1859,* and much has been added by others during the last forty years; but when we speak of Vedic sacrifices, we must not think of the temple at Jerusalem or of St. Peter's, but of a small plot of grass, on which a fire was kindled within the walls of piled up turf, and kept alive by pouring butter or fat upon it.

What is far more instructive in these hymns is the general attitude of the poet towards the sights of nature which attracted his attention, and the transition from a mere description of nature such as he saw it, to its being peopled with persons whom we call either divine or mythological. Here it is where the Veda has proved so useful, and has given quite a new character to the study of ancient religion and ancient mythology in every part of the world.

How much ingenuity was spent in former days to discover the origin of Zeus and the Greek dwellers on Olympus! After opening the Veda all becomes clear. What doubts can there remain that Zeus was Dyaus, originally the sky, but not the sky as the blue vault of heaven, but the sky as active, as personified and divine? We cannot expect to find many such cases as that of Dyaus=Zeus, where

¹¹⁰ *The fire on the altar was supposed to call the gods, like a priest.*

¹¹¹ *Heaven and earth, gods and men.*

¹¹² *The place where the fire was kept.*

* See my 'History of Ancient Sanskrit Literature,' p. 468.

¹¹⁴ *In my 'History of Ancient Sanskrit Literature,' p. 468.*

an Aryan god has preserved not only his old character in India and Greece and Italy, but his name, and that almost unchanged. We saw how the name of Agni was altogether lost in Greece, though preserved as an appellative in Italy. Yet the Greeks also had their god of fire, and their gods of light, such as Hephaestos, Apollon, Dionysos, Hermes and others, each developed in his own way. And here we come across some curious reminiscences among the Aryan nations. We saw how Agni, as morning sun, was called the son of heaven and earth. In other hymns he is actually called Dvimata, having two mothers. This strange name meets us again in Greek Dimetor, in Latin as Bimatrix. The child of two mothers or parents, a name quite intelligible, as we saw, in Sanskrit, as the son of heaven and earth, had become unintelligible in Greek and Latin, so that every kind of myth was invented to account for so strange a name. To say that the deity called Dvimata in the Veda was the same as the Greek Dimetor or the Latin Bimatrix would be going too far; but to say that Dimetor, i.e. Dionysos (Dyu-nisya) was originally a god of light, as much as Agni, as much as Apollon, and Hermes, the son of heaven and earth, is perfectly right and helps us to account for a number of myths in classical mythology.

These more hidden influences of ancient Aryan mythology on that of Greeks and Romans, are often the most interesting. We have a similar case in Jupiter Stator, which is generally explained as the stopper, stopping the soldiers from running away. That may be the Roman explanation, but in the Veda we have the same word Sthata, applied to Indra, first as Sthata harinam, i.e. holder of horses, when he comes in his chariot; then as Sthata rathasya, holder or governor of his chariot. When this origin was once forgotten, it would be not unlikely that a new meaning was discovered in Stator, viz. the preserver of law and order, or the keeper in battle.

If Agni, as in hymn X, 1, is identified with Vishnu, i.e. the sun in the zenith, we see how pliant the ideas of gods still were in the Veda. This Vishnu in India became in time as independent a deity as Apollon and Dionysos ever were in Greece, but they were all conceived as in the beginning sons of heaven and earth, and as closely allied with the sun in its various manifestations. The Vedic poet saw no difficulty in recognising the same elementary power in the sun rising in the morning, culminating at noon, and vanishing at night, nay in the fire on the hearth, and in the fire of the sacrifice, as the divine guest, the friend of the family, the priest on the altar. All this is not the Solar Theory, it is the Solar Fact, and not easily to be disposed of by an ignorant smile. Though Sanskrit scholars differ as much as other scholars, the broad facts of the Solar Theory have never been called in question by any competent authority, I mean, by anybody acquainted with Greek and Latin, and a little of Vedic Sanskrit.

While Agni here appears before us as the god of light in general, and often begins the procession of the daily gods as the light of the morning, as chasing away the dark night, as holding aloft the radiant sun, as leading forth the daughter of Dyaus *Dios Thugater*, that is the Dawn, he being represented sometimes as the brother of the Dawn, sometimes as her lover¹¹³, once even as kissing her¹¹⁴, there are other deities, equally representative of light, but more specialised in their functions. Surya himself, the Greek Helios, appears among the Vedic deities, and Ushas (Eos), the dawn, is called Surya-prabha or sunshine.

We have so far watched the daily procession of the Vedic gods as reflected in the hymns, beginning with Agni, as god of light, especially the light of the morning, and in many respects the *alter ego* of the sun. We saw that in one sense the Dawn also is only a female repetition of the auroral Agni (Agnir aushasya), and we met with a third personification of the morning sun in the shape of Savitri, who is perhaps the most dramatic among the solar heroes, such as Mitra, Aditya, Vishnu and others.

The procession of the matutinal gods, which we have followed so far under the guidance of our old grammarian, Yaska, can be shown to rest on even earlier authority. Thus we read in one of the hymns themselves:¹¹⁵

Agni awoke, from earth arises Surya,
Ushas, the great and bright, throws heaven open,
The pair of Asvins yoked their car to travel,
God Savitri has roused the world to labour.

There are other hymns, of course, that refer to the light of day or to the sun in his later stages also, culminating as Vishnu, or setting with Trita, till at last Ratri, night, appears, and Varuna, the coverer, reigns once more supreme in heaven. When we see Varuna together with Mitra, the sun-god, they represent a divine couple, dividing between them the sovereignty of the whole world, heaven and earth, very much like the Asvins. They are not so much in opposition to each other, as partners in a common work.

Just as the night, the sister of the Dawn, is sometimes conceived as a dawn or day (Ahan) herself, Mitra and Varuna also seem often to be charged with the same duties. They hold heaven and earth asunder, they support heaven and earth and are the common guardians of the whole world. Varuna as well as Mitra is represented as sun-eyed. Still the contrast between the two becomes gradually more and more pointed, and we can clearly see that, while light and day become the portion of Mitra, night and darkness fall more and more to the share of Varuna. The sun is said to rise from the abode of Mitra and Varuna, but night, moon, and stars are

¹¹³ X, 3, 3.

¹¹⁴ X, 4, 4.

¹¹⁵ *Rig-Veda* I, 157, 1.

mentioned in the hymns already, as more closely related to Varuna. Thus we read¹¹⁶:

The stars fixed high in heaven and shining brightly,
By night, Oh say, where have they gone by daytime?

The laws of Varuna are everlasting,

The moon moves on by night in brilliant splendour.

In *Rig-Veda*¹¹⁷ we ought surely to translate, "He made the white-clothed black-clothed," and not, as proposed, "He made the black-clothed white-clothed," a change which is never ascribed to Varuna.

This explains why some scholars went so far as to recognise in Varuna the original representative of the moon or of the evening star, a far too narrow conception, however, of that supreme deity, though true, no doubt, so far as Varuna, like the sky, comprehends within his sphere of influence night and stars as well as sun and dawn. The almost perfect identity of name between Varuna and Ouranos shows that Varuna was not only a Vedic or Indian deity, but had been named already in the Aryan period. There are phonetic difficulties, but how should we account for the coincidences in the names and character of these two gods?

These few specimens of Vedic poetry will suffice, I hope, to show what is meant by the Solar Theory. It means that most of the physical phenomena which impressed the mind of primitive races, like those that have left us their religious utterances in the Veda, were connected with the sun, with the light of the morning, with day and night succeeding each other, and regulating the whole life of an agricultural population. What else was there to interest such people and to draw away their thoughts from a visible to an invisible world? If I have sometimes called that population uncivilised, what I meant was that we come across customs, such as the selling of children or offering them as victims, polygamy, possibly even polyandry, which are generally considered as signs or survivals of savagery. Such general terms, however, are often very misleading, and because in the Rajasuya sacrifice, for instance, there are remnants of disgusting customs, we must not allow ourselves to indulge with certain so-called missionaries in a general condemnation of the Vedic ceremonial. We should rather learn the lesson that ceremonial is generally the accumulation of centuries, and contains, besides much that may be useful, a large quantity of old rubbish, mostly misunderstood, muddled, and complicated, till the meaning of it, if it ever had any, is lost beyond the hope of recovery.

If anybody, after reading these few hymns, selected quite at random, can still doubt whether the Solar Theory is the only possible theory to account for these Vedic deities, and in consequence, for the Aryan deities connected with them by name or character, I have

¹¹⁷ VIII, 41, 10.

¹¹⁸ *Rig-Veda* I, 27, 10.

nothing more to say. I doubt the existence of such a person. He must in very truth be a solar myth. Let me say once more that I have never looked upon all Vedic deities as solar or matutinal, but that other physical phenomena also, such as rivers, clouds, earth, night, storms, and rain had been personified or deified before these hymns could be composed. It is true there is one hymn only addressed exclusively to the Night¹¹⁸, two only addressed to the Earth, but I pointed out before why such statistics, though very tempting, are altogether untrustworthy and have nothing whatever to do with the real importance or popularity of these deities. Does the ninth Mandala of the *Rig-Veda*, with its 114 hymns almost entirely addressed to Soma, prove the supreme popularity of Soma as a member of the Vedic Pantheon? However, to guard against all possibility of misapprehending my purpose, here follows the hymn to Ratri or Night; which can hardly be called solar in the usual sense of that word.

HYMN TO RATRI, NIGHT

1

The night comes near and looks about,
The goddess with her many eyes,
She has put on her glories all.

2

Immortal, she has filled the space,
Both far and wide, both low and high,
She conquers darkness with her light¹¹⁹.

3

She has undone her sister, Dawn¹²⁰,
The goddess Night as she approached,
And utter darkness¹²¹ flies away.

4

For thou art she in whose approach,
We seek to-day for rest, like birds,
Who in the branches seek their nest.

¹¹⁸ X, 127.

¹¹⁹ *The darkness of the night is lighted by the light of the moon and stars.*

¹²⁰ *The dawn or bright day that lasts from morning till evening.*

¹²¹ *The darkness, caused by the retreat of Dawn or Day, is lighted up by the brilliant Night.*

5

The villages have sought for rest,
 And all that walks and all that flies,
 The falcons come, intent on prey.

6

Keep off the she-wolf, keep the wolf,
 Keep off the thief, O kindly Night,
 And be thou light for us to pass.

7

Black darkness came, yet bright with stars,
 It came to us, with brilliant hues;
 Dawn, free us as from heavy debt!

8

Like cows, I brought this hymn to thee,
 As to a conqueror, child of Dyaus,
 Accept it graciously, O Night!

We must remember that the night to the Vedic poet was not the same as darkness, but that on the contrary, when the night had driven away the day, she was supposed to lighten the darkness, and even to rival her sister, the bright day, with her starlight beauty. The night, no doubt, gives peace and rest, yet the Dawn is looked upon as the kindlier light, and is implored to free mortals from the dangers of the night, as debtors are freed from a debt. Many conjectural alterations have been proposed in this hymn, but it seems to me to be intelligible even as it stands.

One more hymn to show how the belief in and the worship of these physical gods, the actors behind the phenomena of nature, could grow naturally into a belief in and a worship of moral powers, endowed with all the qualities essential to divine beings. Moral ideas are not so entirely absent from the Veda, as has sometimes been asserted, and nothing can be more instructive than to watch the process by which they spring naturally from a belief in the gods of nature. I give the hymn to Varuna from *Rig-Veda*¹²² which I translated for the first time in my "History of Ancient Sanskrit Literature" in the year 1859, and which, with the help of other translations published in the meantime, I have now tried to improve and to clothe in the metrical form of the original.

HYMN TO VARUNA

1

Wise, surely, through his might is his creation,
 Who stemmed asunder spacious earth and heaven;
 He pushed the sky, the bright and glorious, upward,
 And stretched the starry sky and earth asunder.

2

With my own heart I commune, how I ever
 Can now approach Varuna's sacred presence;
 Will he accept my gift without displeasure?
 When may I fearless look and find him gracious?

3

Fain to discover this my sin, I question,
 I go to those who know, and ask for counsel,
 The same reply I get from all the sages,
 'Tis Varuna indeed whom thou hast angered.

4

What was my chief offence that thou wilt slay me,
 Thy oldest friend who always sang thy praises?
 Tell me, unconquered Lord, and I shall quickly
 Fall down before thee, sinless with my homage.

5

Loose us from sins committed by our fathers,
 From others too which we ourselves committed,
 As from a calf, take from us all our fetters,
 Loose us as thieves are loosed that lifted cattle.

6

'Twas not our own free will, 'twas strong temptation,
 Or thoughtlessness, strong drink, or dice, or passion,
 The old was near to lead astray the younger,
 Nay, sleep itself suggests unrighteous actions.

7

Let me do service to the bounteous giver,
 The angry god, like to a slave, but sinless;
 The gracious god gave wisdom to the foolish,
 And he, the wiser, leads the wise to riches.

O let this song, god Varuna, approach thee,
 And let it reach thy heart, O Lord and Master!
 Prosper thou us in winning and in keeping,
 Protect us, gods, for evermore with blessings!

I wish I could have introduced a larger number of my so-called Indian friends, the poets of sacred songs who may have lived thousands of years ago. But I am afraid I have already tried out the patience of my readers with these very ancient friends of mine. The only excuse I can plead is that my own friends in England and in Germany have so often wondered how I could have fallen in love with the Veda, and actually left my own country in order to rescue this forgotten Bible from utter oblivion. It is fortunate that people have different tastes and that we are not all devoted to the same beauty.

One more hymn I must add, however, for I am afraid if I do not, I shall be accused of having misrepresented the character of the Veda, as reflecting only the simplest thoughts of shepherds and cultivators of the land. I have remarked several times before that the *Rig-Veda* contains some very striking philosophical passages, and how far some of the Vedic poets must have been carried by purely metaphysical speculations may be seen by a hymn which I translated for the first time in my *History of Ancient Sanskrit Literature*, 1859. In putting it into a metrical form I was helped at the time by my departed friend, the late Archbishop of York, then Mr. Thomson, and I am glad to say I find little to alter in his translation even now.

Hymn X, 129

Nor aught nor naught existed; you bright sky
 Was not, nor heaven's broad woof outstretched above;
 What covered all? what sheltered? what concealed?
 Was it the waters' fathomless abyss?
 There was not death, hence was there naught immortal,
 There was no light of night, no light of day,
 The only One breathed breathless in itself,
 Other than it there nothing since has been.
 Darkness there was, and all at first was veiled
 In gloom profound, an ocean without light;
 The germ that still lay covered in the husk,
 Burst forth, one nature, from the fervent heat.
 Then first came Love upon it, the new germ,
 Of mind; yea, poets in their hearts discerned
 Pondering this bond between created things
 And uncreated. Came this ray from earth

Piercing and all-pervading, or from heaven?
Then seeds were sown, and mighty powers arose,
Nature below, and Power and will above;
Who knows the secret? who proclaimed it here,
Whence, whence this manifold creation sprang?
The gods themselves came later into being,
Who knows from whence this great creation sprang?
He from whom all this great creation came,
Whether his will created or was mute,
The most high Seer that is in highest heaven,
He knows it—or perchance e'en He knows not.

This hymn is important, not only by what it says, but by what it presupposes. Whatever date we may ascribe to it as incorporated in the *Rig-Veda*, many generations of thinkers must have passed before such questions could possibly have been asked or answered. As yet we see the Vedic age only as through a glass darkly. The first generation of Vedic scholars is passing away. It has done its work bravely, though well aware of its limits. Let the next generation dig deeper and deeper. What is wanted is patient, but independent and original work. There is so much new ground still to be broken, that the time has hardly come as yet for going again and again over the same ploughed field.

I must now part with my Vedic Friends. I can hardly hope that I have persuaded many of my English friends to share my feelings for my antediluvian acquaintances. All I care for is to make others understand how my heart was caught, and what I saw in my Indian love, not only in her Vedantic dreams and aspirations, but in the simplicity of her earliest utterances of trust in powers invisible, yet present behind what is visible, and in her faith in a law that rules both the natural and the supernatural world.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE RELIGION OF THE VEDA

Although there is hardly any department of learning which has not received new light and new life from the ancient literature of India, yet nowhere is the light that comes to us from India so important, so novel, and so rich as in the study of religion and mythology. It is to this subject therefore that I mean to devote the remaining lectures of this course. I do so, partly because I feel myself most at home in that ancient world of Vedic literature in which the germs of Aryan religion have to be studied, partly because I believe that for a proper understanding of the deepest convictions, or, if you like, the strongest prejudices of the modern Hindus, nothing is so useful as a knowledge of the Veda. It is perfectly true that nothing would give a falsel impression of the present Brahmanical religion than the ancient Vedic literature, supposing we were to imagine that three thousand years could have passed ever India without producing any change. Such a mistake would be nearly as absurd as to deny any difference between the Vedic Sanskrit and the spoken Bengali. But no one will gain a scholarlike knowledge or a true insight into the secret springs of Bengali who is ignorant of the grammar of Sanskrit; and no one will ever understand the present religious, philosophical, legal, and social opinions of the Hindus, who is unable to trace them back to their true sources in the Veda.

I still remember how, many years ago, when I began to publish for the first time the text and the commentary of the Rig-veda, it was argued by a certain, perhaps not quite disinterested party, that the Veda was perfectly useless, that no man in India, however learned, could read it, and that it was of no use either for missionaries or for any one else who wished to study and to influence the later Sanskrit, the Laws of Manu, the epic poems, and, more particularly, the Puranas. The Veda might do very well for German students, but not for Englishmen.

There was no excuse for such ignorant assertions even thirty years ago, for in these very books, in the Laws of Manu, in the Mahabharata, and in the Puranas, the Veda is everywhere proclaimed as the highest authority in all matters of religion¹. 'A Brahman,' says Manu, 'unlearned in holy writ, is extinguished in an instant like dry grass on fire.' 'A twice-born man (that is a Brahmana, Kshatriya, and a Vaisya) not having studied the Veda, soon falls, even when living, to the condition of a Sudra, and his descendants after him.'

¹ *Wilson, Lectures*, p. 9.

How far this license of ignorant assertion may be carried is shown by the same authorities who denied the importance of the Veda for a historical study of Indian thought, boldly charging those wily priests, the Brahmans, with having withheld their sacred literature from any but their own caste. Now so far from withholding it, the Brahmans have always been striving, and often striving in vain, to make the study of their sacred literature obligatory on all castes, except the Sudras, and the passages just quoted from Manu show what penalties were threatened, if children of the second and third castes, the Kshatriya and Vaisyas, were not instructed in the sacred literature of the Brahmans.

At present the Brahmans themselves have spoken, and the reception they have accorded to my edition of the Rig-veda² and its native commentary, the zeal with which they have themselves taken up the study of Vedic literature, and the earnestness with which different sects are still discussing the proper use that should be made of their ancient religious writings, show abundantly that a Sanskrit scholar ignorant of, or, I should rather say, determined to ignore the Veda, would be not much better than a Hebrew scholar ignorant of the Old Testament.

I shall now proceed to give you some characteristic specimens of the religion and poetry of the Rig-veda. They can only be few, and as there is nothing like system or unity of plan in that collection of 1017 hymns, which we call the Samhita of the Rig-veda, I cannot promise that they will give you a complete panoramic view of that intellectual world in which our Vedic ancestors passed their life on earth.

I could not even answer the question, if you were to ask it, whether the religion of the Veda was *polytheistic*, or *monotheistic*. Monotheistic, in the usual sense of that word, it is decidedly not, though there are hymns that assert the unity of the Divine as fearlessly as any passage of the Old Testament, or the New Testa-

² *As it has been doubted, and even denied, that the publication of the Rig-veda and its native commentary has had some important bearing on the resuscitation of the religious life of India, I feel bound to give at least one from the many testimonials which I have received from India. It comes from the Adi Brahma Samaj, founded by Ram Mohun Roy, and now represented by its three branches, the Adi Brahma Samaj, the Brahma Samaj of India, and the Sadharano Brahma Samaj. 'The Committee of the Adi Brahma Samaj beg to offer you their hearty congratulations on the completion of the gigantic task which has occupied you for the last quarter of a century. By publishing the Rig-veda at a time when Vedic learning has by some sad fatality become almost extinct in the land of its birth, you have conferred a boon upon us Hindus, for which we cannot but be eternally grateful.'*

ment, or the Koran. Thus one poet says³: 'That which is *one*, sages name it in various ways—they call it Agni, Yama, Matarisvan.'

Another poet says: 'The wise poets represent by their words Him who is one with beautiful wings, in many ways⁴.'

And again we hear of a being called Hiranyagarbha, the golden germ (whatever the original of that name may have been), of whom the poet says⁵: 'In the beginning there arose Hiranyagarbha; he was the one born lord of all this. He established the earth and this sky. Who is the god to whom we shall offer our sacrifice?' That Hiranyagarbha, the poet says 'is alone God above all gods'⁶—an assertion of the unity of the Divine which could hardly be exceeded in strength by any passage from the Old Testament.

But by the side of such passages, which are few in number, there are thousands in which ever so many divine beings are praised and prayed to. Their number is sometimes given as 'thrice eleven'⁷ or thirty-three, and one poet assigns eleven gods to the sky, eleven to the earth, and eleven to the waters⁸, the waters here intended being those of the atmosphere and the clouds. These thirty-three gods have even wives apportioned to them,⁹ though few of these only have as yet attained to the honour of a name¹⁰.

These thirty-three gods, however, by no means include all the Vedic gods, for such important deities as Agni, the fire, Soma, the rain, the Maruts or Storm-gods, the Asvins, the gods of Morning and Evening, the Waters, the Dawn, the Sun, are mentioned separately; and there are not wanting passages in which the poet is carried away into exaggerations, till he proclaims the number of his gods to be, not only thirty-three, but three thousand three hundred and thirty-nine¹¹.

It therefore there must be a name for the religion of the Rig-veda, polytheism would seem at first sight the most appropriate.

³ *Rig-veda* I. 164, 46.

⁴ *Rig-veda* X. 114, 5.

⁵ *Rig-veda* X. 121.

⁶ *Yah deveshu adhi devah ekah asit.*

⁷ *Muir*, iv. 9.

⁸ *Rig-veda* I. 139, 11.

⁹ *Rig-veda* III. 6, 9.

¹⁰ *The following names of Devapatnis or wives of the gods are given in the Vaitana Sutra XV. 3 (ed. Garbe): Prithivi, the wife of Agni, Vak of Vata, Scna of Indra, Dhena of Brihaspati, Pathya of Pushan, Gayatri of Vasu, Trishtubh of Rudra, Jayati of Aditya, Anushtubh of Mitra, Virag of Varuna, Pankti of Vishnu, Diksha of Soma.*

¹¹ *Rig-veda* III. 9, 9.

Polytheism, however, has assumed with us a meaning which renders it totally inapplicable to the Vedic religion.

