

Adams William Henry Davenport

**Curiosities of Superstition, and
Sketches of Some Unrevealed
Religions**



William Adams

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Curiosities of Superstition, and Sketches of Some Unrevealed Religions

CHAPTER I. *BUDDHISM: ITS ORIGIN AND CEREMONIES*

Prayer-Wheels of the Buddhists

Travelling on the borders of Chinese Tartary, in the country of the Lamas or Buddhists, Miss Gordon Cumming remarks that it was strange, every now and again, to meet some respectable-looking workman, twirling little brass cylinders, only about six inches in length, which were incessantly spinning round and round as they walked along the road. What could they be? Not pedometers, not any of the trigonometrical instruments with which the officers of the Ordnance Survey go about armed? No; she was informed that they were prayer-wheels, and that turning them was just about equivalent to the telling of beads, which in Continental lands workmen may often be seen counting as homeward along the road they plod their weary way.

The telling of beads seems to the Protestant a superfluous piece of formalism: what then are we to think of prayer by machinery? The prayers, or rather invocations, to Buddha – the Buddhists never pray, in the Christian sense – are all closely written upon strips of cloth or paper; the same sentence being repeated some thousands of times. These strips are placed inside a cylinder, revolving on a long spindle, the end of which is the handle. From the wind-cylinder depends a small lump of metal, which, whirling round, communicates the necessary impetus to the little machine, so that it rotates with the slightest possible effort, and continues to grind any required number of acts of worship, while the owner, with the plaything in his hand, carries on his daily work. His religion requires that he should be all his time immersed in holy contemplation of the perfections of Buddha, but to a busy man no such self-absorption is possible. He is content, therefore, to say the sentences aloud at the beginning and end of his devotions, and in the interval twirls slowly, while a tiny bell marks each rotation, and reminds him if he should unconsciously quicken his pace.

Tennyson finely speaks of Prayer as that by which

“The whole round world is every way
Bound by gold chains around the feet of God;”

but no such efficacy can be ascribed to the cylinders of brass, copper, or gold, which are fashionable among the Buddhists. Yet we must not condemn too unreservedly: Prayer, even among Christians, is apt to degenerate into a dull, mechanical uniformity, and to become scarcely less perfunctory than that which the Tibetans grind out of their prayer-machine.

In a Lama temple, Miss Gordon Cumming once saw a colossal prayer-wheel, which might almost have sufficed for the necessities of a nation. It was turned by a great iron crank, which acted as a handle. The cylinder measured about twelve feet in height, and six to eight feet in diameter. Circular bands of gold and vermilion adorned it, each band bearing the well-known Buddhist ascription, or invocation, “To the jewel on the Lotus.” Of this inscription, multiplied on strips of paper and cloth, the cylinder was full, and each time that it revolved on its axis, the devotee was accredited with having uttered the pious invocation just as often as it was repeated within the cylinder. The whole history of Superstition offers scarcely any fact more curious or suggestive than this method of prayer

by machinery; and that such a grotesque extravagance should have emanated from so subtle and metaphysical a faith as Buddhism is an anomaly not easily to be explained.

Each votary who is too poor to possess a prayer-wheel of his own, attends the temple, does homage to the head Lama, receives his benediction, and then, squatting in front of the great wheel, he turns the crank on behalf of himself and his family. But if there be a considerable number of worshippers, the priest himself works the handle, that all may participate simultaneously in the act of prayer.

The use of these machines is traced back for fully fourteen centuries, and is supposed to have originated in the belief that it was a meritorious act, and a patent cure for sin, to be continually reading or reciting portions of the sacred books of Buddha. But as many of the people could not read, a substitute had to be found, and it came to be considered sufficient if they turned over the rolled manuscripts which embodied the invaluable precepts. And as a vast amount of time and trouble was saved by this process, a further simplification became possible and popular, – the invention of wheels termed *Tehu-Chor*, – great cylindrical bands full of prayers; a cord being attached to the base of the band, which, when the cord was pulled, twirled like a children's toy. Prayer-wheels of this kind are set up in all public places in Tibet, so that the poor who do not possess little pocket Wheels of Devotion may not lose their chance of accumulating merit. In some of the monasteries the rows of small cylinders are so arranged, that the priest, or any passer-by can set them all in simultaneous motion, by just drawing his hand along them.