Our ideas of polytheism being chiefly derived from Greece and Rome, we understand by it a certain more or less organised system of gods, different in power and rank, and all subordinate to a supreme God, a Zeus or Jupiter. The Vedic polytheism differs from the Greek and Roman polytheism, and, I may add, likewise from the polytheism of the Ural-Altai, the Polynesian, the American, and most of the African races, in the same manner as a confederacy of village communities differs from a monarchy. There are traces of an earlier stage of village-community life to be discovered in the later republican and monarchical constitutions, and in the same manner nothing can be clearer, particularly in Greece, than that the monarchy of Zeus was preceded by what may be called the septarchy of several of the great gods of Greece. The same remark applies to the mythology of the Teutonic nations also¹². In the Veda, however, the gods worshipped as supreme by each sept stand still side by side. No one is first always, no one is last always. Even gods of a decidedly inferior and limited character assume occasionally in the eyes of a devoted poet a supreme place above all other gods¹³. It was necessary, therefore, for the purpose of accurate reasoning to have a name, different from *polytheism*, to signify this worship of single gods, each occupying for a time a supreme position, and I proposed for it the name of *Kathenotheism*, that is a worship of one god after another, or of *Henotheism*, the worship of single gods. This shorter name of *Henotheism* has found more general acceptance, as conveying more definitely the opposition between *Monotheism*, the worship of one only God, and *Henotheism*, the worship of single gods; and, if but properly defined, it will answer its purpose very well. However, in researches of this kind we cannot be too much on our guard against technical terms. They are inevitable, I know; but they are almost always misleading. There is, for instance, a hymn addressed to the *Indus* and the rivers that fall into it, of which I hope to read you a translation, because it determines very accurately the

¹² Grimm showed that *Thorr* is sometimes the supreme god, while at other times he is the son of *Odinn*. This, as Zimmer truly remarks, need not be regarded as the result of a revolution, or even of gradual decay, as in the case of *Dyau* and *Tyr*, but simply as inherent in the character of a nascent polytheism. See *Zeitschrift für D. A.* vol. xii. p. 174.

¹³ Among not yet civilised races prayers are addressed to a god with a special object, and to that god who is supposed to be most powerful in a special domain. He becomes for the moment the highest god, to whom all others must give place. He may be invoked as the highest and the only god, without any slight being intended for the other gods.' Zimmer, l. c. p. 175.

geographical scene on which the poets of the Veda passed their life. Indian scholars call these rivers *devatas* or deities, and European translators too speak of them as gods and goddesses. But in the language used by the poet with regard to the Indus and the other rivers, there is nothing to justify us in saying that he considered these rivers as *gods* and *goddesses*, unless we mean by *gods* and *goddesses* something very different from what the Greeks called River-gods and River-goddesses, Nymphs, Najades, or even Muses.

And what applies to these rivers applies more or less to all the objects of Vedic worship. They all are still oscillating between what is seen by the senses, what is created by fancy, and what is postulated by the understanding; they are things, persons, causes, according to the varying disposition of the poets; and if we call them gods or goddesses, we must remember the remark of an ancient Indian theologian, who reminds us that by *devata* or deity he means no more than the object celebrated in a hymn, while *Rishi* or seer means no more than the subject or the author of a hymn.

It is difficult to treat of the so-called gods celebrated in the Veda according to any system, for the simple reason that the concepts of these gods and the hymn addressed to them sprang up spontaneously and without any pre-established plan. It is best perhaps for our purpose to follow an ancient Brahmanical writer, who is supposed to have lived about 400 B.C. He tells us of students of the Veda, before his time, who admitted three deities only, viz. Agni or fire, whose place is on the earth; Vayu or Indra, the wind and the god of the thunderstorm, whose place is in the air; and Surya, the sun, whose place is in the sky. These deities, they maintained, received severally many appellations, in consequence of their greatness, or of the diversity of their functions; just as a priest according to the functions which he performs at various sacrifices, receives various names.

This is *one* view of the Vedic gods, and, though too narrow, it cannot be denied that there is some truth in it. A very useful division of the Vedic gods might he made, and has been made by Yaska, into *terrestrial*, *aerial*, and *celestial*, and if the old Hindu theologian meant no more than that all the manifestations of divine power in nature might be traced back to three centres of force, one in the sky, one in the air, and one on the earth, he deserves great credit for his sagacity.

But he himself perceived evidently that this generalisation was not quite applicable to all the gods, and he goes on to say, 'Or, it may be, these gods are all distinct beings, for the praises addressed to them are distinct, and their appellations also.' This is quite right. It is the very object of most of these divine names to impart distinct individuality to the manifestations of the powers of nature, and though the philosopher or the inspired poet might perceive that these

numerous names were but names, while that which was named was *one* and *one* only, this was certainly not the idea of most of the Vedic Rishis themselves, still less of the people who listened to their songs at fairs and festivals. It is the peculiar character of that phase of religious thought which we have to study in the Veda, that in it the Divine is conceived and represented as manifold, and that many functions are shared in common by various gods, no attempt having yet been made at organising the whole body of the gods, sharply separating one from the other, and subordinating all of them to several or, in the end, to one supreme head.

Availing ourselves of the division of the Vedic gods into terrestrial, aerial, and celestial, as proposed by some of the earliest Indian theologians, we should have to begin with the gods, connected with the earth.

Before we examine them, however, we have first to consider one of the earliest objects of worship and adoration, namely *Earth and Heaven*, or *Heaven and Earth*, conceived as a divine couple. Not only in India, but among many other nations, both savage, half-savage, or civilized, we meet with Heaven and Earth as one of the earliest objects, pondered on, transfigured, and animated by the early poets, and more or less clearly conceived by early philosophers. It is surprising that it should be so, for the conception of the Earth as an independent being, and of Heaven as an independent being, and then of both together as a divine couple embracing the whole universe, requires a considerable effort of abstraction, far more than the concepts of other divine powers, such as the Fire, the Rain, the Lightning, or the Sun.

Still so it is, and as it may help us to understand the ideas about Heaven and Earth, as we find them in the Veda, and show us at the same (same) time the strong contrast between the mythology of the Aryans and that of real savages (a contrast of great importance, though I admit very difficult to explain), I shall read you first some extracts from a book, published by a friend of mine, the Rev. William Wyatt, Gill, for many years an active and most successful missionary in Mangaia, one of those Polynesian islands that form a girdle round one quarter of our globe,¹⁴ and all share in the same language, the

¹⁴ *'We are not concerned here with the sundering of America and Africa, but with a study of the amazingly uniform pattern stretching throughout the length and breadth of the still oceans. If we take the oceans in their entirety, the Micro Melanesia enclosure (up to Malaya), it may be stated that a uniform pattern of thought structure covers about 120 degrees in longitude and 70 degrees in latitude—or one quarter of the entire surface of the earth.'* Bastian, *Die Heilige Sage der Polynesier*, p. 57. Taylor, *Primitive Culture*, i. p. 290.

same religion, the same mythology, and the some customs. The book is called 'Myths and Songs from the South Pacific¹⁵,' and it is full of interest to the student of mythology and religion.

The story, as told him by the natives of Mangaia, runs as follows¹⁶:

"The sky is built of solid blue stone. At one time it almost touched the earth; resting upon the stout broad leaves of the teve (which attains the height of about six feet) and the delicate indigenous arrow-root (whose slender stem rarely exceeds three feet). . . . In this narrow space between earth and sky the inhabitants of this world were pent up. Ru, whose usual residence was in Avaiki, or the shades, had come up for a time to this world of ours. Pitying the wretched confined residence of the inhabitants, he employed himself in endeavouring to raise the sky a little. For this purpose he cut a number of strong stakes of different kinds of trees, and firmly planted them in the ground at Rangimotia, the centre of the island, and with him the centre of the world. This was a considerable improvement, as mortals were thereby enabled to stand erect and to walk about without inconvenience. Hence Ru was named "The sky-supporter." Wherefore Teka sings (1794):

" Force up the sky, O Ru,
And let the space be clear!"

"One day when the old man was surveying his work, his graceless son Maui contemptuously asked him what he was doing there. Ru replied, "Who told youngsters to talk? Take care of yourself, or I will hurl you out of existence."

"Do it, then," shouted Maui.

"Ru was as good as his word, and forthwith seized Maui, who was small of stature, and threw him to a great height. In falling Maui assumed the form of a bird, and lightly touched the ground, perfectly unharmed. Maui, now thirsting for revenge, in a moment resumed his natural form, but exaggerated to gigantic proportions, and ran to his father, saying:

" Ru, who supportest the many heavens,
The third, even to the highest, ascend!"

Inserting his head between the old man's legs, he exerted all his prodigious strength, and hurled poor Ru, sky and all, to a tremendous height,—so high, indeed, that the blue sky could never get back again. Unluckily, however, for the sky supporting Ru, his head and shoulders got entangled among the stars. He struggled hard, but fruitlessly,

¹⁵ *Henry S. King & Co., London, 1876.*

¹⁶ p. 58.

to extricate himself. Maui walked off well pleased with having raised the sky to its present height, but left half his father's body and both his legs ingloriously suspended between heaven and earth. Thus perished Ru. His body rotted away, and his bones came tumbling down from time to time, and were shivered on the earth into countless fragments. These shivered bones of Ru are scattered over every hill and valley of Mangaia, to the very edge of the sea.'

What the natives call 'the bones of Ru' (te ivi o Ru) are pieces of pumice-stone.

Now let us consider, first of all, whether this story, which with slight variations is told all over the Polynesian islands,¹⁷ is pure non-sense, or whether there was originally some sense in it. My conviction is that non-sense is everywhere the child of sense, only that unfortunately many children, like that youngster Maui, consider themselves much wiser than their fathers, and occasionally succeed in hurling them out of existence.

It is a peculiarity of many of the ancient myths that they represent events, which happen every day, or every year, as having happened once upon a time. The daily battle between day and night, the yearly battle between winter and spring, are represented almost like historical events, and some of the episodes and touches belonging originally to these constant battles of nature, have certainly been transferred into and mixed up with battles that took place at a certain time, such as, for instance, the siege of Troy. When historical recollections failed, legendary accounts of the ancient battles between Night and Morning, Winter and Spring, were always at hand; and, as in modern times we constantly hear 'good stories,' which we have known from our childhood, told again and again of any man whom they seem to fit, in the same manner, in ancient times, any act of prowess, or daring, or mischief, originally told of the sun, 'the orient Conqueror of gloomy Night,' was readily transferred to and believed of any local hero who might seem to be a second Jupiter, or Mars, or Hercules.

I have little doubt therefore that as the accounts of a deluge, for instance, which we find almost everywhere, are originally recollections of the annual torrents of rain or snow that covered the little worlds within the ken of the ancient village-bards, this tearing asunder of heaven and earth too was originally no more than a description of what might be seen every morning. During a dark night the sky seemed to cover the earth; the two seemed to be one, and could not be distinguished one from the other. Then came the Dawn, which with its bright rays lifted the covering of the dark night to a certain point, till at last Maui appeared, small in stature, a mere child, that is, the sun of the morning—thrown up suddenly, as it were, when his first rays shot through the sky from beneath the horizon, then falling

¹⁷ *There is a second version of the story even in the small island of Mangaia; see Myths and Songs, p. 71.*

back to the earth, like a bird, and rising in gigantic form on the morning sky. The dawn now was hurled away, and the sky was seen lifted high above the earth; and Maui, the sun, marched on well pleased with having raised the sky to its present height.

Why pumice-stone should be called the bones of Ru, we cannot tell, without knowing a great deal more of the language of Mangaia than we do at present. It is most likely an independent saying, and was afterwards united with the story of Ru and Maui.

Now I must quote at least a few extracts from a Maori legend as written down by Judge Manning:¹⁸

'This is the Genesis of the New Zealanders:

'The Heavens which are above us, and the Earth which lies beneath us, are the progenitors of men, and the origin of all things.

'Formerly the Heaven lay upon the Earth, and all was darkness. . . .

'And the children of Heaven and Earth sought to discover the difference between light and darkness, between day and night. . . .

"So the sons of Rangi (Heaven) and of Papa (Earth) consulted together, and said: "Let us seek means whereby to destroy Heaven and Earth, or to separate them from each other."

'Then said Tumatauenga (the God of War), "Let us destroy them both."

'Then said Tane-Mahuta (the Forest God), "Not so: let them be separated. Let one of them go upwards and become a stranger to us; let the other remain below and be a parent for us."

'Then four of the gods tried to separate Heaven and Earth, but did not succeed, while the fifth, Tane, succeeded.

'After Heaven and Earth had been separated, great storms arose, or, as the poet expresses it, one of their sons, Tawhiri-Matea, the god of the winds, tried to revenge the outrage committed on his parents by his brothers. Then follow dismal dusky days, and dripping chilly skies, and arid scorching blasts. All the gods fight, till at last Tu only remains, the god of war, who had devoured all his brothers, except the Storm. More fights follow, in which the greater part of the earth was overwhelmed by the waters, and but a small portion remained dry. After that, light continued to increase, and as the light increased, so also the people who had been hidden between Heaven and Earth increased. . . . And so generation was added to generation down to the time of Maui-Potiki, he who brought death into the world.

'Now in these latter days Heaven remains far removed from his wife, the Earth; but the love of the wife rises upward in sighs towards her husband. These are the mists which fly upwards from the mountain-tops; and the tears of Heaven fall downwards on his wife; behold the dew-drops!

¹⁸ *Bastian, Heilige Sage der Polynesier*, p. 36.

So far the Maori Genesis.

Let us now return to the Veda, and compare these crude and somewhat grotesque legends with the language of the ancient Aryan poets. In the hymn of the Rig-veda the separating and keeping apart of Heaven and Earth is several times alluded to, and here too it is represented as the work of the most valiant gods. In I. 67, 3 it is Agni, fire, who holds the earth and supports the heaven; in X. 89, 4 it is Indra who keeps them apart; in IX. 101, 15 Soma is celebrated for the same deed, and in III. 31, 12 other gods too share the same honour.¹⁹

In the Aitareya Brahmana we read:²⁰ 'These two worlds (Heaven and Earth) were once joined together. They went asunder. Then it did not rain, nor did the sun shine. And the five tribes did not agree with one another. The gods then brought the two (Heaven and Earth) together, and when they came together they performed a wedding of the gods.'

Here we have in a shorter form the some fundamental ideas; first, that formerly Heaven and Earth were together; that afterwards they were separated, that when they were thus separated there was war throughout nature, and neither rain nor sunshine; that, lastly, Heaven and Earth were conciliated, and that then a great wedding took place.

Now I need hardly remind those who are acquainted with Greek and Roman literature, how familiar these and similar conceptions about a marriage between Heaven and Earth were in Greece and Italy. They seem to possess there a more special reference to the annual reconciliation between Heaven and Earth, which takes place in spring, and to their former estrangement during winter. But the first cosmological separation of the two always points to the want of light and the impossibility of distinction during the night, and the gradual lifting up of the blue sky through the rising of the sun.²¹

In the Homeric hymns²² the Earth is addressed as

'Mother of gods, the wife of the starry Heaven;'

and the Heaven or Æther is often called the father. Their marriage too is described, as, for instance, by Euripides, when he says:

There is the mighty Earth, Jove's Æther:

He (the Æther) is the creator of men and gods;

The earth receiving the moist drops of rain,

Bears mortals,

Bears food, and the tribes of animals.

¹⁹ *Bergaigne, La Religion Vedique*, p. 240.

²⁰ *Ait. Br. IV. 27; Muir, iv. p. 23.*

²¹ *See Muir, iv. p. 24.*

²² *Homer, Hymn xxx. 17.*

Hence she is not unjustly regarded,
As the mother of all.²³

And what is more curious still is that we have evidence that Euripides received this doctrine from his teacher, the philosopher Anaxagoras. For Dionysius of Halicarnassus²⁴ tells us that Euripides frequented the lectures of Anaxagoras. Now, it was the theory of that philosopher that originally all things were in all things, but that afterwards they became separated. Euripides later in life associated with Socrates, and became doubtful regarding that theory. He accordingly propounds the ancient doctrine by the mouth of another, namely Melanippe, who says:

'This saying (myth) is not mine, but came from my mother, that formerly Heaven and Earth were one shape; but when they were separated from each other, they gave birth and brought all things into the light, trees, birds, beasts, and the fishes whom the sea feeds, and the race of mortals.'

Thus we have met with the same idea of the original union, of a separation, and of a subsequent re-union of Heaven and Earth in Greece, in India, and in the Polynesian islands.

Let us now see how the poets of the Veda address these two beings, Heaven and Earth.

They are mostly addressed in the dual, as two beings forming but one concept. We meet, however, with verses which are addressed to the Earth by herself, and which speak of her as 'kind, without thorns, and pleasant to dwell on.'²⁵ while there are clear traces in some of the hymns that at one time Dyaus, the sky, was the supreme deity.²⁶ When invoked together they are called *Dyava-prithivya*, from *dyu*, the sky, and *prithivi*, the broad earth.

If we examine their epithets, we find that many of them reflect simply the physical aspects of Heaven and Earth. Thus they are called *uru*, wide, *uruvyachas*, widely expanded, *dure-ante*, with limits far apart, *gabhirā*, deep, *ghritavat*, giving fat, *madhudugha*, yielding honey or dew, *payasvat*, full of milk, *bhuri-retas*, rich in seed.

Another class of epithets represents them already as endowed with certain human and superhuman qualities, such as *asaschat*, never tiring, *ajara*, not decaying, which brings us very near to immortal; *adruh*, not injuring, or not deceiving, *prachetas*, provident, and then *pita-mata*, father and mother, *devaputra*, having the gods for their sons, *rita-bridh* and *ritavat*, protectors of the *Rita*, of what is right, guardians of eternal laws.

²³ Euripides, *Chrysiippus*, *fragm.* (6 edit. Didot, p. 824).

²⁴ *Dionysius Halic.* vol. v. p. 355; *Muir*, v. p. 27.

²⁵ *Rig-veda* I. 22, 15.

²⁶ See *Science of Language*, vol. ii. p. 537.

Here you see what is so interesting in the Veda, the gradual advance from the material to the spiritual, from the sensuous to the supersensuous, from the human to the superhuman and the divine. Heaven and Earth were seen, and, according to our notions, they might simply be classed as visible and finite beings. But the ancient poets were more honest to themselves. They could see Heaven and Earth, but they never saw them in their entirety. They felt that there was something beyond the purely finite aspect of these beings, and therefore they thought of them, not as they would think of a stone, or a tree, or a dog, but as something not altogether visible or knowable, yet as something important to themselves powerful, strong to hurt. Whatever was between Heaven and Earth seemed to be theirs, their property, their realm, their dominion. They held and embraced all; they seemed to have produced all. The Devas or bright beings, the sun, the dawn, the fire, the wind, the rain, were all theirs, and were called therefore the offspring of Heaven and Faith. Thus Heaven and Earth became the Universal Father and Mother.

Then we ask at once, 'Were then these Heaven and Earth gods? But gods in what sense? In our sense of God? Why, in our sense, God is altogether incapable of a plural. Then in the Greek sense of the word? No, certainly not, for what the Greeks called gods was the result of an intellectual growth totally independent of the Veda or of India. We must never forget that what we call gods in ancient mythologies are not substantial, living, individual beings, of whom we can predicate this or that. Deva, which we translate by god, was originally nothing but an adjective, expressive of a quality shared by heaven and earth, by the sun and the stars and the dawn and the sea, namely *brightness*; and the idea of god, at that early time, contains neither more nor less than what is shared in common by all these bright beings. That is to say, the idea of god is not an idea ready-made, which could be applied in its abstract purity to heaven and earth and other such-like beings; but it is an idea, growing out of the concepts of heaven and earth and of the other bright being, slowly separating itself from them, but never containing more than what was contained, though confusedly, in the objects to which it was successively applied.

Nor must it be supposed that heaven and earth, having once been raised to the rank of undecaying or immortal beings, of divine parents, of guardians of the laws, were thus permanently settled in the religious consciousness of the people. Far from it. When the ideas of other gods, and of more active and more distinctly personal gods had been elaborated, the Vedic Rishis asked without hesitation, Who then has made heaven and earth? not exactly Heaven and Earth, as conceived before, but heaven and earth as seen every day, as a part of what began to be called Nature or the Universe.

Thus one poet says:²⁷

'He was indeed among the gods the cleverest workman who produced the two brilliant ones (heaven and earth), that gladden all things; he who measured out the two bright ones (heaven and earth) by his wisdom, and established them on everlasting supports.'

And again:²⁸ 'He was a good workman who produced heaven and earth; the wise, who by his might brought together these two (heaven and earth), the wide, the deep, the well-fashioned in the bottomless space.'

Very soon this great work of making heaven and earth was ascribed, like other mighty works, to the mightiest of their gods, to Indra. At first we read that Indra, originally only a kind of *Jupiter pluvius*, or god of rain, stretched out heaven and earth, like a hide;²⁹ that he held them in his hand,³⁰ that he upholds heaven and earth,³¹ and that he grants heaven and earth to his worshippers.³² But very soon Indra is praised for having made Heaven and Earth,³³ and then, when the poet remembers that Heaven and Earth had been praised elsewhere as the parents of the gods, and more especially as the parents of Indra, he does not hesitate for a moment, but says:³⁴ 'What poets living before us have reached the end of all thy greatness? for thou hast indeed begotten thy father and thy mother together³⁵ from thy own body!'

That is a strong measure, and a god who once could do that, was no doubt capable of anything afterwards. The same idea, namely that Indra is greater than heaven and earth, is expressed in a less outrageous way by another poet, who says³⁶ that Indra is greater than heaven and earth, and that both together are only a half of Indra. Or again:³⁷ 'The divine Dyaus bowed before Indra, before Indra the great Earth bowed with her wide spaces.' 'At the birth of thy splendour Dyaus trembled, the Earth trembled for fear of thy anger.'³⁸

²⁷ *Rig-veda* I. 160, 4.

²⁸ *Rig-veda* IV. 56, 3.

²⁹ *L. c.* VIII. 6, 5.

³⁰ *L. c.* III. 30, 5.

³¹ *L. c.* III. 32, 8.

³² *L. c.* III. 34, 8.

³³ *L. c.* VIII. 36, 4.

³⁴ *L. c.* X. 54, 3.

³⁵ *Cf.* IV. 17, 4, where *Dyaus* is the father of *Indra*; see however *Muir*, iv. 31, note.

³⁶ *Rig-veda* VI. 30, 1.

³⁷ *Rig-veda* I. 131, 1.

³⁸ *L. c.* IV. 17, 2.

Thus, from one point of view, Heaven and Earth were the greatest gods, they were the parents of everything, and therefore of the gods also, such as Indra and others.

But, from another point of view, every god that was considered as supreme at one time or other, must necessarily have made heaven and earth, and thus the child became greater than the father, aye, became the father of his father. Indra was not the only god that created heaven and earth. In one hymn³⁹ that creation is ascribed to Soma and Pushan, by no means very prominent characters; in another⁴⁰ to *Hiranyagarbha* (the golden germ): in another again, to a god who is simply called Dhatri, the Creator,⁴¹ or Visvakarman,⁴² the maker of all things. Other gods, such as Mitra and Savitri, names of the sun, are praised for upholding Heaven and Earth, and the same task is sometimes performed by the old god Varuna⁴³ also.

What I wish you to observe in all this is the perfect freedom with which these so-called gods or Devas are handled, and particularly the ease and naturalness with which now the one, now the other emerges as supreme out of this chaotic theogony. This is the peculiar character of the ancient Vedic religion, totally different both from the Polytheism and from the Monotheism as we see it in the Greek and the Jewish religions; and if the Veda had taught us nothing else but this *henotheistic* phase, which must everywhere have preceded the more highly organised phase of Polytheism which we see in Greece, in Rome, and elsewhere, the study of the Veda would not have been in vain.

It may be quite true that the poetry of the Veda is neither beautiful, in our sense of the word, nor very profound; but it is instructive. When we see those two giant spectres of Heaven and Earth on the background of the Vedic religion, exerting their influence for a time, and then vanishing before the light of younger and more active gods, we learn a lesson which it is well to learn, and which we can hardly learn anywhere else—the lesson *how gods were made and unmade*—how the Beyond or the Infinite was named by different names in order to bring it near to the mind of man, to make it for a time comprehensible, until, when name after name had proved of no avail, a nameless God was felt to answer best the restless cravings of the human heart.

I shall next translate to you the hymn to which I referred before as addressed to the Rivers. If the Rivers are to be called deities at all, they belong to the class of terrestrial deities. But the reason

³⁹ *L. c.* II. 40, 1.

⁴⁰ *L. c.* X. 121, 9.

⁴¹ *L. c.* X. 190, 3.

⁴² *L. c.* X. 81, 2.

⁴³ *L. c.* VI. 70, 1.

why I single out this hymn is not so much because it throws new light on the theogonic process, but because it may help to impart some reality to the vague conceptions which we form to ourselves of the ancient Vedic poets and their surroundings. The rivers invoked are, as we shall see, the real rivers of the Punjab, and the poem shows a much wider geographical horizon than we should expect from a mere village bard.⁴⁴

1. 'Let the poet declare, O Waters, your exceeding greatness, here in the seat of Vivasvat.⁴⁵ By seven and seven they have come forth in three courses, but the Sindhu (the Indus) exceeds all the other wandering rivers by her strength.

⁴⁴ *Rig-veda* X. 75. See *Hibbert Lectures*, Lect. iv.

⁴⁵ *Vivasvat* is a name of the sun, and the seat or home of *Vivasvat* can hardly be anything but the earth, as the home of the sun, or, in a more special sense, the place where a sacrifice is offered.

⁴⁶ I formerly translated *yat vagan abhi adravah tvam* by 'when thou rannest for the prizes.' Grassmann had translated similarly, 'When thou, O Sindhu, rannest to the prize of the battle,' while Ludwig wrote, 'When thou, O Sindhu, was flowing on to greater powers.' *Vaga*, connected with *vegeo*, *vigeo*, *vigil*, *wacker* (see *Cutrius*, *Grundzuge*, No. 159), is one of the many difficult words in the *Veda*, the general meaning of which may be guessed, but in many places cannot yet be determined with certainty. *Vaga* occurs very frequently, both in the singular and the plural, and some of its meanings are clear enough. The *St. Petersburg Dictionary* gives the following list of them—*swiftness*, *race*, *prize of race*, *gain*, *treasure*, *race-horse*, &c. Here we perceive at once the difficulty of tracing all these meanings back to a common source, though it might be possible to begin with the meanings of *strength*, *strife*, *contest*, *race*, whether friendly or warlike, then to proceed to what is won in a race or in war, viz. *booty*, *treasure*, and lastly to take *vagah* in the more general sense of *acquisitions*, *goods*, even *goods bestowed as gifts*. We have a similar transition of meaning in the Greek *athlos* *contest*, *contest for a prize*, and *athlove*, the *prize of contest*, *reward*, *gift*, while in the plural *ta athla* stands again for *contest*, or even the *place of combat*. The *Vedic vagambhara* may in fact be tendered by *athlophoros*, *vagasati* by *athlorune*.

The transition from fight to prize is seen in passages such as:

Rig-veda VI. 45, 12, *vagan indra sravayyan tvaya geshma hitam dhanam*, 'May we with thy help, O Indra, win the glorious fights, the offered prize' (cf. *athlothes*).

Rig-veda VIII. 19, 18, *te it vagebhih gigyuh mahat dhanam*, 'The won great wealth by battles.

What we want for a proper understanding of our verse, are passages where we have, as here, a movement towards *vagas* in the

2. 'Varuna dug out paths for thee to walk on when thou ranst to the race.⁴⁶ Thou proceedest on a precipitous ridge of the earth, when thou art lord in the van of all the moving streams.

3. 'The sound rises up to heaven above the earth; she stirs up with splendour her endless power.⁴⁷ As from a cloud, the showers thunder forth, when the Sindhu comes, roaring like a bull.

4. 'To thee, O Sindhu, they (the other rivers) come as lowing mother-cows (run) to their young with their milk.⁴⁸ Like a king in battle thou ledest the two wings, when thou reachest the front of these down-rushing rivers.

5. 'Accept, O Ganga (Ganges), Yamuna (Jumna), Sarasvati (Sursuti), Sutudri (Sutlej), Parushni (Iravati, Ravi), my praise!⁴⁹ With the Asikni (Akesines) listen, O Marudvridha,⁵⁰ and with the Vitasta (Hydaspes, Behat); O Argikiya,⁵¹ listen with the Sushoma.⁵²

6. 'First thou goest united with the Trishtama on thy journey, with the Susartu, the Rasa (Rambha, Araxes?)⁵³ and the Sveti,—O Sindhu, with the Kubha (Kophen, Cabul river) to the Gomati (Gomal), with the Mehatnu to the Krumu (Kurrum)—with whom thou proceedest together.

plural. Such passages are few; for instance: X. 53, 8, atra gahama ye asan asevah sivan vayam ut tarema abhi vagan. 'Let us leave here those who were unlucky (the dead), and let us get up to lucky toils.' No more is probably meant here when the Sindhu is said to run towards her vagas, that is, her struggles, her fights, her race across the mountains with the other rivers.

⁴⁷ On sushma, strength, see *Rig-veda, translation*, vol. i. p. 105. We find *subhram sushmam* II. 11, 4; and *iyarti with sushmam* IV. 17, 12.

⁴⁸ See *Muir, Sanskrit Texts*, v. p. 344.

⁴⁹ 'O Marudvridha with Asikni, Vitasta; O Argikiya, listen with the Sushoma,' Ludwig. 'Asikni and Vitasta and Marudvridha, with the Sushoma, hear us, O Argikiya,' Grassmann.

⁵⁰ Marudvridha, a general name for river. According to Roth the combined course of the Akesines and Hydaspes, before the junction with the Hydraotes: according to Ludwig, the river after the junction with Hydraotes. Zimmer (*Altindisches Leben*, p. 12) adopts Roth's, Kiepert in his maps follows Ludwig's opinion.

⁵¹ According to Yaska the Argikiya is the Vipas. Vivien de Saint-Martin takes it for the country watered by the Suwan, the Soanos of Megasthenes.

⁵² According to Yaska the Sushoma is the Indus. Vivien de Saint-Martin identifies it with the Suwan. Zimmer (l. c. p. 14) points out that in *Arrian, Indica*, iv. 12, there is a various reading Soamos for Soanos.

⁵³ *Chips from a German Workshop*, vol. i. p. 157.

7. 'Sparkling, bright, with mighty splendour she carries the waters across the plains—the unconquered Sindhu, the quickest of the quick, like a beautiful mare—a sight to see.

8. 'Rich in horses, in chariots, in garments, in gold in booty,⁵⁴ in wool,⁵⁵ and in straw,⁵⁶ the Sindhu, handsome and young, clothes herself in sweet flowers.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ *Vaginivati* is by no means an easy word. Hence all translators vary, and none settles the meaning. Muir translates, 'yielding, nutriment;' Zimmer, 'having plenty of quick horses;' Ludwig, 'like a strong mare.' *Vagin*, no doubt, means a strong horse, a racer, but *vagini* never occurs in the *Rig-veda* in the sense of a mare, and the text is not *vaginivat*, but *vaginivati*. If *vagini* meant mare, we might translate rich in mares, but that would be a mere repetition after *svasva*, possessed of good horses. *Vaginivati* is chiefly applied to *Ushas*, *Sarasvati*, and here to the river *Sindhu*. It is joined with *vagebhih*, *Rig-veda* I. 3, 10, which, if *vagini* meant mare, would mean 'rich in mares through horses.' We also read, *Rig-veda* I. 48, 16, *sam (nah mimikshva) vagaih vaginivati*, which we can hardly translate by 'give us horses, thou who art possessed of mares;' nor, *Rig-veda* I. 92, 15, *yukshva hi vaginivati asvan*, 'harness the horses, thou who art rich in mares.' In most of the passages where *vaginivati* occurs, the goddess thus addressed is represented as rich, and asked to bestow wealth, and I should therefore prefer to take *vagini*, as a collective abstract noun, like *tretini*, in the sense of wealth, originally body, and to translate *vaginivati* simply by rich, a meaning well adapted to every passage where the word occurs. See now, *Vedic Hymns*, vol. i. p. 442.

⁵⁵ *Urnavati*, rich in wool, probably refers to the flocks of sheep for which the North-West of India was famous. See *Rig-veda* I. 126, 7.

⁵⁶ *Silamavati* does not occur again in the *Rig-veda*. Muir translates, 'rich in plants;' Zimmer, 'rich in water;' Ludwig takes it as a proper name. Sayana states that *silama* is a plant which is made into ropes. That the meaning of *silamavati* was forgotten at an early time we see by the *Atharva-veda*, III. 12, 2, substituting *sunritavati* for *silamavati*, as preserved in the *Sankhayana Grihyasutras*, 3, 3. I think *silama* means straw, from whatever plant it may be taken, and this would be equally applicable to a *sala*, a house, a *sthuna*, a post, and to the river *Indus*. It may have been, as Ludwig conjectures, an old local name, and in that case it may possibly account for the name given in later times to the *Suleiman range*.

⁵⁷ *Madhuvidh* is likewise a word which does not occur again in the *Rig-veda*. Sayana explains it by *nirgundi* and similar plants, but it is doubtful what plant is meant. *Gunda* is the name of a grass, *madhuvidh* therefore may have been a plant such as sugarcane, that

9. 'The Sindhu has yoked her easy chariot with horses; may she conquer prizes for us in the race. The greatness of her chariot is praised as truly great—that chariot which is irresistible, which has its own glory, and abundant strength.'⁵⁸

This hymn does not sound perhaps very poetical, in our sense of the word; yet if you will try to realise the thoughts of the poet who composed it, you will perceive that it is not without some bold and powerful conceptions.

Take the modern peasants, living in their villages by the side of the Thames, and you must admit that he would be a remarkable man who could bring himself to look on the Thames as a kind of general, riding at the head of many English rivers, and leading them on to a race or a battle. Yet it is easier to travel in England, and to gain a commanding view of the river-system of the country, than it was three thousand years ago to travel over India, even over that part of India which the poet of our hymn commands. He takes in at one swoop three great river-systems, or, as he calls them, three great armies of rivers—those flowing from the North-West into the Indus, those joining it from the North-East, and, in the distance, the Ganges and the Jumnah with their tributaries. Look on the map and you will see how well these three armies are determined; but our poet had no map—he had nothing but high mountains and sharp eyes to carry out his trigonometrical survey. Now I call a man, who for the first time could *see* those three marching armies of rivers, a poet.

The next thing that strikes one in that hymn—if hymn we must call it—is the fact that all these rivers, large and small, have their own proper names. That shows a considerable advance in civilized life, and it proves no small degree of coherence, or what the French call *solidarity*, between the tribes who had taken possession of Northern India. Most settlers call the river on whose banks they settle '*the river*.' Of course there are many names for river. It may be called the runner,⁵⁹ the fertiliser, the roarer—or, with a *yielded a sweet-juice, the Upper Indus being famous for sugarcane; see Hiouen-thsang, ii. p. 105. I take adhvaste with Roth in the sense 'she dresses herself,' as we might say 'the river is dressed in heather.'* Muir translates, '*she traverses a land yielding sweetness;*' Zimmer, '*she clothes herself in Madhuvridh;*' Ludwig, '*the Silamavati throws herself into the increaser of the honey-sweet dew.*' All this shows how little progress can be made in Vedic scholarship by merely translating either words or verses, without giving at the same time a full justification of the meaning assigned to every single word.

⁵⁸ See St. Petersburg Dictionary, s.v. *virapsin*.

⁵⁹ '*Among the Hottentots, the Kunene, Okavango, and Orange rivers, all have the name of Garib, i.e. the Runner.*' Dr. Theoph. Hahn, Cape Times, July 11, 1882.

little poetical metaphor, the watchman, the child of the mountains. Many rivers had many names in different parts of their course, and it was only when communication between different settlements became more frequent, and a fixed terminology was felt to be a matter of necessity, that the rivers of a country were properly baptised and registered. All this had been gone through in India before our hymn became possible.

And now we have to consider another, to my mind the most startling fact. We here have a number of names of the rivers of India, as they were known to one single poet, say about 1000 B.C. We then hear nothing of India till we come to the days of Alexander, and when we look at the names of the Indians rivers, represented as well as they could be by Alexander's companions, mere strangers in India, and by means of a strange language and a strange alphabet, we recognise, without much difficulty, nearly all of the old Vedic names.

In this respect the names of rivers have a great advantage over the names of towns in India. What we now call *Dilli* or *Delhi* was in ancient times called *Indraprastha*, in later times *Shahjahanabad*. *Oude* is *Ayodhya*, but the old name of *Saketa* is forgotten. The town of *Pataliputra*, known to the Greeks as *Palimbothra*, is now called *Patna*.⁶⁰

Now I can assure you this persistency of the Vedic river names was to my mind something so startling that I often said to myself, This cannot be—there must be something wrong here. I do not wonder so much at the names of the *Indus* and the *Ganges* being the same. The *Indus* was known to early traders, whether by sea or by land. *Skylax* sailed from the country of the *Paktyes*, i.e. the *Pushtus*, as the *Afghans* still call themselves, down to the mouth of the *Indus*. That was under *Darius Hystaspes* (521-486). Even before that time India and the Indians were known by their name, which was derived from *Sindhu*, the name of their frontier river. The neighbouring tribes who spoke *Iranic* languages all pronounced, like the *Persian*, the *s* as an *h*.⁶¹ Thus *Sindhu* became *Hindhu* (*Hidhu*), and as *h*'s were dropped even at that early time, *Hindhu* became *Indu*. Thus the river was called *Indos*, the people *Indoi* by the *Greeks*, who first heard of India through the *Persians*.

Sindhu probably meant originally the divider, keeper, and defender, from *sidh*, to keep off. It was a masculine, before it became a feminine. No more telling name could have been given to a broad river, which guarded peaceful settlers both against the inroads of hostile tribes and the attacks of wild animals. A common name for the ancient settlements of the *Aryans* in India was 'the Seven Rivers,' '*Sapta Sindhavah*.' But though *sindhu* was used as an

⁶⁰ *Cunningham, Archaeological Survey of India*, vol. xii. p. 113.

⁶¹ *Pliny, Hist. Nat.* vi. 20, 71: '*Indus incolis Sindus appellatus*.'

appellative noun for river in general, ('like rivers longing for the sea'),⁶² it remained throughout the whole history of India the name of its powerful guardian river, the Indus.

In some passages of the Rig-veda it has been pointed out that *sindhu* might better be translated by 'sea,' a change of meaning, if so it can be called, fully explained by the geographical conditions of the country. There are places where people could swim across the Indus, there are others where no eye could tell whether the boundless expanse of water should be called river or sea. The two run into each other, as every sailor knows, and naturally the meaning of *sindhu*, river, runs into the meaning of *sindhu*, sea.

But besides the two great rivers, the Indus and the Ganges,—in Sanskrit the Ganga, literally the Go-go,—we have the smaller rivers, and many of their names also agree with the names preserved to us by the companions of Alexander.⁶³

The Yamuna, the Jumna, was known to Ptolemy as *Diamouna*,⁶⁴ to Pliny as *Jomanes*, to Arrian, somewhat corrupted, as *Jobares*.⁶⁵

The Sutudri, or, as was afterwards called *Satadru*, meaning 'running in a hundred streams,' was known to Ptolemy as *Zadardes* or *Zaradros*; Pliny called it *Sydrus*; and Megasthenes, too, was probably acquainted with it as *Zadardes*. In the Veda⁶⁶ it formed with the *Vipas* the frontier of the Punjab, and we hear of fierce battles fought at that time, it may be on the same spot where in 1846 the battle of the Sutlej was fought by Sir Hugh Gough and Sir Henry Hardinge. It was probably on the *Vipas* (later *Vipasa*), a north-western tributary of the Sutledge, that Alexander's army turned back. The river was then called *Hyphasis*; Pliny calls it *Hypasis*,⁶⁷ a very fair approximation to the Vedic *Vipas*, which means 'unfettered'. Its modern name is *Bias* or *Bejah*.

The next river on the west is the Vedic *Parushni*, better known

⁶² *Rig-veda* vi. 19, 5, *samudre na sindhavah yadamanah*.

⁶³ *The history of these names has been treated by Lassen, in his 'Indische Alterthumskunde,' and more lately by Kaegi, in his very careful essay, 'Der Rig-veda,' pp. 146, 147.*

⁶⁴ *Ptol.* vii. 1, 29.

⁶⁵ *Arrian, Indica, viii. 5.*

⁶⁶ *Rig-veda* III. 33, 1: 'From the lap of the mountains *Vipas* and *Sutudri* rush forth with their water like two lusty mares neighing, freed from their tethers, like two bright mother-cows licking (their calf).

'Ordered by Indra and waiting his bidding you run toward the sea like two charioteers; running together, as your waters rise, the one goes into other, you bright ones.'

⁶⁷ Other classical names are *Hypanis*, *Bipasis*, and *Bibasis*. *Yaska* identifies it with the *Argikiya*.

as Iravati,⁶⁸ which Strabo calls Hyarotis, while Arrian gives it a more Greek appearance by calling it Hydraotes. It is the modern Ravi. It was this river which the Ten Kings when attacking the Tritsus under Sudas tried to cross from the west by cutting off its water. But their stratagem failed, and they perished in the river.⁶⁹

We then come to the Asikni, which means 'black.' That river had another name also, *Chandrabhaga*, which means 'streak of the moon.' The Greeks, however, pronounced that name *Sandarophagos*, and this had the unlucky meaning of 'the devourer of Alexander.' Hesychius tells us that in order to avert the bad women Alexander changed the name of that river into '*Akesines*, which would mean 'the Healer;' but he does not tell, what the Veda tells us, that this name '*Akesines* was a Greek adaptation of another name of the same river, namely Asikni, which had evidently supplied to Alexander the idea of calling the Asikni '*Akesines*. It is the modern Chinab.

Next to the Akesines we have the Vedic Vitasta, the last of the rivers of the Punjab, changed in Greek into Hydaspes. It was to this river that Alexander retired, before sending his fleet down the Indus and leading his army back to Babylon. It is the modern Behat or Jilam.

I could identify still more of these Vedic rivers such as, for instance, the Kubha, the Greek Cophen, the modern Kabul river⁷⁰;

⁶⁸ Cf. Nirukta IX. 26.

⁶⁹ Rig-veda VII. 18, 8-9.

⁷⁰ "The first tributaries which join the Indus before its meeting with the Kubha or the Kabul river cannot be determined. All travellers in these northern countries complain of the continual changes in the names of the rivers, and we can hardly hope to find traces of the Vedic names in existence there after the lapse of three or four thousand years. The rivers intended may be the Shauyook, Ladak, Abba Seen, and Burrindu, and one of the four rivers, the Rasa, has assumed an almost fabulous character in the Veda. After the Indus has joined the Kubha or the Kabul river, two names occur, the Gomati and Krumu, which I believe I was the first to identify with modern rivers the Gomal and Kurrum. (Roth, Nirukta, Erlauterungen, p. 43, Anm.) The Gomal falls into the Indus, between Dera Ismael Khan and Paharpore, and although Elphinstone calls it a river only during the rainy season, Klaproth (Foe-koue-ki, p. 23) describes its upper course as far more considerable, and adds: "A little to the east of Sirmagha the Gomal crosses the chain of the Soliman Ranges, flows past Raghzi, and fertilizes the country inhabited by the tribes of Dauletkhail and Grandehpour. It dries up at the Pezou gorge and its bed, thereafter, is filled with water only in the rainy season: only at this season does it flow on to rejoin the Indus on the right side a little way south-east on the town of Paharpur." The Kurrum falls into the Indus North of the Gomal,

but the names which I have traced from the Veda to Alexander, and in many cases from Alexander again to our own time, seem to me sufficient to impress upon us the real and historical character of the Veda. Suppose the Veda were a forgery—suppose at least that it had been put together after the time of Alexander—how could we explain these names? They are names that have mostly a meaning in Sanskrit, they are names corresponding very closely to their Greek corruptions, as pronounced and written down by people who did not know Sanskrit. How is a forgery possible here?

I selected this hymn for two reasons. First, because it shows us the widest geographical horizon of the Vedic poets, confined by the snowy mountains in the North, the Indus and the range of the Suleiman mountains in the West, the Indus or the sea in the South, and the valley of the Jumna and Ganges in the East. Beyond that, the world, though open, was unknown to the Vedic poets. Secondly, because the same hymn gives us also a kind of historical background to the Vedic age. These rivers, as we may see them to-day, as they were seen by Alexander and his Macedonians, were seen also by the Vedic poets. Here we have an historical continuity—almost living witnesses, to tell us that the people whose songs have been so strangely, aye, you may almost say, so miraculously preserved to us, were real people, lairds with their clans, priests, or rather, servants, of their gods, shepherds with their flocks, dotted about on the hills and valleys, with enclosures or palisades here and there, with a few strongholds, too, in case of need—living their short life on earth, as at that time life might be lived by men, without much pushing and crowding and trampling on each other—spring, summer, and winter leading them on from year to year, and the sun in his rising and setting lifting up their thoughts from their meadows and groves which they loved, to a world in the East, from which they had come, or to a world in the West, to which they were gladly hastening on. They had what I call religion, though it was very simple, and hardly reduced, as yet to the form of a creed. 'There is a Beyond,' that was all they felt and knew, though they tried, as well as they could, to give names to that Beyond, and thus to change religion into a religion. They had not as yet a name for God—certainly not in our sense of the word—or even a general name for the gods; but they invented name after name to enable them to grasp and comprehend by some outward and visible token powers whose presence they felt in nature, though their true and full essence was to them, as it is to us, invisible and incomprehensible.

while, according to the poet, we should expect it South. It might be urged that poets are not bound by the same rules as geographers, as we see, for instance, in the verse immediately preceding. But if it should be taken as a serious objection, it will be better to give up the

CHAPTER FIVE

VEDIC DEITIES.