According to Miss Cumming, who is confirmed by other travellers, the cylinders vary in size, from tiny hand-mills, about as big as a policeman's rattle, to huge machines, eight or ten feet in diameter, worked by a heavy iron crank, or sometimes by wind or water power. The wind prayer-mills are turned by wings, which, like the cylinder, are plentifully covered with prayers. The water-mills are placed over streams, so as to dispense with human aid, and allow the running water to turn them for the general welfare of the village. Through the cylinder passes a wooden axle, which is fastened to a horizontal wheel, whose cogs are turned diagonally to the water.

“One such group of little mills we noticed,” says Miss Cumming,¹ “set in a clear stream half-way between Rarung and Pangi, a lively, rapid river, rushing headlong down the mountain side to join the Sutlej. Having never then heard of prayer-mills, we assumed them to be for corn, as perhaps they were. At all events, we passed them without inspection, to our subsequent infinite regret. These wheels rotate with the action of the water, and so turn the cylinder, which must invariably stand upright. Sometimes several of these are placed almost across the stream, and the rudest form of temple is built over them.

“They are so placed that the wheel must invariably turn from right to left, following the course of the sun; to invert that course would not only involve ill-luck, but would amount to being a sin. Hence the exceeding unwillingness of the people we met to let us tend their little wheels, knowing from sad experience that the English sahibs rather enjoy the fun of turning them the wrong way, and so undoing the efficacy of all their morning's work.

“Some of the little pocket cylinders are very beautifully wrought; some are even inlaid with precious stones. I saw one great beauty which I coveted exceedingly. The owner would on no account sell it. I returned to the temple next morning, wishing at least to make a drawing of it, but I think he mistrusted me, for he and his plaything had both vanished, and I had to be content with a much simpler one of bronze, inlaid with copper. The people have the greatest reluctance to sell even the ugliest old mills. They cling to them as lovingly as you might do to your dear old Bible; but, as I said before, not merely from the charm of association, but from a dread lest a careless hand should turn them against the sun, and so change their past acts of merit into positive sin. So there was a great deal

¹ Miss Gordon Cumming, “From the Hebrides to the Himalayas,” ii. 226, 227.

of talk, and many irons in the fire, before I was allowed to purchase two of these, at a price which would have supplied half the village with new ones.”

The prayer-mill sometimes contains the Tibetan prayer, or litany, for the six classes of living creatures, namely, the souls in heaven, the evil spirits in the air, men, animals, souls in purgatory, and souls in hell; but, as a rule, the Lama worship begins and ends in the famous inscription to which we have already alluded — *Aum Mani Padmi Hoong* (to the jewel in the lotus.) These mystic words are raised in embossed letters on the exterior of the cylinder, and are closely written on strips of paper inside. All the sacred places are covered with them; the face of the rock, the walls of the temple; just as the Alhambra glitters with its *azulejos*, its blazoned inscriptions from the Kúran.

This mystic sentence is composed as follows: *Aum* or *Om*, equivalent to the Hebrew Jah or Jehovah, the most glorious title of the Almighty; *Mani*, the jewel, one of Buddha’s appellations; *Padmi*, the lotus, in allusion to his lotus-throne; and *Hoong*, synonymous with *Amen*. The Buddhists regard this “six-syllabled” charm as a talisman of never-failing efficacy; but by some of the sects it is more or less varied. For instance: the Chinese Fo-ists read it as *Aum-mi-to-fuh*, which is also one of Buddha’s titles; and every devout Fo-ist aims at repeating it at least three hundred thousand times in the course of his life. Some of their priests will shut themselves up in the temples for months at a time, and devote themselves to the dreary task of repetition, hour after hour, day and night. Sometimes, ten or twelve devotees will voluntarily sequester themselves, and continue all day to cry aloud in chorus; and at night they undertake the task successively, one person droning through the monotonous chant while the others sleep. Thus do they think to be heard for their much speaking! Similar excesses of formalism, however, are recorded in the history of mediæval Christianity, – in the biographies of saints and ascetics who have substituted for a practical Christianity and the active performance of social duties the dreary vanity of an unprofitable solitude, spent in the discharge of useless penances.

The Buddhist prayer which is consecrated to Buddha as the Chakravarta Rajah, or King of the Wheel, proves, on examination, to be closely related to that Sun-worship which prevailed in the early ages of the world. The wheel is, in many creeds, the symbol of the sun’s chariot, that is, of the revolution of the heavenly bodies. In a sculpture, nearly two thousand years old, on the Bilsah Tepe, Buddha is represented simply by a wheel, overshadowed by the mystic *chattah*, or golden umbrella, which is a common emblem of his power. His worshippers are represented as making their offerings to the King of the Wheel. “This sacred Wheel of the Law, or Wheel of Faith, is found again and again among the fain and Buddhist sculptures in the caves of Ellora and Ajunta, in most cases projecting in front of Buddha’s Lotus-Throne. In one instance an astronomical table is carved above the wheel. In another it is supported on either side by a stag, supposed to represent the fleetness wherewith the sun runs his daily circuit, ‘going forth from the uttermost part of the heaven, and running about unto the end of it again.’”