The next important phenomenon of nature which was represented in the Veda as a terrestrial deity is Fire, in Sanskrit Agni, in Latin *ignis*. In the worship which is paid to the Fire and in the high praises bestowed on Agni we can clearly perceive the traces of a period in the history of man in which not only the most essential comforts of life, but life itself, depended on the knowledge of producing fire. To us fire has become so familiar that we can hardly form an idea of what life would be without it. But how did the ancient dwellers on earth get command and possession of fire? The Vedic poets tell us that fire first came to them from the sky, in the form of lightning, but that it disappeared again, and that then Matarisvan, a being to a certain extent like Prometheus, brought it back and confined it to the safe keeping of the clan of the Bhrigus (Phlegyas).¹ In other poems we hear of the mystery of producing fire by rubbing pieces of wood; and here it is a curious fact that the name of the wood thus used for rubbing is in Sanskrit Pramantha, a word which, as Kuhn has shown, would in Greek come very near to the name of Prometheus. The possession of fire, whether by preserving it as sacred on the hearth, or by producing it at pleasure with the fire-drill, represents an enormous step in early civilization. It enabled people to cook their meat instead of eating it raw; it gave them the power of carrying on their work by night; and in colder climates it really preserved them from being frozen to death. No wonder, therefore, that the fire should have been praised and worshipped as the best and kindest of gods, the only god who had come down from heaven to live on earth, the friend of man, the messenger of the gods, the mediator between gods and men, the immortal among mortals. He, it is said, protects the settlements of the Aryans, and frightens away the black-skinned enemies.

Soon, however, fire was conceived by the Vedic poets under the more general character of light and warmth, and then the presence

Gomati than the Krumu, the latter being the larger of the two, and we might then take Gomati, "rich in cattle," as an adjective belonging to Krumu.—From a review of Cunningham's 'Ancient Geography of India,' in *Nature*, 1871, Sept. 14.

¹ *Muir*, iv. p. 209.

of Agni was perceived, not only on the hearth and the altar, but in the Dawn, in the Sun, and in the world beyond the Sun, while at the same time his power was recognised as ripening, or as they called it, as cooking, the fruits of the earth, and as supporting also the warmth and the life of the human body. From that point of view Agni, like other powers, rose to the rank of a Supreme God². He is said to have stretched out heaven and earth—naturally, because without his light heaven and earth would have been invisible and undistinguishable. The next poet says that Agni held heaven aloft by his light, that he kept the two worlds asunder; and in the end Agni is said to be the progenitor and father of heaven and earth, and the maker of all that flies, or walks, or stands, or moves on earth.

Here we have once more the same process before our eyes. The human mind begins with being startled by a single or repeated event, such as the lightning striking a tree and devouring a whole forest, or a spark of fire breaking forth from wood being rubbed against wood, whether in a forest, or in the wheel of a carriage, or at last in a forest, or in the wheel of a carriage, or at last in a fire-drill, devised on purpose. Man then begins to wonder at what to him is a miracle, none the less so because it is a fact, a simple, natural fact. He sees the effects of a power, but he can only do so by speaking of it as an agent, or as something like a human agent, and, if in some respects not quite human, in others more than human or super-human. Thus the concept of Fire grew, and while it became more and more generalised, it also became more sublime, more incomprehensible, more divine. Without Agni, without fire, light, and warmth, life would have been impossible. Hence he became the author and giver of life, of the life of plants and animals and of men; and his favour having once been implored for 'light and life and all things,' what wonder that in the minds of some poets, and in the traditions of this or that village community, he should have been raised to the rank of a supreme ruler, a god above all gods, their own true god!

We now proceed to consider the powers which the ancient poets might have discovered in the air, in the clouds, and more particularly, in those meteoric conflicts which by thunder, lightning, darkness, storms, and showers of rain must have taught man that very important lesson that he was not alone in this world. Many philosophers, as you know, believe that all religion arose from fear or terror, and that without thunder and lightning to teach us, we should never have believed in any gods or god. This is a one-sided and exaggerated view. Thunderstorms, no doubt, had a large share in arousing feelings of awe and terror, and in making man conscious of his weakness and dependence. Even in the Veda Indra is introduced as saying: 'Yes, when I send thunder and lightning, then

² *M. Muller, Physical Religion*, p. 194.

you believe in me. But what we call religion would never have sprung from fear and terror alone. *Religion is trust*, and that trust arose in the beginning from the impressions made on the mind and heart of man by the order and wisdom of nature, and more particularly, by those regularly recurring events, the return of the sun, the revival of the moon, the order of the seasons, the law of cause and effect, gradually discovered in all things, and traced back in the end to a cause of all causes, by whatever name we choose to call it.

Still, the meteoric phenomena had, no doubt, their important share in the production of ancient deities; and in the poems of the Vedic *Rishis* they naturally occupy a very prominent place. If we were asked who was the principal god of the Vedic period, we should probably, judging from the remains of that poetry which we possess, say it was Indra, the god of the blue sky, the Indian Zeus, the gatherer of the clouds, the giver of rain, the wielder of the thunder-bolt, the conqueror of darkness and of all the powers of darkness, the bringer of light, the source of freshness, vigour, and life, ruler and lord of the whole world. Indra is this, and much more in the Veda. He is supreme in the hymns of many poets, and may have been so in the prayers addressed to him by many of the ancient septs or village communities in India. Compared with him the other gods are said to be decrepit old men. Heaven, the old Heaven or Dyaus, formerly the father of all the gods, nay the father of Indra himself, bows before him, and the Earth trembles at his approach. Yet Indra never commanded the permanent allegiance of all the other gods, like Zeus and Jupiter; nay, we know from the Veda itself that there were sceptics, even at that early time, who denied that there was any such thing as Indra.³

By the side of Indra, and associated with him in his battles, and sometimes hardly distinguishable from him, we find the representatives of the wind, called Vata or Vayu, and the more terrible Storm-gods, the Maruts, literally the Smashers.

When speaking of the Wind, a poet says:⁴ 'Where was the born? Whence did he spring? the life of the gods, the germ of the world! That god moves about where he listeth, his voices are heard, but he is not to be seen.'

The Maruts are more terrible than Vata, the wind. They are clearly the representatives of such storms as are known in India, when the air is darkened by dust and clouds, when in a moment the trees are stripped of their foliage, their branches shivered, their stems snapped, when the earth seems to reel and the mountains to shake, and the rivers are lashed into foam and fury. Then the poet sees the Maruts approaching with golden helmets, with spotted skins

³ *Hibbert Lectures*, p. 307.

⁴ *Rig-veda* X. 168, 3, 4.

on their shoulders, brandishing golden spears, whirling their axes, shooting fiery arrows, and cracking their whips amidst thunder and lightning. They are the comrades of Indra, sometimes, like Indra, the sons of Dyaus or the sky, but also the sons of another terrible god, called Rudra, or the Howler, a fighting god, to whom many hymns are addressed. In him a new character is evolved, that of a healer and saviour,—a very natural transition in India, where nothing is so powerful for dispelling miasmas, restoring health, and imparting fresh vigour to man and beast, as a thunderstorm, following after weeks of heat and drought.

All these and several others, such as Parjanya and the *Ribhus*, are the gods of mid-air, the most active and dramatic gods, ever present to the fancy of the ancient poets, and in several cases the prototypes of later heroes, celebrated in the epic poems of India. In battles, more particularly, these fighting gods of the sky were constantly invoked.⁵ Indra is the leader in battles, the protector of the bright Aryans, the destroyer of the black aboriginal inhabitants of India. 'He has thrown down fifty thousand black fellows,' the poet says, 'and their strongholds crumbled away like an old rag.' Strange to say, Indra is praised for having saved his people from their enemies, much as Jehovah was praised by the Jewish prophets. Thus we read in one hymn that when Sudas, the pious king of the Tritsus, was pressed hard in his battle with the ten kings, Indra changed the flood into an easy ford, and thus saved Sudas.

In another hymn we read⁶, 'Thou hast restrained the great river for the sake of Turviti Vayya; the flood moved in obedience to thee, and thou madest the rivers easy to cross.' This is not very different from the Psalmist⁷: 'He divided the sea, and caused them to pass through; and he made the waters to stand as an heap.'

And there are other passages which have reminded some students of the Veda of Joshua's battle⁸, when the sun stood still and the moon stayed, until the people had avenged themselves upon their enemies. For we read in the Veda also, as Professor Kaegi has pointed out, that 'Indra lengthened the days into the night,' and that 'the Sun unharnessed its chariot in the middle of the day.'⁹

In some of the hymns addressed to Indra his original connection with the sky and the thunderstorm seems quite forgotten. He has become a spiritual god, the only king of all worlds and all people,¹⁰

⁵ See Kaegi, *Rig-veda*, p. 61.

⁶ *Rig-veda* II, 13, 12; IV. 19, 6.

⁷ lxxvii. 13.

⁸ *Joshua* x. 13.

⁹ *Rig-veda* IV. 30, 3; X. 138, 3.

¹⁰ *L. c.* VIII. 37, 3.

who sees and hears everything,¹¹ nay, who inspires men with their best thoughts. No one is equal to him, no one excels him.

The name of Indra is peculiar to India, and must have been formed after the separation of the great Aryan family had taken place, for we find it neither in Greek, nor in Latin, nor in German. There are Vedic Gods, as I mentioned before, whose names must have been framed before that separation, and which occur therefore, though greatly modified in character, sometimes in Greek, sometimes in Latin, sometimes in the Celtic, Teutonic, and Slavonic dialects. Dyaus, for instance, is the same word as Zeus or Ju-piter, Ushas is Fos, Nakta is Nyx, Surya is Helios, Agni is ignis, Bhaga is Baga in Old Persian, Bogu in Old Slavonic, Varuna is Uranos, Vak is vox, and in the name of the *Maruts*, or the storm-gods, the germs of the Italic god of war, Mars, have been discovered. Besides these direct coincidences, some indirect relations have been established between Hermes and Sarameya, Dionysos and Dyunisya, Prometheus and pramantha, Orpheus and Ribhu, Erinnyes and Saranyu, Pan and Pavana.

But while the name of Indra as the god of the sky, also as the god of the thunderstorm, and the giver of rain, is unknown among the North-western members of the Aryan family, the name of another god who sometimes acts the part of Indra (*Indrah Parjanya*), but is much less prominent in the Veda, I mean *Parjanya*, must have existed before that of Indra, because two at least of the Aryan languages have carried it, as we shall see, to Germany, and to the very shores of the Baltic.

Sometimes this *Parjanya* stands in the place of Dyaus, the sky. Thus we read in the Atharva-veda¹²: 'The Earth is the mother, and I am the son of the Earth. *Parjanya* is the father; may he help us!'

In another place¹³ the Earth, instead of being the wife of Heaven or Dyaus, is called the wife of *Parjanya*.

Now who or what is this *Parjanya*? There have been long controversies about him¹⁴, as to whether he is the same as Dyaus, Heaven, or the same as Indra, the successor of Dyaus, whether he is the god of the sky, of the cloud, or of the rain.

To me it seems that this very expression, god of the sky, god of the cloud, is so entire an anachronism that we could not even translate it into Vedic Sanskrit without committing a solecism. It is true, no doubt, we must use our modern ways of speaking when we wish to represent the thoughts of the ancient world; but we cannot

¹¹ *L. c.* VIII. 78, 5.

¹² *Muir*, iv. p. 23.

¹³ XII. 1, 42.

¹⁴ *Ibid.* p. 142. . *An excellent paper on Parganya was published by Buhler in 1862, Orient und Occident, vol. i. p. 214.*

be too much on our guard against accepting the dictionary representative of an ancient word for its real counterpart. Deva, no doubt, means 'gods' and 'god,' and Parjanya means 'cloud,' but no one could say in Sanskrit parjanya devah, 'the god of the cloud.' The god, or the divine or transcendental element, does not come from without, to be added to the cloud or to the sky or to the earth, but it springs from the cloud and the sky and the earth, and is slowly elaborated into an independent concept. As many words in ancient languages have an undefined meaning, and lend themselves to various purposes according to the various intentions of the speakers, the names of the gods also share in this elastic and plastic character of ancient speech. There are passages where Parjanya means cloud, there are passages where it means rain. There are passages where Parjanya takes the place which elsewhere is filled by Dyaus, the sky, or by Indra, the active god of the atmosphere. This may seem very wrong and very unscientific to the scientific mythologist. But it cannot be helped. It is the nature of ancient thought and ancient language to be unscientific, and we must learn to master it as well as we can, instead of finding fault with it, and complaining that our forefathers did not reason exactly as we do.

There are passages in the Vedic hymns where Parjanya appears as a supreme god. He is called father, like Dyaus, the sky. He is called asura, the living or life-giving god, a name peculiar to the oldest and the greatest gods. One poet says¹⁵, 'He rules as god over the whole world; all creatures rest in him; he is the life (atma) of all that moves and rests.'

Surely it is difficult to say more of a supreme god than what is here said of Parjanya. Yet in other hymns he is represented as performing his office, namely that of sending rain upon the earth, under the control of Mitra and Varuna, who are then considered as the highest lords, the mightiest rulers of heaven and earth.¹⁶

There are other verses, again, where parjanya occurs with hardly any traces of personality, but simply as a name of cloud or rain.

Thus we read: 'Even by day the Maruts (the storm-gods) produce darkness with the cloud that carries water, when they moisten the earth.'¹⁷ Here cloud is parjanya, and it is evidently used as an appellative, and not as a proper name. The same word occurs in the plural also, and we read of many parjanyas or clouds vivifying the earth.¹⁸

When Devapi prays for rain in favour of his brother, he says:¹⁹ 'O lord of my prayer (Brihaspati), whether thou be Mitra or

¹⁵ *Rig-veda* VII, 101, 6.

¹⁶ *Rig-veda* V. 63, 3-6.

¹⁷ *L. c.* I. 38, 9.

¹⁸ *L. c.* I. 164, 51.

¹⁹ *L. c.* X. 98. 1.

Varuna or Pushan, come to my sacrifice! Whether thou be together with the Adityas, the Vasus or the Maruts, let the cloud (parjanya) rain for Śantanu.'

And again: 'Stir up the rainy cloud' (parjanya).

In several places it makes no difference whether we translate parjanya by cloud or by rain, for those who pray for rain, pray for the cloud, and whatever may be the benefits of the rain, they may nearly all be called the benefits of the cloud. There is a curious hymn, for instance, addressed to the frogs who, at the beginning of the rains, come forth from the dry ponds, and embrace each other and chatter together, and whom the poet compares to priests singing at a sacrifice, a not very complimentary remark from a poet who is himself supposed to have been a priest. Their voice is said to have been revived by parjanya, which we shall naturally translate 'by rain,' though, no doubt, the poet may have meant, for all we know, either a cloud, or even the god Parjanya himself.

I shall try to translate one of the hymns addressed to Parjanya, when conceived as a god, or at least as so much of a god as it was possible to be at that stage in the intellectual growth of the human race²⁰.

1. 'Invoke the strong god with these songs! praise Parjanya, worship him with veneration! for he, the roaring bull, scattering drops, gives seed-fruit to plants.

2. 'He cuts the trees asunder, he kills evil spirits; the whole world trembles before his mighty weapon. Even the guiltless flees before the powerful, when Parjanya thundering strikes down the evil-doers.

3. 'Like a charioteer, striking his horses with a whip, he puts forth his messengers of rain. From afar arise the roarings of the lion, when Parjanya makes the sky full of rain.

4. 'The winds blow, the lightnings²¹ fly, plants spring up, the sky pours. Food is produced for the whole world, when Parjanya blesses the earth with his seed.

5. 'O Parjanya, thou at whose work the earth bows down, thou at whose work hoofed animals are scattered, thou at whose work the plants assume all forms, grant thou to us thy great protection!

6. 'O Maruts, give us the rain of heaven, make the streams of the strong horse run down! And come thou hither with thy thunder, pouring out water, for thou (O Parjanya) art the living god, thou art our father.

²⁰ *Rig-veda* V. 83. See Buhler, *Orient und Occident*, vol. i. p. 214; Zimmer, *Altindisches Leben*, p. 43.

²¹ Both Buhler (*Orient und Occident*, vol. i. p. 224) and Zimmer (*Z. f. D. A.* vii. p. 169) say that the lightning is represented as the son of Parjanya in *Rig-veda* VII. 101, 1. This seems doubtful.

7. 'Do thou roar, and thunder, and give fruitfulness! Fly around us with thy chariot full of water! Draw forth thy water-skin, when it has been opened and turned downward, and let the high and the low places become level!

8. 'Draw up the large bucket, and pour it out; let the streams pour forth freely! Soak heaven and earth with fatness! and let there be a good draught for the cows!

9. 'O Parjanya, when roaring and thundering thou killest the evil-doers, then everything rejoices, whatever lives on earth.

10. 'Thou hast sent rain, stop now! Thou hast made the deserts passable, thou hast made plants grow for food, and thou hast obtained praise from men.'

This is a Vedic hymn, and a very fair specimen of what these ancient hymns are. There is nothing very grand and poetical about them, and yet, I say, take thousands and thousands of people living in our villages, and depending on rain for their very life, and not many of them will be able to compose such a prayer for rain, even though three thousand years have passed over our heads since Parjanya was first invoked in India. Nor are these verses entirely without poetical conceptions and descriptions. Whoever has watched a real thunderstorm in a hot climate, will recognise the truth of those sentences, 'the winds blow, the lightnings fly, plants spring up, the hooped cattle are scattered.' Nor is the idea without a certain drastic reality, that Parjanya draws a bucket of water from his well in heaven, and pours out skin after skin (in which water was then carried) down upon the earth.

There is even a moral sentiment perceptible in this hymn. 'When the storms roar and the lightnings flash and the rain pours down, even the guiltless trembles, and evildoers are struck down.' Here we clearly see that the poet did not look upon the storm simply as an outbreak of the violence of nature, but that he had a presentiment of a higher will and power which even the guiltless fears; for who, he seems to say, is entirely free from guilt?

If now we ask again, Who is Parjanya? or What is Parjanya? we can answer that Parjanya was meant originally for the cloud, so far as it gives rain; but as soon as the idea of a giver arose, the visible cloud became the outward appearance only, or the body of that giver, and the giver himself was somewhere else, we know not where. In some verses Parjanya seems to step into the place of Dyaus, the sky, and Prithivi, the earth, is his wife. In other places²², however, he is the son of Dyaus or the sky, though no thought is given in that early stage to the fact that thus Parjanya might seem to be the husband of his mother. We saw that even the idea of Indra being the father of his own father did not startle the ancient poets beyond an exclamation that it was a very wonderful thing indeed.

²² *Rig-veda* VII. 102, I.

Sometimes Parjanya does the work of Indra²³, the Jupiter Pluvius of the Veda; sometimes of Vayu, the wind, sometimes of Soma, the giver of rain. Yet with all this he is not Dyaus, nor Indra, nor the Maruts, nor Vayu, nor Soma. He stands by himself, a separate god, as we should say—nay, one of the oldest of all the Aryan gods.

His name, parjanya, is derived from a root *parj*, which, like its parallel forms *pars* and *parsh*, must (I think) have had the meaning of sprinkling, irrigating, moistening. An interchange between final *g*, *s*, and *sh* may, no doubt, seem unusual, but it is not without parallel in Sanskrit. We have, for instance, the roots *pinj*, *pinjere*; *pish*, to rub; *pis*, to adorn (as in *pesas*, *poikilos*, &c.): *mrig*, to rub, *mrish*, to rub out, to forget; *mrish*, *mulcere*.

This very root *mrig* forms its participle as *mrish-ta*, like *yag*, *ishta*, and *vis*, *vishta*; nay there are roots, such as *druh*, which optionally take a final lingual or guttural, such as *dhrut* and *dhruk*²⁴.

We may therefore compare *parg* in *parjanya* with such words as *prishata*, *prishati*, speckled, drop of water;²⁵ also *parsu*, cloud, *prisni*, speckled, cloud, earth: and in Greek prox. (*o*), *perknos*, &c.²⁶

If derived from *parj*, to sprinkle, *Parjanya* would have meant originally 'he who irrigates or gives rain.'²⁷

When the different members of the Aryan family dispersed, they might all of them, the ancestors of Hindus as well as of Greeks and Celts, and Teutons and Slavs, have carried that name for cloud with them. But you know that it happened very often that out of the common wealth of their ancient language, one and the same word was preserved, as the case might be, not by all, but by only six, or five, or four, or three, or two, or even by one only of the seven principal heirs; and yet, as we know that there was no historical contact between them, after they had once parted from each other, long before the beginning of what we call history, the fact that two of the Aryan languages have preserved the same finished word with the same finished meaning, is proof sufficient that it belonged to the most ancient treasure of Aryan thought.

²³ *Rig-veda* VIII. 6. 1.

²⁴ See *M. Muller, Sanskrit Grammar*, 174, 10.

²⁵ Cf. *Gobh. Grihya* S. III. 3, 15, *vidyut—stanayitnu—prishiteshu*.

²⁶ *Ugvaladatta*, in his commentary on the *Unadisutras*, iii. 103, admits the same transition of *sh* into *g* in the verb *prish*, as the etymon of *parjanya*.

²⁷ For different etymologies, see *Buhler, Orient und Occident*, i. p. 214; *Muir, Original Sanskrit Texts*, v. p. 140; *Grassmann*, in his *Dictionary to the Rig-veda*, s. v.; *Zimmer, Zeitschrift fur Deutsches Alterthum, Neue Folge*, vii. p. 164.

Now there is no trace, at least no very clear trace, of Parjanya, in Greek, or Latin or Celtic, or even in Teutonic. In Slavonic, too, we look in vain, till we come to that almost forgotten side-branch called the *Lettic*, comprising the spoken *Lituanian* and *Lettish*, and the now extinct *Old Prussian*. Lituania is no longer an independent state, but it was once, not more than six centuries ago, a Grand Duchy, independent both of Russia and Poland. Its first Grand Duke was Ringold, who ruled from 1235, and his successors made successful conquests against the Russians. In 1368 these grand dukes became kings of Poland and in 1569 the two countries were united. When Poland was divided between Russia and Prussia, part of Lituania fell to the former, part to the latter. There are still about one million and a half of people who speak Lituanian in Russia and Prussia, while Lettish is spoken by about one million in Curland and Livonia.

The Lituanian language, even as it is now spoken by the common people, contains some extremely primitive grammatical forms—in some cases almost identical with Sanskrit. These forms are all the more curious, because they are but few in number and the rest of the language has suffered much from the wear and tear of centuries.

Now in that remote Lituanian language we find that our old friend Parjanya has taken refuge. There he lives to the present day, while even in India he is almost forgotten, at least in the spoken languages; and there, in Litunia, not many centuries back might be heard among a Christianised or nearly Christianised people, prayers for rain, not very different from that which I translated to you from the Rig-veda. In Lituanian the god of thunder was called *Perkunas*,²⁸ and the same word is still used in the sense of thunder. In Old Prussian, thunder was *percunos*, and in Lettish to the present day *perkons* is thunder, god of thunder.²⁹

It was, I believe, Grimm who for the first time identified the Vedic Parjanya with the Old Slavonic Perun, the Polish Piorun, Bohemian Peraun. These words had formerly been derived by Dobrowsky and others from the root *peru*, I strike. Grimm³⁰ showed that the fuller forms *Perkunas*, *Pehrkons*, and *Perkunos* existed in Lituanian, Lettish, Old Prussian, and that even the Mordvinians had adopted the name *Porguini* as that of their thunder-god.

²⁸ *In order to identify Perkunas with parjanya, we must go another step backward, and look upon j or g, in the root parj, as a weakening of an original k in park. This, however, is a frequent phonetic process. See Buhler, in Benfey's Orient and Occident, ii. p. 717.*

²⁹ *Lituanian perkun-kulke, thunder-bolt, perkuno gaisis, storm. See Voelkel, Die lettischen Sprachreste, 1879, p. 23.*

³⁰ *Teutonic Mythology, Engl. transl., p. 171.*

Simon Grunau, who finished his chronicle in 1521, speaks of three gods, as worshipped by the Old Prussians, Patollo, Patrimpo, and Perkuno, and he states that Perkuno was invoked 'for storm's sake, that they might have rain and fair weather at the proper time, and thunder and lightning should not injure them.'³¹

The following Lituianian prayer has been preserved to us by Lasitzki:—'Check thyself, O Percuna, and do not send misfortune on my field! and I shall give thee this flich.'³²

Among the neighbours of the Lets, the Esthonians, who, though un-Aryan in language, have evidently learnt much from their Aryan neighbours, the following prayer was heard³³, addressed by an old peasant to their god *Picker* or *Picken*, the god of thunder and rain, as late as the seventeenth century³⁴:

'Dear Thunder (woda Picker), we offer to thee an ox that has two horns and four cloven hoods; we would pray thee for our ploughing and sowing, that our straw be copper-red, our grain golden-yellow. Push elsewhere all the thick black clouds, over great fens, high forests, and wildernesses. But unto us, ploughers and sowers, give a fruitful season and sweet rain. Holy Thunder (poha Picken), guard our seed-field, that it bear good straw below, good ears above, and good grain within³⁵.'

Now, I say again, I do not wish you to admire this primitive poetry, primitive, whether it is repeated in the Esthonian fens in the seventeenth century of our era, or sung in the valley of the Indus in the seventeenth century before our era. Let æsthetic critics say what they like about these uncouth poems. I only ask you, Is it not worth a great many poems, to have established this fact, that the same god Parjanya, the god of clouds and thunder and lightning and rain, who was invoked in India a thousand years before India was discovered by Alexander, should have been remembered and believed in by Lituianian peasants on the frontier between East Prussia and Russia, not more than two hundred years ago, and should have retained its old name Parjanya, which in Sanskrit meant 'showering,' under the form of *Perkuna*, which in Lituianian is a

³¹ Cf. 'Gottesidee bei den alten Preussen,' Berlin, 1870, p. 23. The triad of the gods is called *Triburti*, *Trybozc*; 1. c.

³² Grimm *Teutonic Mythology* p. 175; and Lasitzki (*Lasicius*) *Joannes, De Russorum, Moscovitarum et Tartarorum religione, sacrificiis, nuptiarum et funerum ritu, Spiraë Nemetum*, 1582; *idem, De Diis Samagitarum*.

³³ Grimm, 1. c. p. 176, quoting from Joh. Gutsloff, *Kurzer Bericht und Unterricht von der falsch heilig genandten bache in Liefland Wohhanda*, Dorpat, 1644, pp. 362-364.

³⁴ In modern Esthonian *Pitkne*, the Finnish *Pitcainen* (?).

³⁵ On foreign influences in Esthonian stories, see *Ehstnische Marchen*, von. T. Kreutzwald, 1869, *Vorwort* (by Schiefner), p. iv.

name and a name only, without any etymological meaning at all; nay, should live on, as some scholars assure us, in an abbreviated form in most Slavonic dialects, namely, in Old Slavonic as *Perun*, in Polish as *Piorun*, in Bohemian as *Peraun*, all meaning thunder or thunder-storm?

Such facts strike me as if we saw the blood suddenly beginning to flow again through the veins of old mummies; or as if the Egyptian statues of black granite were suddenly to begin to speak to us. Touched by the rays of modern science the old words—call them mummies or statues—begin indeed to live again, the old names of gods and heroes begin indeed to speak again. All that is old becomes new, all that is new becomes old, and that one word, Parjanya, seems, like a charm, to open before our eyes the cave or cottage in which the fathers of the Aryan race, our own fathers,—whether we live on the Baltic or on the Indian Ocean,—are seen gathered together, taking refuge from the buckets of Parjanya, and saying: 'Stop now, Parjanya; thou hast sent rain; thou hast made the deserts passable, and hast made the plants to grow; and thou hast obtained praise from man.'

We have still to consider the third class of gods, in addition to the gods of the earth and the sky, namely, the gods of the highest heaven, more serene in their character than the active and fighting gods of the air and the clouds, and more remote from the eyes of man, and therefore, more mysterious in the exercise of their power than the gods of the earth or the air.

The principal deity is here no doubt the bright sky itself, the old *Dyaus*, worshipped as we know by the Aryas before they broke up into separate people and languages, and surviving in Greece as *Zeus*, in Italy as *Jupiter*, Heaven-father, and among the Teutonic tribes as *Tyr* and *Tiu*. In the Veda we saw him chiefly invoked in connection with the earth, as *Dyava-prithivi*, Heaven and Earth. He is invoked by himself also, but he is a vanishing god, and his place is taken in most of the Vedic poems by the younger and more active god, *Indra*.

Another representative of the highest heaven, as covering, embracing, and shielding all things, is *Varuna*, a name derived from the root *var*, to cover, and identical with the Greek *Ouranos*. This god is one of the most interesting creations of the Hindu mind, because though we can still perceive the physical background from which he rises, the vast, starry, brilliant expanse above, his features, more than those of any of the Vedic gods, have become completely transfigured, and he stands before us as a god who watches ever the world, punishes the evil-doer, and even forgives the sins of those who implore his pardon.

I shall read you one of the hymns addressed to him³⁶:

³⁶ *Rig-veda* II. 28.

'Let us be blessed in thy service, O Varuna, for we always think of thee and praise thee, greeting thee day by day, like the fires lighted on the altar, at the approach of the rich dawns.' 2.

'O Varuna, our guide, let us stand in thy keeping, thou who art rich in heroes and praised far and wide! And you, unconquered sons of Aditi, deign to accept us as your friends, O gods!' 3.

'Aditya, the ruler, sent forth these rivers; they follow the law of Varuna. They tire not, they cease not; like birds they fly quickly everywhere.' 4.

'Take from me my sin, like a fetter, and we shall increase, O Varuna, the spring of thy law. Let not the thread be cut while I weave my song! Let not the form of the workman break before the time!' 5.

'Take far away from me this terror, O Varuna! Thou, O righteous king, have mercy on me! Like as a rope from a calf, remove from me my sin; for away from thee I am not master even of the twinkling of an eye.' 6.

'Do not strike us, Varuna, with weapons which at thy will hurt the evil-doer. Let us not go where the light has vanished! Scatter our enemies, that we may live.' 7.

'We did formerly, O Varuna, and do now, and shall in future also, sing praises to thee, O mighty one! For on thee, unconquerable hero, rest all statutes, immovable, as if established on a rock.' 8.

'Move far away from me all self-committed guilt, and may I not, O king, suffer for what others have committed! Many dawns have not yet dawned; grant us to live in them, O Varuna.' 9.

You may have observed that in several verses of this hymn Varuna was called Aditya, or son of Aditi. Now Aditi means *infinitude*, from *dita*, bound, and *a*, not, that is, not bound, not limited, absolute, infinite. Aditi itself is now and then involved in the Veda, as the Beyond, as what is beyond the earth and the sky, and the sun and the dawn—a most surprising conception in that early period of religious thought. More frequently, however, than Aditi, we meet with the Adityas, literally the sons of Aditi, or the gods beyond the visible earth and sky,—in one sense, the infinite gods. One of them is Varuna, others Mitra and Aryaman (Bhaga, Daksha, Amsa) most of them abstract names, though pointing to heaven and the solar light of heaven as their first though almost forgotten source.

When Mitra and Varuna are invoked together, we can still perceive dimly that they were meant originally for day and night, light and darkness. But in their more personal and so to say dramatic aspect, day and night appear in the Vedic mythology as the two Asvins, the two horsemen.

Aditi, too, the infinite, still shows a few traces of her being originally connected with the boundless Dawn; but again, in her more personal and dramatic character, the Dawn is praised by the Vedic

poets as Ushas, the Greek Eos, the beautiful maid of the morning, loved by the Asvins, loved by the sun, but vanishing before him at the very moment when he tries to embrace her with his golden rays. The sun himself, whom we saw reflected several times before in some of the divine personifications of the air and the sky and even of the earth, appears once more in his full personality, as the sun of the sky, under the names of Surya (Helios), Savitri, Pushan, and Vishnu, and many more.

You see from all this how great a mistake it would be to attempt to reduce the whole of Aryan mythology to solar concepts, and to solar concepts only. We have seen how largely the earth, the air, and the sky have each contributed their share to the earliest religious and mythological treasury of the Vedic Aryas. Nevertheless, the Sun occupied in that ancient collection of Aryan thought, which we call Mythology, the same central and commanding position which, under different names, it still holds in our own thoughts.

What we call the Morning, the ancient Aryas called the Sun or the Dawn: 'and there is no solemnity so deep to a rightly thinking creature as that of the Dawn.' (These are not my words, but the words of one of our greatest poets, one of the truest worshippers of Nature—John Ruskin.) What we call Noon, and Evening, and Night, what we call Spring and Winter, what we call Year, and Time and Life, and Eternity—all this the ancient Aryas called *Sun*. And yet wise people wonder and say, how curious that the ancient Aryas should have had so many solar myths. Why, every time we say 'Good Morning,' we commit a solar myth. Every poet who sings about 'the May driving the Winter from the field again' commits a solar myth. Every 'Christmas Number' of our newspapers—ringing out the old year and ringing in the new—is brimful of solar myths. Be not afraid of solar myths, but whenever in ancient mythology you meet with a name that, according to the strictest phonetic rules (for this is a *sine qua non*), can be traced back to a word meaning sun, or dawn, or night, or spring or winter, accept it for what it was meant to be, and do not be greatly surprised, if a story told of a solar eponymos was originally a solar myth.

No one has more strongly protested against the extravagances of Comparative Mythologists in changing everything into solar legends, than I have; but if I read some of the arguments brought forward against this new science, I confess they remind me of nothing so much as of the arguments brought forward centuries ago, against the existence of Antipodes! People then appealed to what is called Common Sense, which ought to teach everybody that Antipodes could not possibly exist, because they would tumble off. The best answer that astronomers could give, was, 'Go and see.' And I can give no better answer to those learned sceptics who try to ridicule the Science of Comparative Mythology

—'Go and see!' that is, go and read the Veda, and before you have finished the first Mandala, I can promise you, you will no longer shake your wise heads at solar myths, whether in India, or in Greece, or in Italy, or even in England, where we see so little of the sun, and talk all the more about the weather—that is, about a solar myth.

We have thus seen from the hymns and prayers preserved to us in the Rig-veda, how a large number of so-called Devas, bright and sunny beings, or gods, were called into existence, how the whole world was peopled with them, and every act of nature, whether on the earth or in the air or in the highest heaven, ascribed to their agency. When we say, *it* thunders, they said Indra thunders; when we say, *it* rains, they said Parjanya pours out his buckets; when we say, *it* dawns, they said the beautiful Ushas appears like a dancer, displaying her splendour; when we say, *it* grows dark, they said Surya unharnesses his steeds. The whole of nature was alive to the poets of the Veda, the presence of the gods was felt everywhere, and in that sentiment of the presence of the gods there was a germ of religious morality, sufficiently strong, it would seem, to restrain people from committing as it were before the eyes of their gods what they were ashamed to commit before the eyes of men. When speaking of Varuna, the old god of the sky, one poet says:³⁷

'Varuna, the great lord of these worlds, sees as if he were near. If a man stands or walks or hides, if he goes to lie down or to get up, what two people sitting together whisper to each other, King Varuna knows it, he is there as the third.³⁸ This earth, too, belongs to Varuna, the King, and this wide sky with its ends far apart. The two seas (the sky and the ocean) are Varuna's loins; he is also contained in this small drop of water. He who should flee far beyond the sky, even he would not be rid of Varuna, the King³⁹. His spies proceed from heaven towards this world; with thousand eyes they overlook this earth. King Varuna sees all this, what is between heaven and earth, and what is beyond. He has counted the twinklings of the eyes of men. As a player throws down the dice, he settles all things (irrevocably). May all thy fatal snares which stand spread out seven by seven and threefold, catch the man who tells a lie, may they pass by him who speaks the truth.'

You see this is as beautiful, and in some respects as true, as anything in the Psalms. And yet we know that there never was such a Deva, or god, or such a thing as Varuna. We know it is a mere

³⁷ *Atharva-veda*, IV. 16.

³⁸ *Psalm cxxxix. 1, 2*, 'O Lord, thou hast searched me and known me. Thou knowest my downsitting and mine uprising, thou understandest my thought afar off.'

³⁹ *Psalm cxxxix. 9*, 'If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me.'

name, meaning originally 'covering or all-embracing,' which was applied to the visible starry sky, and afterwards, by a process perfectly intelligible, developed into the name of a Being behind the starry sky, endowed with human and superhuman qualities.

And what applies to Varuna applies to all the other gods of the Veda and the Vedic religion, whether three in number or thirty-three, or, as one poet said, 'three thousand three hundred and thirty-nine gods⁴⁰.' They are all but names, quite as much as Jupiter and Apollo and Minerva; in fact, quite as much as all the gods of every religion who are called by such appellative titles.

Possibly, if any one had said this during the Vedic age in India, or even during the Periclean age in Greece, he would have been called, like Socrates, a blasphemer or an atheist. And yet nothing can be clearer or truer, and we shall see that some of the poets of the Veda too, and, still more, the later Vedantic philosopher, had a clear insight that it was so.

Only let us be careful in the use of that phrase 'it is a mere name.' No name is a mere name. Every name was originally meant for something; only it often failed to express what it was meant to express, and then became a weak or an empty name, or what we then call 'a mere name.' So it was with these names of the Vedic gods. They were all meant to express the *Beyond*, the Invisible behind the Visible, the Infinite within the Finite, the Supernatural above the Natural, the Divine, omnipresent, and omnipotent. They failed in expressing what, by its very nature, must always remain inexpressible. But that Inexpressible itself remained, and in spite of all these failures, it never succumbed, or vanished from the mind of the ancient thinkers and poets, but always called for new and better names, nay calls for them even now, and will call for them to the very end of man's existence upon earth.

⁴⁰ *Rig-veda* III. 9, 9; X. 52, 6.

CHAPTER SIX

VEDA AND VEDANTA

I do not wonder that I should have been asked by some of my hearers to devote part of my last lecture to answering the question, how the Vedic literature could have been composed and preserved, if writing was unknown in India before 500 B.C., while the hymns of the Rig-veda are said to date from 1500 B.C. Classical scholars naturally ask what is the date of our oldest MSS. of the Rig-veda, and what is the evidence on which so high an antiquity is assigned to its contents? I shall try to answer this question as well as I can, and I shall begin with a humble confession that the oldest MSS. of the Rig-veda, known to us at present, date not from 1500 B.C. but from about 1500 A.D.

We have therefore a gap of three thousand years, which it will require a strong arch of argument to bridge over. But that is not all.

You may know how, in the beginning of this century, when the age of the Homeric poems was discussed, a German scholar, Frederick, August Wolf, asked two momentous questions:—

1. At what time did the Greeks first become acquainted with the alphabet and use it for inscriptions on public monuments, coins, shields, and for contracts, both public and private?¹

2. At what time did the Greeks first think of using writing for literary purposes, and what materials did they employ for that purpose?

These two questions and the answers they elicited threw quite a new light on the nebulous periods of Greek literature. A fact more firmly established than any other in the ancient history of Greece is that the Ionians learnt the alphabet from the Phœnicians. The Ionians always called their letters Phœnician letters,² and the very name of Alphabet was a Phœnician word. We can well understand that the Phœnicians should have taught the Ionians in Asia Minor a knowledge of the alphabet, partly for commercial purposes, i.e., for making contracts, partly for enabling them to use those useful little sheets, called *Periplus*, or *Circumnavigations*, which at that time were as precious to sailors as maps were to the adventurous seamen of the

¹ *On the early use of letters for public inscriptions, see Hayman. Journal of Philosophy, 1879, pp. 141, 142, 150; Hicks, Manual of Greek Historical Inscriptions, pp. 1 seqq.*

² *Herod. (v. 59) says: 'I saw Phœnician letters on certain tripods in a temple of the Ismenian Apollo at Thebes in Bocotia, the most of them like the Ionian letters.'*

middle ages. But from that to a written literature, in our sense of the word, there is still a wide step. It is well known that the Germans, particularly in the North, had their Runes for inscriptions on tombs, goblets, public monuments, but not for literary purposes³. Even if a few Ionians at Miletus and other centres of political and commercial life acquired the art of writing, where could they find writing materials? The Ionians, when they began to write, had to be satisfied with a hide or pieces of leather, which they called *diphthera*, and until that was brought to the perfection of vellum or parchment, the occupation of an author cannot have been very agreeable⁴.

So far as we know at present the Ionians began to write about the middle of the sixth century B.C.; and, whatever may have been said to the contrary, Wolf's *dictum* still holds good that with them the beginning of a written literature was the same as the beginning of prose writing.

Writing at that time was an effort, and such an effort was made for some great purpose only. Hence the first written skins were what we should call Murray's Hand-books, called *Periegesis* or *Periodos*, or, if treating of sea-voyages, *Periplus*, that is, guide-books, books to lead travellers round a country or round a town. Connected with these itineraries were the accounts of the foundations of cities, the *Ktisis*. Such books existed in Asia Minor during the sixth and fifth centuries, and their writers were called by a general term, *Logographi*, or *Logioi* or *Logopoioi*,⁵ as opposed to *Aoidoi* the poets. They were the forerunners of the Greek historians, and Herodotus (443 B.C.), the so-called father of history, made frequent use of their works.

The whole of this incipient literary activity belonged to Asia Minor. From 'Guides through towns and countries,' literature seems to have spread at an early time to Guides through life, or philosophical dicta, such as are ascribed to Anaximander the Ionian (610-547 B.C.)⁶ and Pherekydes the Syrian (540 B.C.). These names carry us into the broad daylight of history, for Anaximander was the teacher of Anaximenes of Anaxagoras, and Anaxagoras of Pericles. At that time writing was a recognised art, and its cultivation had been rendered possible chiefly through trade

³ Munch, *Die Nordisch Germanischen Volker*, p. 240.

⁴ Herod. (v. 58) says: 'The Ionians from of old call bublos, *Diphtherai*, because once, in default of the former, they used to employ the latter. And even down to my own time, many of the barbarians write on such *diphtherae*.'

⁵ *Hekataeos and Kadmos of Miletos* (520 B.C.), *Charon of Lampsakos* (504 B.C.), *Xanthos the Lydian* (463 B.C.), *Pherekydes of Leros* (480 B.C.), *Hellanikos of Mitylene* (450 B.C.), etc.

⁶ Lewis, *Astronomy*, p. 92.

with Egypt and the importation of *papyrus*. In the time of *Æschylos* (500 B.C.) the idea of writing had become so familiar that he could use it again and again in poetical metaphors,⁷ and there seems little reason why we should doubt that both Peisistratos (528 B.C.) and Polykrates of Samos (523 B.C.) were among the first collectors of Greek manuscripts.

In this manner the simple questions asked by Wolf helped to reduce the history of ancient Greek literature to some kind of order, particularly with reference to its first beginnings.

It would therefore seem but reasonable that the two first questions to be asked by the students of Sanskrit literature should have been:

1. At what time did the people of India become acquainted with an alphabet?

2. At what time did they first use such alphabet for literary purposes?

Curiously enough, however, these questions remained in abeyance for a long time, and, as a consequence, it was impossible to introduce even the first elements of order into the chaos of ancient Sanskrit literature⁸.

I can here state a few facts only. There are no inscriptions to be found anywhere in India before the middle of the third century B.C. These inscriptions are Buddhist, put up during the reign of Asoka, the grandson of Chandragupta, who was the contemporary of Selucus, and at whose court in Patalipura, Megasthenes lived as ambassador of Seleucus. Here, as you see, we are on historical ground. In fact, there is little doubt that Asoka, the king who put up these inscriptions in several parts of his vast kingdom, reigned from 274-237 B.C.

These inscriptions are written in two alphabets—one written from right to left, and clearly derived from an Aramæan, that is, a Semitic alphabet; the other written from left to right, and likewise an adaptation, and an artificial or systematic adaptation, of a Semitic alphabet to the requirements of an Indian language. That second alphabet became the source of all Indian alphabets, and of many alphabets carried chiefly by Buddhist teachers far beyond the limits of India, though it is possible that the earliest Tamil alphabet may have been directly derived from the same Semitic source which supplied both the *dextrorsum* and the *sinistrorsum* alphabets of India.

Here then we have the first fact, *viz.*, that writing, even for monumental purposes, was unknown in India before the third century B.C.

⁷ See Hayman, *Journal of Philology*, 1879, p. 139.

⁸ See M. M., *History of Ancient Sanskrit Literature*, pp. 497 *seqq.*, 'On the Introduction of Writing in India.'

But writing for commercial purposes was known in India before that time. Megasthenes was no doubt quite right when he said that the Indians did not know letters⁹, that their laws were not written, and that they administered justice from memory. But Nearchus, the admiral of Alexander the Great, who sailed down the Indus (325 B.C.), and was therefore brought in contact with the merchants frequenting the maritime stations of India, was probably equally right in declaring that 'the Indians wrote letters on cotton that had been well beaten together.' These were no doubt commercial documents, contracts, it may be, with Phœnician or Egyptian captains, and they would prove nothing as to the existence in India at that time of what we mean by a written literature. In fact, Nearchus himself affirms what Megasthenes said after him, namely that 'the laws of the sophists in India were not written.' If, at the same time, the Greek travellers in India speak of mile-stones, and of cattle marked by the Indians with various signs and also with numbers, all this would perfectly agree with what we know from other sources, that though the art of writing may have reached India before the time of Alexander's conquest, its employment for literary purposes cannot date from a much earlier time.