The Hindu Temples

Visiting the Temples at Hardwar, one of the sacred cities of India, Miss Gordon Cumming remarks upon the number of their hideous idols, painted and carved, their multitudinous brass bells, their brazen horns, their sacred courts all covered with elaborate carving, and their mythological sculptures.

She says: – “I frankly confess that there is something startling in the rapidity with which one gets quite at home amongst all this paraphernalia of heathenism, and how very soon idolatry ceases to shock the mind, and becomes merely a curious study with picturesque adjuncts. Six months previously the sight of a veritable temple with its hideous idols and devout worshippers was a thing from which one shrank in shuddering pity.” But she soon became a connoisseur, and “lounged from one temple to another, inspecting jewels and exquisite stone carving, and anything wonderful the priests had to show, and quite forgot to be shocked, it was all so perfectly natural, and seemed so entirely in keeping

with the tastes of the people.” In this remark there is a wonderful *naïveté*; for it may reasonably be supposed that the tastes of the people would be in accord with a religion which, during its career of two thousand years, must have exercised so great an influence in forming them!

In some of the temples, according to the same writer, there are sacred bulls, carved in white marble and adorned with costly necklaces. In others the attendant priests spend the whole day in pouring single drops of precious oil on holy pebbles brought from the Nerbudda and other sacred streams, and here arranged in little trays. Amongst the privileged inhabitants are the monkeys, who frolic about incessantly with their babies in their arms, or sitting on their backs, and twining their little arms round the parental necks.

The ceremonies in the different temples are, on the whole, very similar; and the following description, taken from the *Rão Mālā*, applies, except in minor details, to all.

The day is marked by five services: the first at sunrise, when bells are rung in the temple, and drums or conch-shells sounded, to rouse the Du, or god, from his slumbers. After performing copious ablutions, the officiating priest enters the holy place, and swings before the idol a lamp with five or seven branches. An hour or two later, the Du is attired in raiment appropriate to the season. He wears a quilted coat in cold weather, and has a lighted brazier placed beside him; whereas, in hot weather, he is anointed with sandal-wood dust and water, clothed in fine linen, and decked out with gems and flowers. Placed close to a cool fountain, he is assiduously fanned by his attendants. In rainy weather, he is wrapped about in scarlet cloth and shawls. When he is dressed, a light breakfast of rice and milk is served up, and his votaries perform “the sixteen acts of worship.” At noon a third service takes place. The Du is again rubbed with oil of sandal-wood, or sandal-dust and water, and adorned with fresh flowers. The lamps are trimmed; incense is burned; and his dinner is set before him: after which he is supposed to indulge in his noonday sleep, and profound silence is maintained throughout the temple.

At three in the afternoon a drum beats, and the god awakes! His attendants hasten to serve fruits and sweetmeats, and perform various games for his amusement. At sunset he is enshrined: his feet are basted, he is sprinkled with water, his mouth is washed, and another offering is made of sandal-wood dust, and flowers, and incense. He is once more clothed; an elaborate dinner is spread before him; betel leaves are presented; and again the many-branched candlestick is waved, while all the votaries present for the second time perform “the sixteen acts of worship.”

The last service takes place at night, when the image is supposed to sup on bread and water. After receiving the usual oblations of incense and flowers, he is undressed, and if he be movable, put to bed, or if not, is warmly covered with shawls and quilts.

Not the least remarkable objects in the Hindu temples are their great statues of bulls in marble or in metal. It is worthy of note that “in the great Brazen Laver, which Solomon was commanded to make for the use of the Temple at Jerusalem, the symbols selected for the adornment of that consecrated Molten Sea should have been those which in later ages were to hold so prominent a place in the symbolism of faiths so widely spread as those of Brahma and Buddha. That huge laver was supported by twelve oxen of cast metal, three looking to each point of the compass, while the brim of the great sea itself was all wrought with flowers of lilies, much the same as the pattern of lotus or water-lily with which the shrine of Buddha is invariably edged.” The bull is another symbol which seems to connect the creed of the Hindu with the old nature-worship; for the vernal equinox takes place when the sun enters the sign of Taurus, and this event was always and everywhere a signal for feasting and rejoicing.