Here then we are brought face to face with a most startling fact. Writing was unknown in India before the fourth century before Christ, and yet we are asked to believe that the Vedic literature in its three well-defined periods, the Mantra, Brahmana, and Sutra periods, goes back to at least a thousand years before our era.

Now the Rig-veda alone, which contains a collection of ten books of hymns addressed to various deities, consists of 1017 (1028) poems, 10,580 verses, and about 153,826 words.¹⁰ How were these poems composed—for they are composed in very perfect metre—and how, after having being composed, were they handed down from 1500 before Christ to 1500 after Christ, the time to which most of our best Sanskrit MSS belong?

Entirely by memory. This may sound startling, but—what will sound still more startling, and yet is a fact that can easily be ascertained by anybody who doubts it—at the present moment, if every MS of the Rig-veda were lost, we should be able to recover the whole of it—from the memory of the Srotriyas in India. These native students learn the Veda by heart, and they learn it from the mouth of their Guru, never from a MS., still less from my printed edition,—and after a time they teach it again to their pupils.

I have had such students in my room at Oxford, who not only could repeat these hymns, but who repeated them with the proper accents (for the Vedic Sanskrit has accents like Greek), nay who,

⁹ *M. Muller, History of Ancient Sanskrit Literature*, p. 515.

¹⁰ *M. Muller, Hibbert Lectures*, p. 153.

when looking through my printed edition of the Rig-veda, could point out a misprint without the slightest hesitation.

I can tell you more. There are hardly any various readings in our MSS. of the Rig-veda, but various schools in India have their own readings of certain passages, and they hand down those readings with great care. So, instead of collating MSS, as we do in Greek and Latin, I have asked some friends of mine to collate those Vedic students, who carry their own Rig-veda in their memory, and to let me have the various readings from these living authorities.

Here then we are not dealing with theories, but with facts, which anybody may verify. The whole of the Rig-veda, and a great deal more, still exists at the present moment in the oral tradition of a number of scholars who, if they liked, could write down every letter, and every accent, exactly as we find them in our old MSS.

Of course, this learning by heart is carried on under a strict discipline: it is, in fact, considered as a sacred duty. An Indian friend of mine, himself a very distinguished Vedic scholar, tells me that a boy, who is to be brought up as a student of the Rig-veda, has to spend about eight years in the house of his teacher. He has to learn ten books: first, the hymns of the Rig-veda; then a prose treatise on sacrifices, called the *Brahmana*; then the so-called *Forest-book* or *Aranyaka*; then the rules on domestic ceremonies; and lastly, six treatises on pronunciation, grammar, etymology, metre, astronomy, and ceremonial.

These ten books, it has been calculated, contain nearly 30,000 lines, each line reckoned as thirty-two syllables.

A pupil studies every day, during the eight years of his theological apprenticeship except on the holidays, which are called 'non-reading days.' There being 560 days in a lunar year, the eight years would give him 2880 days. Deduct from this 384 holidays, and you get 2,496 working days during the eight years. If you divide the number of lines, 30,000, by the number of working days, you get about twelve lines to be learnt each day, though much time is taken up, in addition, for practising and rehearsing what has been learnt before.

Now this is the state of things at present, though I doubt whether it will last much longer, and I always impress on my friends in India, and therefore impress on those also who will soon be settled as Civil Servants in India, the duty of trying to learn all that can still be learnt from those living libraries. Much ancient Sanskrit lore will be lost for ever when that race of *Srotriyas* becomes extinct.

But now let us look back. About a thousand years ago a Chinese, of the name of I-tsing, a Buddhist, went to India to learn Sanskrit, in order to be able to translate some of the sacred books of his own religion, which were originally written in Sanskrit, into Chinese. He left China in 671, twenty-five years after Hiouen-tsang's return, arrived at Tamralipti in India in 673, and went to

the great College and Monastery of Nalanda, where he studied Sanskrit. He returned to China in 695, and died in 713.¹¹

In one of his works which we still possess in Chinese, he gives an account of what he saw in India, not only among his own co-religionists, the Buddhists, but likewise among the Brahmans.¹²

Of the Buddhist priests he says that after they have learnt to recite the five and the ten precepts, they are taught the 400 hymns of Matricheta, and afterwards the 150 hymns of the same poet. When they are able to recite these, they begin the study of the Sutras of their Sacred Canon. They also learn by heart the Jatakamala¹³, which gives an account of Buddha in former states of existence. Speaking of what he calls the islands of the Southern Sea, which he visited after leaving India, I-tsing says: 'There are more than ten islands in the South Sea. There both priests and laymen recite the Jatakamala, as they recite the hymns mentioned before; but it has not yet been translated into Chinese.'

One of these stories, he proceeds to say, was versified by a king (*Kie-zhieh*) and set to music, and was performed before the public with a band and dancing—evidently a Buddhist mystery play.

I-tsing then gives a short account of the system of education. Children, he says, learn the forty-nine letters and the 10,000 compound letters when they are six years old, and generally finish them in half a year. This corresponds to about 300 verses, each sloka of thirty-two syllables. It was originally taught by Mahesvara. At eight years, children begin to learn the grammar of Panini, and know it after about eight months. It consists of 1,000 slokas, called Sutras.

Then follows the list of roots (*dhatu*) and the three appendices (*khila*), consisting again of 1,000 slokas. Boys begin the three appendices when they are ten years old, and finish them in three years.

When they have reached the age of fifteen, they begin to study a commentary on the grammar (*Sutra*) and spend five years in learning it. And here I-tsing gives the following advice to his countrymen, many of whom came to India to learn Sanskrit, but seem to have learnt it very imperfectly. 'If men of China,' he writes, go to India, wishing to study there, they should first of all learn

¹¹ See my article on the date of the *Kasika* in the *Indian Antiquary*, 1880, p. 305. *Deux Chapitres extraits des Memoires d'I-tsing, sur son voyage dans l'Inde, par M. Ryauon Fujishima, in Journal Asiatique*, 1888, p. 411.

¹² The translation of the most important passages in I-tsing's work was made for me by one of my Japanese pupils, K. Kasawara.

¹³ See Bunyiu Nanjio's *Catalogue of the Chinese Tripitaka*, p. 372, where *Aryasura*, who must have lived before 434 A.D., is mentioned as the author of the *Jatakamala*.

these grammatical works, and then only other subjects; if not, they will merely waste their labour. These works should be learnt by heart. But this is suited for men of high quality only. . . . They should first of all learn these grammatical works, and then only other subjects; if not, they will merely waste their labour. These works should be learnt by heart. But this is suited for men of high quality only. . . . They should study hard day and night, without letting a moment pass for idle repose. They should be like Confucius, through whose hard study the binding of his Yih-king was three times cut asunder, being worn away; and like Sui-shih, who used to read a book repeatedly one hundred times.' Then follows a remark, more intelligible in Chinese than in English: 'The hairs of a bull are counted by thousands, the horn of a unicorn is only one.'

I-tsing then speaks of the high degree of perfection to which the memory of these students attained, both among Buddhists and heretics. 'Such men,' he says, 'could commit to memory the comments of two volumes, learning them only once.'

And then turning to the *heretics*, or what we should call the orthodox Brahmans, he says: 'The Brahmans are regarded throughout the five divisions of India as the most respectable. They do not walk with the other three castes, and other mixed classes of people are still further dissociated from them. They revere their Scriptures, the four Vedas, containing about 100,000 verses. . . . The Vedas are handed down from mouth to mouth, nor written on paper. There are in every generation some intelligent Brahmans who can recite those 100,000 verses. . . . I myself saw such men.'

Here then we have an eye-witness who, in the seventh century after Christ, visited India, learnt Sanskrit, and spent about twenty years in different monasteries—a man who had no theories of his own about oral tradition, but, who, on the contrary, as coming from China, was quite familiar with the idea of a written, nay, of a printed literature:—and yet what does he say? 'The Vedas are not written on paper, but handed down from mouth to mouth.'

Now, I do not quite agree here with I-tsing. At all events, we must not conclude from what he says that there existed no Sanskrit MSS. at all at his time? We know that they existed. We know that in the first century of our era Sanskrit MSS. were carried from India to China and translated there. Most likely therefore there were MSS. of the Veda also in existence. But I-tsing, for all that, was right in supposing that these MSS. were not allowed to be used by students, and that they had always to learn the Veda by heart and from the mouth of a properly qualified teacher. The very fact that in the later law-books severe punishments are threatened against persons who copy the Veda or learn it from a MS., shows that MSS. existed, and that their existence interfered seriously with the ancient

privileges of the Brahmins, as the only legitimate teachers of their sacred scriptures.

If now, after having heard this account of I-tsing, we go back for about another thousand years, we shall feel less sceptical in accepting the evidence which we find in the so-called Pratisakhya, that is, collections of rules which, so far as we know at present, go back to the fifth century before our era, and which tell us almost exactly the same as what we can see in India at the present moment, namely that the education of children of the three twice-born castes, the Brahmanas, Kshatriyas, and Vaisyas, consisted in their passing at least eight years in the house of a Guru, and learning by heart the ancient Vedic hymns.

The art of teaching had even at that early time been reduced to a perfect system, and at that time certainly there is not the slightest trace of anything, such as a book, or skin, or parchment, a sheet of paper, pen or ink, being known even by name to the people of India; while every expression connected with what we should call literature, points to a literature (we cannot help using that word) existing in memory only, and being handed down with the most scrupulous care by means of oral tradition.

I had to enter into these details because I know that, with our ideas of literature, it requires an effort to imagine the bare possibility of a large amount of poetry, and still more of prose, existing in any but a written form. And yet here too we only see what we see elsewhere, namely that man, before the great discoveries of civilization were made, was able by greater individual efforts to achieve what to us, accustomed to easier contrivances, seems almost impossible. So-called savages were able to chip flints, to get fire by rubbing sticks of wood, which baffles our handiest workmen. Are we to suppose that, if they wished to preserve some songs which, as they believed, had once secured them the favour of their gods, had brought rain from heaven, or led them on to victory, they would have found no means of doing so? We have only to read such accounts, as, for instance, William Wyatt Gill has given us in his 'Historical Sketches of Savage Life in Polynesia,'¹⁴ to see how anxious even savages are to preserve the records of their ancient heroes, kings, and gods, particularly when the dignity or nobility of certain families depends on these songs, or when they contain what might be called the title-deeds to large estates. And that the Vedic Indians were not the only savages of antiquity who discovered the means of preserving a large literature by means of oral tradition, we may learn from Cæsar¹⁵, not a very credulous witness, who tells us that the 'Druids were said to know a large number of verses by heart; that

¹⁴ *Wellington*, 1880.

¹⁵ *De Beno Gall.* vi. 14; *History of Ancient Sanskrit Literature*, p. 506.

some of them spent twenty years in learning them, and that they considered it wrong to commit them to writing'—exactly the same story which we hear in India.

We must return once more to the question of dates. We have traced the existence of the Veda, as handed down by oral tradition, from our days to the days of I-tsing in the seventh century after Christ, and again to the period of the Pratisakhya, in the fifth century before Christ.

In that fifth century B.C. took place the rise of Buddhism, a religion built up on the ruins of the Vedic religion, and founded, so to say, on the denial of the divine authority ascribed to the Veda by all orthodox Brahmans.

Whatever exists therefore of Vedic literature must be accommodated within the centuries preceding the rise of Buddhism, and if I tell you that there are three periods of Vedic literature to be accommodated, the third presupposing the second, and the second the first, and that even that first period presents us with a collection, and a systematic collection of Vedic hymns, I think you will agree with me that it is from no desire for an extreme antiquity, but simply from a respect for facts, that students of the Veda have come to the conclusion that these hymns, of which the MSS. do not carry us back beyond the fifteenth century after Christ, took their origin in the fifteenth century before Christ.

One fact I must mention once more, because I think it may carry conviction even against the stoutest scepticism.

I mentioned that the earliest inscriptions discovered in India, belong to the reign of King Asoka, the grandson of Chandragupta, who reigned from 274-237 before Christ. What is the language of those inscriptions? Is it the Sanskrit of the Vedic hymns? Certainly not. Is it the later Sanskrit of the Brahmanas and Sutras? Certainly not. These inscriptions are written in the local dialects as then spoken in India, and these local dialects differ from the grammatical Sanskrit about as much as Italian does from Latin.

What follows from this? First, that the archaic Sanskrit of the Veda had ceased to be spoken before the third century B.C. Secondly, that even the later literary and grammatical Sanskrit was no longer spoken and understood by the people at large; that Sanskrit therefore had ceased, nay, we may say, had long ceased to be the spoken language of the country when Buddhism arose, and that therefore the youth and manhood of the ancient Vedic language lie far beyond the period that gave birth to the teaching of Buddha, who, though he may have known Sanskrit, and even Vedic Sanskrit, insisted again and again on the duty that his disciples should preach his doctrines in the language of the people whom they wished to benefit.

And now, when the time allotted to me is nearly at an end, I find, as it always happens, that I have not been able to say one half

of what I hoped to say as to the lessons to be learnt by us in India, even with regard to this one branch of human knowledge only, the study of the origin of religion. I hope, however, I may have succeeded in showing you the entirely new aspect which the old problem of the *theogony*, or the origin and growth of the Devas or gods, assumes from the light thrown upon it by the Veda. Instead of positive theories, we now have positive facts, such as you look for in vain anywhere else; and though there is still a considerable interval between the Devas of the Veda, even in their highest form, and such concepts as Zeus, Apollon, and Athene, yet the chief riddle is solved, and we know now at last what stuff the gods of the ancient world were made of.

But this theogonic process is but one side of the ancient Vedic religion, and there are two other sides of at least the same importance and of even a deeper interest to us.

There are in fact three religions in the Veda, or, if I may say so, three naves in one great temple, reared, as it were, before our eyes by poets, prophets, and philosophers. Here, too, we can watch the work and the workmen. We have not to deal with hard formulas only, with unintelligible ceremonies, or petrified fetishes. We can see how the human mind arrives by a perfectly rational process at all its later irrationalities: This is what distinguishes the Veda from all other Sacred Books. Much, no doubt, in the Veda also, and in the Vedic ceremonial, is already old and untelligible, hard and petrified. But in many cases the development of names and concepts, their transition from the natural to the supernatural, from the individual to the general, is still going on, and it is for that very reason that we find it so difficult, nay almost impossible, to translate the growing thoughts of the Veda into the full-grown and more than full-grown language of our time.

Let us take one of the oldest words for god in the Veda, such as *deva*, the Latin *deus*. The dictionaries tell you that *deva* means god and gods, and so, no doubt, it does. But if we always translated *deva* in the Vedic hymns by god, we should not be translating, but completely transforming the thoughts of the Vedic poets. I do not mean only that *our* idea of God is totally different from the idea that was intended to be expressed by *deva*; but even the Greek and Roman concept of gods would be totally inadequate to convey the thoughts imbedded in the Vedic *deva*. *Deva* meant originally bright, and nothing else. Meaning bright, it was constantly used of the sky, the stars, the sun, the dawn, the day, the spring, the rivers, the earth; and when a poet wished to speak of all of these by one and the same word—by what we should call a general term—he called them all Devas. When that had been done, *Deva* did no longer mean 'the Bright ones,' but the name comprehended all the qualities which the

sky and the sun and the dawn shared in common, excluding only those that were peculiar to each.

Here you see how, by the simplest process, the Devas, the bright ones, might become and did become the Devas, the heavenly, the kind, the powerful, the invisible, the immortal—and, in the end, something very like the *Theoi* of the Greeks and the *Dii* of the Romans.

In this way one Beyond, the Beyond of Nature, was built up in the ancient religion of the Veda, and peopled with Devas, and Asuras, and Vasus, and Adityas, all names for the bright solar, celestial, diurnal, and vernal powers of nature, without altogether excluding, however, even the dark and unfriendly powers, those of the night, of the dark clouds, or of winter, capable of mischief, but always destined in the end to succumb to the valour and strength of their bright antagonists.

We now come to the second nave of the Vedic temple, the second *Beyond* that was dimly perceived, and grasped and named by the Rishis, namely the world of the Departed Spirits.

There was in India, as elsewhere, another very early faith, springing up naturally in the hearts of the people, that their fathers and mothers, when they departed this life, departed to a Beyond, wherever it might be, either in the East from whence all the bright Devas seemed to come, or more commonly in the West, the land to which they seemed to go, called in the Veda the realm of Yama or the setting sun. The idea that beings which once had been, could ever cease to be, had not yet entered their minds; and from the belief that their fathers existed somewhere, though they could see them no more, there arose the belief in another Beyond, and the germs, of another religion.

Nor was the actual power of the fathers quite imperceptible or extinct even after their death. Their presence continued to be felt in the ancient laws and customs of the family, most of which rested on their will and their authority. While their fathers were alive and strong, their will was law; and when, after their death, doubts or disputes arose on points of law or custom, it was but natural that the memory and the authority of the fathers should be appealed to settle such points—that the law should still be their will.

Thus Manu says (IV, 178). 'On the path on which his fathers and grandfathers have walked, on that path of good men let him walk, and he will not go wrong.'

In the same manner then in which, out of the bright powers of nature, the Devas or gods had arisen, there arose out of predicates shared in common by the departed, such as pitris, fathers, preta, gone away, another general concept, what we should call *Manes*, the kind ones, *Ancestors*, *Shades*, *Spirits* or *Ghosts*, whose worship was nowhere more fully developed than in India. That common name,

Pitris or *Fathers*, gradually attracted towards itself all that the fathers shared in common. It came to mean not only fathers, but invisible, kind, powerful, immortal, heavenly beings, and we can watch in the Veda, better perhaps than anywhere else, the inevitable, yet most touching metamorphosis of ancient thought,—the love of the child for father and mother becoming transfigured into an instinctive belief in the immortality of the soul.

It is strange, and really more than strange, that not only should this important and prominent side of the ancient religion of the Hindus have been ignored, but that of late its very existence should have been doubted. I feel obliged, therefore, to add a few words in support of what I have said just now of the supreme importance of this belief in and this worship of ancestral spirits in India from the most ancient to the most modern times. Herbert Spencer, who has done so much in calling attention to ancestor worship as a natural ingredient of religion among all savage nations, declares in the most emphatic manner,¹⁶ 'that he has seen it implied, that he has heard it in conversation, and that he now has it before him in print, that no Indo-European or Semitic nation, so far as we know, seems to have made a religion of the worship of the dead.' I do not doubt his words, but I think that on so important a point, Herbert Spencer ought to have named his authorities. It seems to me almost impossible that anybody who has ever opened a book on India should have made such a statement. There are hymns in the Rig-veda addressed to the Fathers. There are full descriptions of the worship due to the Fathers in the Brahmanas and Sutras. The epic poems, the law books, the Puranas, all are brimful of allusions to ancestral offerings. The whole social fabric of India, with its laws of inheritance and marriage,¹⁷ rests on a belief in the Manes,—and yet we are told that no Indo-European nation seems to have made a religion of the worship of the dead.

The Persians had their Fravashis, the Greeks their *Theoi Patrooi* and their *daimones*,¹⁸ while among the Romans the *Lares familiares* and the *Divi Manes* were worshipped more zealously than any other gods.¹⁹ Manu goes so far as to tell us in one place:²⁰ 'An oblation

¹⁶ *Principles of Sociology*, p. 313.

¹⁷ 'The Hindu Law of Inheritance is based upon the Hindu religion, and we must be cautious that in administering Hindu law we do not, by acting upon our notions derived from English law, inadvertently wound or offend the religions.' *Bengal Law Reports*, 103.

¹⁸ (*Hesiodi Opera et Dies*, vv. 122-126).

¹⁹ Cicero, *De Leg.* II. 9, 22, '*Deorum manium jura sancta sunt; sos leto datos divos habento.*'

²⁰ III. 203.

by Brahmans to their ancestors transcends an oblation to the deities; and yet we are told that no Indo-European nation seems to have made a religion of the worship of the dead.

Such things ought really not to be, if there is to be any progress in historical research, and I cannot help thinking that what Herbert Spencer meant was probably no more than that some scholars did not admit that the worship of the dead formed the whole of the religion of any of the Indo-European nations. That, no doubt, is perfectly true, but it would be equally true, I believe, of almost any other religion. And on this point again the students of anthropology will learn more, I believe, from the Veda than from any other book.

In the Veda the Pitris, or fathers, are invoked together with the Deva, or gods, but they are not confounded with them. The Devas never become Pitris, and though such adjectives as deva are sometimes applied to the Pitris, and they are raised to the rank of the older classes of Devas,²¹ it is easy to see that the Pitris and Devas had each their independent origin, and that they represent two totally distinct phases of the human mind in the creation of its objects of worship. This is a lesson which ought never to be forgotten.

We read in the Rig-veda: 'May the rising Dawns protect me, may the flowing Rivers protect me, may the firm Mountains protect me, may the Fathers protect me at this invocation of the gods.'²² Here nothing can be clearer than the separate existence of the Fathers, apart from the Dawns, the Rivers, and the Mountains, though they are included in one common Devahuti, or invocation of the gods.

We must distinguish, however, from the very first, between two classes, or rather between two concepts of Fathers, the one comprising the distant, half-forgotten, and almost mythical ancestors of certain families or of what would have been to the poets of the Veda, the whole human race, the other consisting of the fathers who had but lately departed, and who were still, as it were, personally remembered and revered.

The old ancestors in general approach more nearly to the gods. They are often represented as having gone to the abode of Yama, the ruler of the departed, and to live there in company with some of the Devas.²³

We sometimes read of the great-grandfathers being in heaven the grandfathers in the sky, the fathers on the earth, the first in company with the Adityas, the second with the Rudras, the last with the Vasus. All these are individual poetical conceptions.²⁴

²¹ *Manu*, III. 192, 284, *Yagnavalkya* I, 268.

²² VI. 52, 4.

²³ *Rig-veda*, VII. 76, 4, *devanam sadhamadah*; *Rig-veda* X. 16, 2, *devanam vasanih*.

²⁴ See *Atharva-veda* XVIII. 2, 49.

Yama himself is sometimes invoked as if he were one of the Fathers, the first of mortals that died or that trod the path of the Fathers²⁵ leading to the common sunset in the West.²⁶ Still his real Deva-like nature is never completely lost, and, as the god of the setting sun, he is indeed the leader of the Fathers, but not one of the Fathers himself.²⁷

Many of the benefits which men enjoyed on earth were referred to the Fathers, as having first been procured and first enjoyed by them. They performed the first sacrifices, and secured the benefits arising from them. Even the great events in nature, such as the rising of the sun, the light of the day and the darkness of the night, were sometimes referred to them, and they were praised for having broken open the dark, stable of the morning and having brought out the cows, that is, the days.²⁸ They were even praised for having adorned the night with stars, while in later writings the stars are said to be the lights of the good people who have entered into heaven.²⁹ Similar ideas, we know, prevailed among the ancient Persians, Greeks, and Romans. The Fathers are called in the Veda truthful (satya), wise (suvidatra), righteous (ritavat), poets (kavi), leaders (pathikrit), and one of their most frequent epithets is somya, delighting in Soma, Soma being the ancient intoxicating beverage of the Vedic Rishis, which was believed to bestow immortality,³⁰ but which had been lost, or at all events had become difficult to obtain by the Aryas, after their migration into the Punjab.³¹

The families of the Bhrigus, the Angiras, the Atharvans³² all have their Pitris or Fathers, who are invoked to sit down on the grass and to accept the offerings placed there for them. Even the name of Pitriyagna, sacrifice of the Fathers, occurs already in the hymns of the Rig-veda.³³

The following is one of the hymns of the Rig-veda by which

²⁵ *The pitriyana*, X. 2, 7.

²⁶ *Rig-veda* X. 14, 12. *He is called Vaivasvata, the solar* (X. 58, 1), *and even the son of Vivasvat* (X. 14, 5). *In a later phase of religious thought Yama is conceived as the first man* (*Atharva-veda* XVIII. 3, 13, *as compared with Rig-veda* X. 14, 1).

²⁷ *Rig-veda* X. 14.

²⁸ *In the Avesta many of these things are done by Ahura Mazda with the help of the Fravashis.*

²⁹ *See Satapatha Brahmana* I. 9, 3, 10; VI. 5, 4, 8.

³⁰ *Rig-veda* VIII. 48, 3: *'We drank Soma, we became immortal, we went to the light, we found the gods;'* VIII. 48, 12.

³¹ *Rig-veda* IX. 97, 39.

³² *Ibid.* X. 14, 6.

³³ *Ibid.* X. 16, 10.

those ancient Fathers were invited to come to their sacrifice (Rig-veda X. 15)³⁴:—

1. 'May the Soma-loving Fathers, the lowest, the highest, and the middle, arise. May the gentle and righteous Fathers who have come to life (again), protect us in these invocations!

2. 'May this salutation be for the Fathers to-day, for those who have departed before or after; whether they now dwell in the sky above the earth, or among the blessed people..

3. 'I invited the wise Fathers... may they come hither quickly, and sitting on the grass readily partake of the poured-out draught!

4. 'Come hither to us with your help, you Fathers who sit on the grass! We have prepared these libations for you, accept them! Come hither with your most blessed protection, and give us health and wealth without fail!

5. 'The Soma-loving Fathers have been called hither to their dear viands which are placed on the grass. Let them approach, let them listen, let them bless, let them protect us!

6. 'Bending your knee and sitting on my right, accept all this sacrifice. Do not hurt us, O Fathers, for any wrong that we may have committed against you, men as we are.

7. 'When you sit down on the lap of the red dawns, grant wealth to the generous mortal! O Fathers, give of your treasure to the sons of this man here, and bestow vigour here on us!

8. 'May Yama, as a friend with friends, consume the offerings according to his wish, united with those old Soma-loving Fathers of ours, the Vasishthas, who arranged the Soma draught.

9. 'Come hither, O Agni, with those wise and truthful Fathers who like to sit down near the hearth, who thirsted when yearning for the gods, who knew the sacrifice, and who were strong in praise with their songs.

10. 'Come, O Agni, with those ancient fathers who like to sit down near the hearth, who for ever praise the gods, the truthful, who eat and drink our oblations, making company with Indra and the gods.

11. 'O Fathers, you who have been consumed by Agni, come here, sit down on your seats, you kind guides! Eat of the offerings which we have placed in the turf, and then grant us wealth and strong offspring!

12. 'O Agni, O Jatavedas³⁵, at our request thou hast carried the offerings, having first rendered them sweet. Thou gavest them to the Fathers, and they fed on their share. Eat also, O god, the proffered oblations!

13. 'The Fathers who are here, and the Fathers who are not

³⁴ A translation considerably differing from my own is given by Sarvadhikari in his *Tagore Lectures for 1880*, p. 34. 3

³⁵ Cf. Max Muller, *Rig-veda, transl.* vol. i. p. 24.

here, those whom we know, and those whom we know not, thou, Jatavedas, knowest how many they are, accept the well-made sacrifice with the sacrificial portions!

14. 'To those who, whether burnt by fire or not burnt by fire, rejoice in their share in the midst of heaven, grant thou, O King, that their body may take that life which they wish for!

Distinct from the worship offered to these primitive ancestors, is the reverence which from an early time was felt to be due by children to their departed father, soon also to their grandfather, and great-grandfather. The ceremonies in which these more personal feelings found expression were of a more domestic character, and allowed therefore of greater local variety.

It would be quite impossible to give here even an abstract only of the minute regulations which have been preserved to us in the Brahmanas, the Srauta, Grihya, and Samayacharika Sutras, the Law-books, and a mass of later manuals on the performance of endless rites, all intended to honour the Departed. Such are the minute prescriptions as to times and seasons, as to altars and offerings, as to the number and shape of the sacrificial vessels, as to the proper postures of the sacrificers, and the different arrangements of the vessels, that it is extremely difficult to catch hold of what we really care for, namely, the thoughts and intentions of those who first devised all these intricacies. Much has been written on this class of sacrifices by European scholars also, beginning with Colebrooke's excellent essays on 'The Religious Ceremonies of the Hindus.'³⁶ But when we ask the simple question, What was the thought from whence all this outward ceremonial sprang, and what was the natural craving of the human heart which it seemed to satisfy, we hardly get an intelligible answer anywhere. It is true that Sraddhas continue to be performed all over India to the present day, but we know how widely the modern ceremonial has diverged from the rules laid down in the old Sastras, and it is quite clear from the descriptions given to us by recent travellers that no one can understand the purport even of these survivals of the old ceremonial, unless he understands Sanskrit and can read the old Sutras. We are indeed told in full detail how the cakes were made which the Spirits were supposed to eat, how many stalks of grass were to be used on which they had to be offered, how long each stalk ought to be, and in what direction it should be held. All the things which teach us nothing are explained to us in abundance, but the few things which the true scholar really cares for are passed over, as if they had no interest to us at all, and have to be discovered under heaps of rubbish.

In order to gain a little light, I think we ought to distinguish between—

³⁶ Published in the *Asiatic Researches*, vol. v, Calcutta, 1798.

1. The daily ancestral sacrifice, the Pitriyagna, as one of the five Great Sacrifices (Mahayagnas);

2. The monthly ancestral sacrifice, the Pinda-pitriyagna, as part of the New and Full-Moon sacrifice;

3. The funeral ceremonies on the death of a householder.

4. The Agapes, or feasts of love and charity, commonly called Sraddhas, at which food and other charitable gifts were bestowed on deserving persons in memory of the deceased ancestors. The name of Sraddha belongs properly to this last class only, but it has been transferred to the second and third class of sacrifices also, because Sraddha formed an important part in them.

The daily Pitriyagna or Ancestor-worship is one of the five sacrifices, sometimes called the Great Sacrifices³⁷, which every married man ought to perform day by day. They are mentioned in the Grihyasutras³⁸, as Devayagna, for the Devas, Bhutayagna for animals &c., Pitriyagna, for the Fathers, Brahmayagna, for Brahman, *i.e.*, study of the Veda, and Manushyayagna, for men, *i.e.*, hospitality, &c.

Manu³⁹ tells us the same, namely, that a married man has five great religious duties to perform:—

1. The Brahma-sacrifice, *i.e.* the studying and teaching of the Veda (sometimes called Ahuta).

2. The Pitri-sacrifice, *i.e.* the offering of cakes and water to the Manes (sometimes called Prasita).

3. The Deva-sacrifice, *i.e.*, the offering of oblations to the Gods (sometimes called Huta).

4. The Bhuta-sacrifice, *i.e.* the giving of food to living creatures (sometimes called Prahuta).

5. The Manushya-sacrifice, *i.e.* the receiving of guests with hospitality (sometimes called Brahmahuta⁴⁰).

The performance of this daily Pitriyagna seems to have been extremely simple. The householder had to put his sacred cord on the right shoulder, to say 'Svadha to the Fathers,' and to throw the remains of certain offerings towards the South⁴¹.

The human impulse to this sacrifice, if sacrifice it can be called, is clear enough. The five 'great sacrifices' comprehended in early times the whole duty of man from day to day. They were connected with his daily meal⁴². When this meal was preparing, and before

³⁷ *Satapatha Brahmana* XI, 5, 6, 1; *Taitt. Ar.* II. II, 10; *Asvalayana Grihya-sutras* III. 1, 1; *Parasara Grihya-sutras* II. 9, 1; *Apastamba, Dharma-sutras*, translated by Buhler, pp. 47 seq.

³⁸ *Asv.* III. 1.

³⁹ III. 70.

⁴⁰ *In the Sankhayana Grihya* (I. 5) four *Paka-yagnas* are mentioned, called *Huta, ahuta, prahuta, prasita*.

⁴¹ *Asv. Grihya-sutras* I. 3, 10.

⁴² *Manu* III. 117, 118.

he could touch it himself, he was to offer something to the Gods, a Vaisvadeva offering,⁴³ in which the chief dieties were Agni, Soma, the Visve Devas, Dhanvantari, a kind of Aesculapius, Kuhu and Anumati (phases of the moon), Prajapati, lord of creatures, Dyava-prithivi, Heaven and Earth, and Svishtakrit, the fire on the hearth.

After having thus satisfied the Gods in the four quarters, the householder had to throw some oblations into the open air, which were intended for animals, and in some cases for invisible beings, ghosts, and such like. Then he was to remember the Departed, the Pitris, with some offerings; but even after having done this he was not yet to begin his own repast, unless he had also given something to strangers (atithis).

When all this had been fulfilled, and when, besides, the householder, as we should say, had said his daily prayers, or repeated what he had learnt of the Veda, then and then only was he in harmony with the world that surrounded him, the five Great Sacrifices had been performed by him, and he was free from all the sins arising from a thoughtless and selfish life.

This Pitriyagna, as one of the five daily sacrifices, is described in the Brahmanas, the Grihya and Samayacharika Sutras, and, of course, in the legal Samhitas. Rajendralal Mitra⁴⁴, informs us that 'orthodox Brahmins to this day profess to observe all these five ceremonies, but that in reality only the offerings to the gods and manes are strictly observed, while the reading is completed by the repetition of the Gayatri only, and charity and feeding of animals are casual and uncertain.'

Quite different from this simple daily ancestral offering is the Pitriyagna or Pinda-pitriyagna, which forms part of many of the statutable sacrifices, and, first of all, of the New and Full-Moon sacrifice. Here again the human motive is intelligible enough. It was the contemplation of the regular course of nature, the discovery of order in the coming and going of the heavenly bodies, the growing confidence in some ruling power of the world which lifted man's thoughts from his daily work to higher regions, and filled his heart with a desire to approach these higher powers with praise, thanksgiving, and offerings. And it was at such moments as the waning of the moon that his thoughts would most naturally turn to those whose life had waned, whose bright faces were no longer visible on earth, his fathers or ancestors. Therefore at the very beginning of the New-Moon sacrifice, we are told in the Brahmanas⁴⁵ and in the Srautasutras, that a Pitriyagna, a sacrifice to the Fathers, has to be

⁴³ *Manu* III. 85.

⁴⁴ *Taittiriya-aryaka, Preface*, p. 23.

⁴⁵ *Masi masi vo'sanam iti sruteh; Gobhiliya Grihya-sutras*, p. 1055.

performed. A Caru or pie had to be prepared in the Dakshinagni, the southern fire, and the offerings, consisting of water and round cakes (pindas), were specially dedicated to father, grandfather, and great-grandfather, while the wife of the sacrificer, if she wished for a son, was allowed to eat one of the cakes⁴⁶.

Similar ancestral offerings took place during other sacrifices too, of which the New and Full-Moon sacrifices form the general type.

It may be quite true that these two kinds of ancestral sacrifices have the same object and share the same name, but their character is different; and if, as has often been the case, they are mixed up together, we lose the most important lessons which a study of the ancient ceremonial should teach us. I cannot describe the difference between these two Pitriyagnas more decisively than by pointing out that the former was performed by the father of a family, or, if we may say so, by a layman, the latter by a regular priest, or a class of priests, selected by the sacrificer to act in his behalf. As the Hindus themselves would put it, the former is a grihya, a domestic, the later a srauta, a priestly ceremony⁴⁷.

We now come to a third class of ceremonies which are likewise domestic and personal, but which differ from the two preceding ceremonies by their occasional character, I mean the funeral as distinct from the ancestral ceremonies. In one respect these funeral ceremonies may represent an earlier phase of worship than the daily and monthly ancestral sacrifices. They lead up to them, and, as it were, prepare the departed for their future dignity as Pitris or Ancestors. On the other hand, the conception of Ancestors in general must have existed before any departed person could have been raised to that rank, and I therefore preferred to describe the ancestral sacrifices first.

Nor need I enter here very fully into the character of the special funeral ceremonies of India. I described them in a special paper, 'On Sepulture and Sacrificial Customs in the Veda,' nearly thirty years ago⁴⁸. Their spirit is the same as that of the funeral ceremonies

⁴⁶ See *Pindapitriyagna*, von Dr. O. Donner, 1870. The restriction to three ancestors, father, grandfather and great-grandfather, occurs in the *Vajasaneyi-samhita*, XIX, 36-37.

⁴⁷ There is, however, great variety in these matters, according to different sakhas. Thus, according to the *Gobhila-saka*, the *Pinda Pitriyagna* is to be considered as *smarta*, not as *srauta* (*pindapitriyagnah khalv asmakkhakhayam nasti*); while others maintain that an *agnimat* should perform the *smarta*, a *srautagnimat* the *srauta Pitriyagna*; see *Gobhiliya Grihya-sutras*, p. 671. On page 667 we read: *anagner amavasyasraddha, nanvaharyam ityadaraniyam*.

⁴⁸ *Über Todtenbestattung und Opfergebrauche im Veda*, in *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft*, vol. ix, 1856.

of Greeks, Romans, Slavonic, and Teutonic nations, and the coincidences between them all are often most surprising.

In Vedic times the people in India both burnt and buried their dead, and they did this with a certain solemnity, and, after a time, according to fixed rules. Their ideas about the status of the departed, after their body had been burnt and their ashes buried, varied considerably, but in the main they seem to have believed in a life to come, not very different from our life on earth, and in the power of the departed to confer blessings on their descendants. It soon therefore became the interest of the survivors to secure the favour of their departed friends by observances and offerings which, at first, were the spontaneous manifestation of human feelings, but which soon became traditional, technical, in fact, ritual.

On the day on which the corpse had been burnt, the relatives (samanodakas) bathed and poured out a handful of water to the deceased, pronouncing his name and that of his family⁴⁹. At sunset they returned home, and, as was but natural, they were told to cook nothing during the first night, and to observe certain rules during the next day up to ten days, according to the character of the deceased. These were days of mourning, or, as they were afterwards called, days of impurity, when the mourners withdrew from contact with the world, and shrank by a natural impulse from the ordinary occupations and pleasures of life.⁵⁰

Then followed the collecting of the ashes on the 11th, 13th or 15th day of the dark half of the moon. On returning from thence they bathed, and then offered what was called a *Sraddha* to the departed.

This word *Sraddha*, which meets us here for the first time, is full of interesting lessons, if only properly understood. First of all it should be noted that it is absent, not only from the hymns but, so far as we know at present, even from the ancient *Brahmanas*. It seems therefore a word of a more modern origin. There is a passage in *Apastamba's Dharma-sutras* which betrays, on the part of the author, a consciousness of the more modern origin of the *Sraddhas*:⁵¹

'Formerly men and gods lived together in this world. Then the gods in reward of their sacrifices went to heaven, but men were left behind. Those men who perform sacrifices in the same manner as the gods did, dwelt (after death) with the gods and Brahman in heaven. Now (seeing man left behind) *Manu* revealed this ceremony which is designed by the word *Sraddha*.'

⁴⁹ *Asvalayana Grihya-sutras* IV. 4, 10.

⁵⁰ *Manu* V. 64-65.

⁵¹ *Buhler, Apastamba, Sacred Books of the East*, vol. ii. p. 138; also *Sraddhakalpa*, p. 890. Though the *Sraddha* is prescribed in the *Gobhiliya Grihya-sutras*, IV. 4, 2-3, it is not described there, but in a separate treatise, the *Sraddhakalpa*.

Sraddha has assumed many⁵² meanings, and Manu⁵³, for instance, uses it almost synonymously with *pītriyagna*. But its original meaning seems to have been 'that which is given with sraddha or faith,' *i.e.* charity bestowed on deserving persons, and, more particularly, on Brahmanas. The gift was called Sraddha, but the act itself also was called by the same name. The word is best explained by Narayana in his commentary on the Grihya-sutras of Asvalayana (IV.7), 'Sraddha is that which is given in faith to Brahmans for the sake of the Fathers.'⁵⁴

Such charitable gifts flowed most naturally and abundantly at the time of a man's death, or whenever his memory was revived by happy or unhappy events in a family, and hence Sraddha has become the general name for ever so many sacred acts commemorative of the departed. We hear of Sraddhas not only at funerals, but at joyous events also, when presents were bestowed in the name of the family, and therefore in the name of the ancestors also, on all who had a right to that distinction.

It is a mistake therefore to look upon Sraddhas simply as offerings of water or cakes to the Fathers. An offering to the Fathers was, no doubt, a symbolic part of each Sraddha, but its more important character was charity bestowed in memory of the Fathers.

This, in time, gave rise to much abuse, like the alms bestowed on the Church during the Middle Ages. But in the beginning the motive was excellent. It was simply a wish to benefit others, arising from the conviction, felt more strongly in the presence of death than at any other time, that as we can carry nothing out of this world, we ought to do as much good as possible in the world with our worldly goods. At Sraddhas the Brahmanas were said to represent the sacrificial fire into which the gifts should be thrown⁵⁵. If we translate here Brahmanas by priests, we can easily understand why there should have been in later times so strong a feeling against Sraddhas. But priest is a very bad rendering of Brahmana. The Brahmanas were, socially and intellectually, a class of men of high

⁵² *As meaning the food, sraddha occurs in sraddhabhug and similar words. As meaning the sacrificial act, it is explained, yatra itak khraddhaya diyate tad eva karma sraddhasabdabhidheyam. Pretam pitrim ka nirdisya bhogyam yat priyam atmanah sraddhaya diyate yatra tak khraddham parikirtitam. Gobhiliya Grihya-sutras, p. 982. We also read sraddhanvitah sraddham kurvita, 'let a man perform the sraddha with faith; Gobhiliya Grihya-sutras, p. 1053.*

⁵³ *Manu III. 82.*

⁵⁴ *Pitrim uddisya yad diyate brahmanebhyah sraddhya tak khraddham.*

⁵⁵ *Apastamba II. 16, 3, Brahmanas tv ahavaniarthe.*

breeding. They were a recognised and, no doubt, a most essential element in the ancient society of India. As they lived for others, and were excluded from most of the lucrative pursuits of life, it was a social, and it soon became a religious duty, that they should be supported by the community at large. Great care was taken that the recipients of such bounty as was bestowed at Sraddhas should be strangers, neither friends nor enemies, and in no way related to the family. Thus Apastamba says:⁵⁶ 'The food eaten (at a Sraddha) by persons related to the giver is a gift offered to goblins. It reaches neither the Manes nor the Gods.' A man who tried to curry favour by bestowing Sraddhika gifts, was called by an opprobrious name, a Sraddhamitra.⁵⁷

Without denying therefore that in later times the system of Sraddhas may have degenerated, I think we can perceive that it sprang from a pure source, and, what for our present purpose is even more important, from an intelligible source.

Let us now return to the passage in the Grihyasutras of Asvalavana, where we met for the first time with the name of Sraddha.⁵⁸ It was the Sraddha to be given for the sake of the Departed, after his ashes had been collected in an urn and buried. This Sraddha is called ekoddishta⁵⁹ or, as we should say, personal. It was meant for one person only, not for the three ancestors, nor for all the ancestors. Its object was in fact to raise the departed to the rank of a Pitri, and this had to be achieved by Sraddha offerings continued during a whole year. This at least is the general, and, most likely, the original rule. Apastamba says that the Sraddha for a deceased relative should be performed every day during the year, and that a monthly Sraddha only should be performed or none at all, that is, no more personal Sraddha⁶⁰, because the departed shares henceforth in the regular Parvana-sraddhas.⁶¹ Sankhayana says the same,⁶² namely that the personal Sraddha lasts for a year, and that then 'the Fourth' is dropped, *i.e.* the great-grandfather was dropped, the grandfather became the great-grandfather, the father the grandfather, while the lately Departed occupied the father's place among the three

⁵⁶ L. c. p. 142.

⁵⁷ *Manu* III. 138, 140.

⁵⁸ *Asv. Grihya-sutras* IV. 5, 8.

⁵⁹ *It is described as a vikriti of the Parvana-sraddha in Gohhiliya Grihya-sutras*, p. 1011.

⁶⁰ *One of the differences between the acts before and after the Sapindikarana is noted by Salankayana:—Sapindikaranam yavad rigudarbhahai pitrikriya Sapindikaranad urdhavam dvigunair vidhiwad bhavet. Gohhiliya Grihya-sutras*, p. 930.

⁶¹ *Gohhiliya Grihya-sutras*, p. 1023.

⁶² *Grihya-sutras*, ed. Oldenberg, p. 83.

principal Pitris⁶³. This was called the Sapindikarana, *i.e.*, the elevating of the departed to the rank of an ancestor.

There are here, as elsewhere, many exceptions. Gobhila allows six months instead of a year, or even a Tripaksha,⁶⁴ *i.e.* three half-months; and lastly, any auspicious event (*vridhhi*) may become the occasion of the Sapindikarana⁶⁵.

The full number of Sraddhas necessary for the Sapindana is sometimes given as sixteen *viz.* the first, then one in each of the twelve months, then two semestral ones, and lastly the Sapindana. But here too much variety is allowed, though, if the Sapindana takes place before the end of the year, the number of sixteen Sraddhas has still to be made up⁶⁶.

When the Sraddha is offered on account of an auspicious event, such as a birth or a marriage, the fathers invoked are not the father, grandfather, and great-grandfather, who are sometimes called *asrumukha*, with tearful faces, but the ancestors before them, and they are called *nandimukha*, or joyful.⁶⁷

Colebrooke⁶⁸, to whom we owe an excellent description of what a Sraddha is in modern times, took evidently the same view. 'The first set of funeral ceremonies,' he writes, 'is adapted to effect, by means of oblations, the re-embodiment of the soul of the deceased, after burning his corpse. The apparent scope of the second set is to raise his shade from this world, where it would else, according to the notions of the Hindus, continue to roam among demons and evil spirits, up to heaven, and then deify him, as it were, among the manes of departed ancestors. For this end, a Sraddha should regularly be offered to deceased on the day after the mourning expires; twelve other Sraddhas *singly* to the deceased in twelve successive months; similar obsequies at the end of the third fortnight, and also in the sixth month, and in the twelfth; and the oblation called Sapindana on the first anniversary of his decease⁶³. At this

⁶³ *A pratyabdikam ekoddishtam on the anniversary of the deceased is mentioned by Gobhila, 1. c. p. 1011.*

⁶⁴ *Gobhiliya Grihya-sutras, p. 1039.*

⁶⁵ *Sankh, Grihya, p. 83; Gobh. Grihya, p. 1025. According to some authorities the ekoddishtha is called nava, new, during ten days; navamisra, mixed, six months; and purana, old, afterwards. Gobhiliya Grihya-sutras, p. 1020.*

⁶⁶ *Gobhiliya, 1. c. p. 1032.*

⁶⁷ *Gobhiliya, 1. c. p. 1047.*

⁶⁸ *Life and Essays, ii. p. 195.*

⁶⁹ *Colebrooke adds that in most provinces the periods for these sixteen ceremonies, and for the concluding obsequies entitled Sapindana, are anticipated, and the whole is completed on the second or third day; after which they are again performed at the proper*

Sapindana Sraddha, which is the last of the ekoddishtha sraddhas, four funeral cakes are offered to the deceased and his three ancestors, that consecrated to the deceased being divided into three portions and mixed with the other three cakes. The portion retained is often offered to the deceased, and the act of union and fellowship becomes complete⁷⁰.

When this system of Sraddhas had once been started, it seems to have spread very rapidly. We soon hear of the monthly Sraddha, not only in memory of one person lately deceased, but as part of the Pitriyagna, and as obligatory, not only on householders (agnimat), but on other persons also, and, not only on the three upper castes, but even, without hymns, on Sudras,⁷¹ and as to be performed, not only on the day of New Moon, but on other days also⁷², whenever there was an opportunity. Gobhila seems to look upon the Pindapitriyagna as itself a Sraddha⁷³, and the commentator holds that, even if there are no pindas or cakes, the Brahmans ought still to be fed. This Sraddha, however, is distinguished from the other, the true Sraddha, called Anvaharya, which follows it⁷⁴, and which is properly known by the name of Parvana Sraddha.

The same difficulties which confront us when we try to form a clear conception of the character of the various ancestral ceremonies, were felt by the Brahmans themselves, as may be seen from the long discussions in the commentary on the Sraddha-kalpa⁷⁵ and from the abusive language used by Chandrakanta Tarkalankara against Raghunandana. The question with them assumes the form of what is pradhana (primary) and what is anga (secondary) in these sacrifices, and the final result arrived at is that sometimes the offering of cakes is pradhana, as in the Pindapitriyagna, sometimes the feeding

times but in honour of the whole set of progenitors instead of the deceased singly. It is this which Donner, in his learned paper on the Pindapitriyagna (p. 11), takes as the general rule.

⁷⁰ See this subject most exhaustively treated, particularly in its bearings on the law of inheritance, in Rajkumar Sarvadhikari's *Tagore Law Lectures for 1880*, p. 93.

⁷¹ *Gobhiliya Grihya-sutras*, p. 892.

⁷² *L. c.* p. 897.

⁷³ See p. 666, and p. 1008. *Grihyakarah pindapitriyagnasya sraddhatvam aha.*

⁷⁴ *Gobhila IV. 4, 3, itarad anvaharyam.* But the commentators add, *anagner amavasyasraddham, nanvaharyam.* According to *Gobhila* there ought to be the *Vaisvadeva* offering and the *Bali* offering at the end of each *Parvana-sraddha*; see *Gobhiliya Grihya-sutras*, p. 1005, but no *Vaisvadeva* at an *ekoddishtha sraddha*, *l. c.* p. 1020.

⁷⁵ *L. c.* pp. 1005-1010; *Nirayasindhu*, p. 270.

of the Brahmans only, as in the Nitya-sraddha, sometimes both, as in the Sapindikarana.

We may safely say, therefore, that not a day passed in the life of the ancient people of India on which they were not reminded of their ancestors, both near and distant, and showed their respect for them, partly by symbolic offerings to the Manes, partly by charitable gifts to deserving persons, chiefly Brahmans. These offertories varied from the simplest, such as milk and fruits, to the costliest, such as gold and jewels. The feasts given to those who were invited to officiate or assist at a Sraddha seem in some cases to have been very sumptuous⁷⁶, and what is very important, the eating of meat, which in later times was strictly forbidden in many sects, must, when the Sutras were written, have been fully recognised at these feasts, even to the killing and eating of a cow⁷⁷.

This shows that these Sraddhas, though possibly of later date than the Pitriyagnas, belong nevertheless to a very early phase of Indian life. And though much may have been changed in the outward form of these ancient ancestral sacrifices, their original solemn character has remained unchanged. Even at present, when the worship of the ancient Devas is ridiculed by many who still take part in it, the worship of the ancestors and the offering of Sraddhas have maintained much of their old sacred character. They have sometimes been compared to the 'communion' in the Christian Church, and it is certainly true that many natives speak of their funeral and ancestral ceremonies with a hushed voice and with real reverence. They alone seem still to impart to their life on earth a deeper significance and a higher prospect. I could go even a step further and express my belief, that the absence of such services for the dead and of ancestral commemorations is a real loss in our own religion. Almost every religion recognises them as tokens of a loving memory offered to a father, to a mother, or even to a child, and though in many countries they may have proved a source of superstition, there runs through them all a deep well of living human faith that ought never to be allowed to perish. The early Christian Church had to sanction the ancient prayers for the Souls of the Departed, and in more Southern countries the services on All Saints' and on All Souls' Day continue to satisfy a craving of the human heart which must be satisfied in every religion. We, in the North, shrink from these open manifestations of grief, but our hearts know often a deeper bitterness; nay, there would seem to be a higher truth than we at first imagine in the belief of the ancients that the souls of our beloved ones leave

⁷⁶ See Burnell, *The Law of Partition*, p. 31.

⁷⁷ *Kalau tavad gavalambho mamsadanam ka sraddhe nishiddham, Gobhilena tu madhyamashtakayam vastukarmani ka gavalambho vihithah, mamsakarus kanvashtakyasraddhe; Gobhiliya Grihya-sutra, ed. Chandrakanta Tarkalankara, Vignapti, p. 8.*

us no test, unless they are appeased by daily prayers, or, better still, by daily acts of goodness in remembrance of them.

But there is still another Beyond that found expression in the ancient religion of India. Besides the Devas or Gods, and besides the Pitris or Fathers, there was a third world, without which the ancient religion of India could not have become what we see it in the Veda. That third Beyond was what the poets of the Veda call the Rita, and which I believe meant originally no more than 'the straight line.' It is applied to the straight line of the sun in its daily course, to the straight line followed by day and night, to the straight line that regulates the seasons, to the straight line which, in spite of many momentary deviations, was discovered to run through the whole realm of nature. We call that Rita, that straight, direct, or right line, when we apply it in a more general sense, *the Law of Nature*; and when we apply it to the moral world, we try to express the same idea again by speaking of the *Moral Law*, the law on which our life is founded, the eternal Law of Right and Reason, or, it may be, 'that which makes for righteousness' both within us and without⁷⁸.

And thus, as a thoughtful look on nature led to the first perception of bright gods, and in the end of a God of light, as love of our parents was transfigured into piety and a belief in immortality, a recognition of the straight lines in the world without, and in the world within, was raised into the highest faith, a faith in a law that underlies everything, a law in which we may trust, whatever befall, a law which speaks within us with the divine voice of conscience, and tells us 'this is rita,' 'this is right,' 'this is true,' whatever the statutes of our ancestors, or even the voices of our bright gods, may say to the contrary.

These three Beyonds are the three revelations of antiquity; and it is due almost entirely to the discovery of the Veda that we, in this nineteenth century of ours, have been allowed to watch again these early phases of thought and religion, which had passed away long before the first beginnings of other literatures⁷⁹. In the Veda an ancient city has been laid bare before our eyes which, in the history of all other religions, is filled up with rubbish, and built over by new architects. Some of the earliest and most instructive scenes of our distant childhood have risen once more above the horizon of our memory which, until thirty or forty years ago, seemed to have vanished for ever.

⁷⁸ See *Hibbert Lectures*, new ed., pp. 243-255.

⁷⁹ In Chinese we find that the same three aspects of religion and their intimate relationship were recognised, as, for instance, when Confucius says to the Prince of Sung: 'Honour the sky (worship of Devas), reverence the Manes (worship of Pitris): if you do this sun and moon will keep their appointed time (Rita).' Happel, *Altchinesische Reichsreligion*, p. 11.

Only a few words more to indicate at least how this religious growth in India contained at the same time the germs of Indian philosophy. Philosophy in India is, what it ought to be, not the denial, but the fulfilment of religion; it is the highest religion, and the oldest name of the oldest system of philosophy in India is Vedanta, that is, the end, the goal, the highest object of the Veda.

Let us return once more to that ancient theologian who lived in the fifth century B.C., and who told us that, even before his time, all the gods had been discovered to be but three gods, the gods of the *Earth*, the gods of the *Air*, and the gods of the *Sky*, invoked under various names. The same writer tells us that in reality there is but *one* God, but he does not call him the Lord, or the Highest God, the Creator, Ruler and Preserver of all things, but he calls him Atman, THE SELF. The one Atman or Self, he says, is praised in many ways owing to the greatness of the godhead. And he then goes on to say: 'The other gods are but so many members of the one Atman, Self, and thus it has been said that the poets compose their praises according to the multiplicity of the natures of the beings whom they praise.'

It is true, no doubt, that this is the language of a philosophical theologian, not of an ancient poet. Yet these philosophical reflections belong to the fifth century before our era, if not to an earlier date; and the first germs of such thoughts may be discovered in some of the Vedic hymns also. I have quoted already from the hymns such passages as⁸⁰—'They speak of Mitra, Varuna, Agni; then he is the heavenly bird Garutmat; *that which is and is one* the poets call in various ways; they speak of Yama, Agni, Matarisvan.'

In another hymn, in which the sun is likened to a bird, we read: 'Wise poets represent by their words the bird who is one, in many ways.'⁸¹

All this is still tinged with mythology; but there are other passages from which a purer light beams upon us, as when one poet asks⁸²:

'Who saw him when he was first born, when he who has no bones bore him who has bones? Where was the breath, the blood, the Self of the world? Who went to ask this from any that knew it?'

Here, too, the expression is still helpless, but though the flesh is weak, the spirit is very willing. The expression 'He who has bones' is meant for that which has assumed consistency and form, the Visible, as opposed to that which has no bones, no body, no form, the Invisible, while 'breath, blood, and self of the world' are but so many

⁸⁰ *Rig-veda* I. 164, 46; *Hibbert Lectures*, p. 311.

⁸¹ *Rig-veda* X. 114, 5; *Hibbert Lectures*, p. 313.

⁸² *Rig-veda* I. 164, 4.

attempts at finding names and concepts for what is by necessity inconceivable, and therefore unnameable.

In the second period of Vedic literature, in the so-called Brahmanas, and more particularly in what is called the Upanishads, or the Vedanta portion, these thoughts advance to perfect clearness and definiteness. Here the development of religious thought, which took its beginning in the hymns, attains to its fulfilment. The circle becomes complete. Instead of comprehending the One by many names, the many names are now comprehended to be the One. The old names are openly discarded; even such titles as Prajapati, lord of creatures, Visvakarman, maker of all things, Dhatri, creator, are put aside as inadequate. The name now used is an expression of nothing but the purest and highest subjectiveness,—it is Atman, the Self, far more abstract than our Ego,—the Self of all things, the Self of all the old mythological gods—for they were not *mere* names, but names intended for something—lastly, it is the Self in which each individual self must find rest, must come to himself, must find his own true Self.

You may remember that I spoke to you in one of my lectures of a boy who insisted on being sacrificed by his father, and who, when he came to Yama, the ruler of the departed, was granted three boons, and who then requested, as his third boon, that Yama should tell him what became of man after death. That dialogue forms part of one of the Upanishads, it belongs to the Vedanta, the end of the Veda, the highest aim of the Veda. I shall read you a few extracts from it.

Yama, the King of the Departed, says:

‘Men who are fools, dwelling in ignorance, though wise in their own sight, and puffed up with vain knowledge, go round and round, staggering to and fro, like blind led by the blind.

‘The future never rises before the eyes of the careless child, deluded by the delusions of wealth. *This* is the world, he thinks; there is no other; thus he falls again and again under my sway (the sway of death).

‘The wise, who by means of meditating on his *Self*, recognises the Old (the old man within) who is difficult to see, who has entered into darkness, who is hidden in the cave, who dwells in the abyss, as God, he indeed leaves joy and sorrow far behind.

‘That Self, the Knower, is not born, it dies not; it came from nothing, it never became anything. The Old man is unborn, from everlasting; he is not killed, though the body be killed.

‘That Self is smaller than small, greater than great; hidden in the heart of the creature. A man who has no more desires and no more griefs, sees the majesty of the Self by the grace of the creator.

‘Though sitting still, he walks far; though lying down, he goes everywhere. Who save myself is able to know that God, who rejoices, and rejoices not?

'That Self cannot be gained by the Veda; nor by the understanding, nor by much learning. He whom the Self chooses, by him alone the Self can be gained. The Self chooses him as his own.

'But he who has not first turned away from his wickedness, who is not calm and subdued, or whose mind is not at rest, he can never obtain the Self, even by knowledge.

'No mortal lives by the breath that goes up and by the breath that goes down. We live by another, in whom both repose.

'Well then, I shall tell thee this mystery, the eternal word (Brahman), and what happens to the *Self*, after reaching death.

'Some are born again, as living beings, others enter into stocks and stones, according to their work, and according to their knowledge.

'But he, the Highest Person, who wakes in us while we are asleep, shaping one lovely sight after another, he indeed is called the Light, he is called Brahman, he alone is called the Immortal. All words are founded on it, and no one goes beyond. *This is that.*

'As the one fire, after it has entered the world, though one, becomes different according to what it burns, thus the One Self within all things, becomes different, according to whatever it enters, but it exists also apart.

'As the sun, the eye of the world, is not contaminated by the external impurities seen by the eye, thus the One Self within all things is never contaminated by the sufferings of the world, being himself apart.

'There is one eternal thinker, thinking non-eternal thoughts; he, though one, fulfils the desires of many. The wise who perceive Him within their Self, to them belongs eternal life, eternal peace⁸³.

'Whatever there is, the whole world, when gone forth (from Brahman), trembles in his breath. That Brahman is a great terror, like a drawn sword. Those who know it, become immortal.

'He (Brahman) cannot be reached by speech, by mind, or by the eye. He cannot be apprehended, except by him who says, *He is.*

'When all desires that dwell in the heart cease, then the mortal becomes immortal, and obtains Brahman.

'When all the fetters of the heart here on earth are broken, when all that binds us to this life is undone, then the mortal becomes immortal:—here my teaching ends.'

This is what is called Vedanta, the Veda-end, the end of the Veda, and this is the religion or the philosophy, whichever you like to call it, that has lived on from about 500 B.C. to the present day. If the people of India can be said to have now any system of religion at all,—apart from their ancestral sacrifices and their Sraddhas, and apart from mere caste-observances,—it is to be found in the Vedanta philosophy, the leading tenets of which are known to some extent in

⁸³ See also *Ruskin, Sesame*, p. 63.

every village⁸⁴. That great revival of religion, which was inaugurated by Raja Ram-Mohun Roy, and is now known as the Brahma Samaj, under the leadership of my noble friend Keshub Chunder Sen, was chiefly founded on the Upanishads, and was Vedantic in spirit. There is, in fact, an unbroken continuity between the most modern and the most ancient phases of Hindu thought, extending over more than three thousand years.

To the present day India acknowledges no higher authority in matters of religion, ceremonial, customs, and law than the *Veda*, and so long as India is India, nothing will extinguish that ancient spirit of Vedantism which is breathed by every Hindu from his earliest youth, and pervades in various forms the prayers even of the idolater, the speculations of the philosopher, and the proverbs of the beggar.

For purely practical reasons therefore,—I mean for the very practical object of knowing something of the secret springs which determine the character, the thoughts and deeds, of the lowest as well as of the highest amongst the people in India,—an acquaintance with their religion, which is founded on the *Veda*, and with their philosophy, which is founded on the *Vedanta*, is highly desirable.

It is easy to make light of this, and to ask, as some statesmen have asked, even in Europe, What has religion, or what has philosophy, to do with politics? In India, in spite of all appearances to the contrary, and notwithstanding the indifference on religious matters so often paraded before the world by the Indians themselves, religion, and philosophy too, are great powers, still. Read the account that has lately been published of two Indian statesmen, the administrators of two first-class states in Saurashtra, Junagadh and Bhavnagar, Gokulaji and Gaurisankara,⁸⁵ and you will see whether the *Vedanta* is still a moral and a political power in India or not.

⁸⁴ Major Jacob, *Manual of Hindu Pantheism, Preface*.

⁸⁵ *Life and Letters of Gokulaji Sampattirama Zala and his views of the Vedanta*, by Manassukharama Suryarama Tripathi, Bombay, 1881.

As a young man Gokulaji, the son of a good family, learnt Persian and Sanskrit. His chief interest in life, in the midst of a most successful political career, was the 'Vedanta.' A little insight, we are told, into this knowledge turned his heart to higher objects, promising him freedom from grief, and blessedness, the highest aim of all. This was the turning-point of his inner life. When the celebrated Vedanti anchorite, Ra Bava, visited Junagadh, Gokulaji became his pupil. When another anchorite, Paramahansa, Sachchidananda, passed through Junagadh on a pilgrimage to Girnar, Gokulaji was regularly initiated in the secrets of the Vedanta. He soon became highly proficient in it, and through the whole course of his life, whether in power or in disgrace, his belief in the doctrines of

But I claim even more for the Vedanta, and I recommend its study . . . to all true students of philosophy. It will bring before them a view of life, different from all other views of life which are placed before us in the History of Philosophy. You saw how behind all the Devas or gods, the authors of the Upanishads discovered the Atman or Self. Of that Self they predicated three things only, that it is, that it perceives, and that it enjoys eternal bliss. All other predicates were negative: it is not this, it is not that—it is beyond anything that we can conceive or name.

But that Self, that Highest Self, the Paramatman, could be discovered after a severe moral and intellectual discipline only, and those who had not yet discovered it, were allowed to worship lower gods, and to employ more poetical names to satisfy their human wants. Those who knew the other gods to be but names or persons—*personae* or masks, in the true sense of the word—*pratikas*, as they call them in Sanskrit—knew also that those who worshipped these names or persons, worshipped in truth the Highest Self, though ignorantly. This is a most characteristic feature in the religious history of India. Even in the Bhagavadgita, a rather popular and exoteric exposition of Vedantic doctrines, the Supreme Lord or Bhagavat himself is introduced as saying: 'Even those who worship idols, worship me.'⁸⁶

But that was not all. As behind the names of Agni, Indra, and Prajapati, and behind all the mythology of nature, the ancient sages of India had discovered the Atman—let us call it the objective Self—they perceived also behind the veil of the body, behind the senses, behind the mind, and behind our reason (in fact behind the mythology of the soul, which we often call psychology), another Atman, or the subjective Self. That Self, too, was to be discovered by a severe moral and intellectual discipline only, and those who wished to find

the Vedanta supported him, and made him, in the opinion of English statesmen, the model of what a native statesman ought to be.

⁸⁶ Kuenen discovers a similar idea in the words placed in the mouth of Jehovah by the prophet Malachi, i. 14: 'For I am a great King, and my name is feared among the heathen.' 'The reference,' he says, 'is distinctly to the adoration already offered to Yahweh by the people, whenever they serve their own gods with true reverence and honest zeal. Even in Deuteronomy the adoration of these other gods by the nations is represented as a dispensation of Yahweh. Malachi goes a step further, and accepts their worship as a tribute which in reality falls to Yahweh,—to Him, the Only True. Thus the opposition between Yahweh and the other gods, and afterwards between the one true God and the imaginary gods, makes room here for the still higher conception that the adoration of Yahweh is the essence and the truth of all religion.' *Hibbert Lectures*, p. 181.

it, who wished to know, not themselves, but their Self, had to cut far deeper than the senses, or the mind, or the reason, or the ordinary Ego. All these too were mere Devas, bright apparitions—mere names—yet names meant for something. Much that was most dear, that had seemed for a time their very self, had to be surrendered, before they could find the Self of Selves, the Old Man, the Looker-on, a subject independent of all personality, an existence independent of all life.

When that point had been reached, then the highest knowledge began to dawn, the Self within (the Pratyagatman) was drawn towards the Highest Self (the Paramatman), it found its true self in the Highest Self, and the oneness of the subjective with the objective Self was recognised as underlying all reality, as the dim dream of religion,—as the pure light of philosophy.

This fundamental idea is worked out with systematic completeness in the Vedanta philosophy, and no one who can appreciate the lessons contained in Berkeley's philosophy, will read the Upanishads and the Brahma-sutras and their commentaries without feeling a richer and a wiser man.

I admit that it requires patience, discrimination, and a certain amount of self-denial before we can discover the grains of solid gold in the dark mines of Eastern philosophy. It is far easier and far more amusing for shallow critics to point out what is absurd and ridiculous in the religion and philosophy of the ancient world than for the earnest student to discover truth and wisdom under strange disguises. Some progress, however, has been made, even during the short span of life that we can remember. The Sacred Books of the East are no longer a mere butt for the invectives of missionaries or the sarcasms of philosophers. They have at last been recognised as historical documents, aye, as the most ancient documents in the history of the human mind, and as palæontological records of an evolution that begins to elicit wider and deeper sympathies than the nebular formation of the planet on which we dwell for a season, or the organic development of that chrysalis which we call man.

If you think that I exaggerate, let me read you in conclusion what one of the greatest philosophical critics—and certainly not a man given to admiring the thoughts of others—says of the Vedanta, and more particularly of the Upanishads. Schopenhauer writes:

'In the whole world there is no study so beneficial and so elevating as that of the Upanishads. It has been the solace of my life—it will be the solace of my death.'⁸⁷

I have thus tried, so far as it was possible in one course of lectures, to give you some idea of ancient India, of its ancient literature, and, more particularly, of its ancient religion. My object was, not merely

⁸⁷ *Sacred Books of the East*, vol. i, *The Upanishads*, translated by M. Muller; Introduction, p. lxi.

to place names and facts before you, these you can find in many published books, but, if possible, to make you see and feel the general human interests that are involved in that ancient chapter of the history of the human race. I wished that the Veda and its religion and philosophy should not only seem to you curious or strange, but that you should feel that there was in them something that concerns ourselves, something of our own intellectual growth, some recollections, as it were, of our own childhood, or at least of the childhood of our own race. I feel convinced that, placed as we are here in this life, we have lessons to learn from the Veda, quite as important as the lessons we learn at school from Homer and Virgil, and lessons from the Vedanta quite as instructive as the systems of Plato or Spinoza.

THE END



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