But, as Max Müller observes, the ancient religion of the Aryan inhabitants of India started, like the religion of Greece and Rome, of the Germans, Slavs, and Celts, with a simple and intelligible mythological phraseology.² In the Veda, the names of all the so-called gods or Devas undisguisedly

² Max Müller, *Buddhism and Buddhist Pilgrims*, pp. 5, 6.

betray their original physical character and meaning. Under the name of Agni (ignis) was praised and invoked the fire; the earth by that of Prithvî (the brave); the sky by the name of Dyu (Zeus, Jupiter), and afterwards of Indra; the firmament and the waters by the name of Οὐρανός. Under many appellations was the sun invoked, such as Sûrya, Savitri, Vishnu, or Mitra; and the dawn by the titles of Ushas, Urvasî, Ahanâ, and Sûrya. Nor was the moon forgotten: for though not often mentioned under its usual name of Kandra, reference is made to it under its more sacred appellation of Soma; and a particular denomination was reserved for each of its phases. There is hardly any fact of nature, if it could impress the human mind in any way with the ideas of a higher power, of order, eternity, or beneficence, – whether the woods, or the rivers, or the trees, or the mountains, – without a name and representative in the early Hindu Pantheon. No doubt there existed in the human mind, from the very beginning, something, whether we call it a suspicion, an innate idea, an intuition, or a sense of the Divine. What distinguishes man from the rest of the animal creation is chiefly his ineradicable feeling of dependence and reliance upon some higher power; that consciousness of bondage, from which the very name of “religion” was derived. “It is He that hath made us, and not we ourselves.” The presence of that power was felt everywhere, and nowhere more clearly and strongly than in the rising and setting of the sun, in the change of day and night, of spring and winter, of birth and death. But although the Divine Presence was felt everywhere, it was impossible, in that early period of thought, and with a language incapable as yet of defining anything but material objects, to conceive the idea of God in its purity and fulness, or to assign to it an adequate and worthy expression.

It must also be remembered that the influence of the genius and forces of Nature would necessarily be greater in an age when the human mind was occupied by few objects of thought, than now when it ranges over the whole world of art and science. Moreover, to the eye of ignorance everything seems large and portentous, or dim and inscrutable. The fire from heaven, the reverberating thunder, the gale that crashed down the mountain ravines and felled great trees before it, the planetary bodies steadily revolving in their courses, the stream with its glow and its ripple, the dense shadows of the haunted forest, the recurring rush and roll of the sea, – all these were things which for early man had a constant novelty and strangeness, and seemed incessantly to claim his reverent consideration. He could not account for them: whether a bane or a delight they were equally unintelligible. They represented, therefore, some Power which he could regard only with awe and reverence. And of that Power the sun would necessarily be the chief type and symbol. All life and love seemed dependent upon it. The trees throve, and the flowers bloomed, and the banks rippled, and the birds sang, and the harvests ripened, through the sun. It was the source of light and heat, of the vigour and activity of nature. While it shone men’s hearts leaped with joy, and the wheels of labour revolved with pleasant toil; but when it disappeared, and the darkness usurped the heavens, the spirits sank, and humanity felt in the change of scene a presentiment and presage of the darkness of death. All vitality, all motion centred in the sun. “It was like a deep furrow,” says Max Müller, “which that heavenly luminary drew, in its silent procession from east to west, over the fallow mind of the gazing multitude; and in the impression left there by the first rising and setting of the sun, there lay the dark seed of a faith in a more than human being, the first intimation of a life without beginning, of a world without end.” Who can wonder that the Chaldean, and the Celt, alike ascended to the high places, and paid their worship of symbolic fires to the great fountain of life and light, the central force of the universe? Who can wonder that all the Aryan tribes made it, so to speak, the nucleus of their religious systems? The Hindu peasant, centuries ago, addressed it in his heart in much the same language which Gawain Douglas afterwards employed. As its glorious orb rose above the gleaming horizon, he sent forth to it a message of welcome:

“Welcome, the lord of light and lamp of day;
Welcome, fosterer of tender herbis green;
Welcome, quickener of flourished flowers’ sheen;

Welcome, support of every root and vein;
Welcome, comfort of all kind fruits and grain;
Welcome, the bird's green beild upon the brier;
Welcome, master and ruler of the year;
Welcome, welfare of husbands at the ploughs;
Welcome, repairer of woods, trees, and boughs;
Welcome, depainter of the bloomit meads;
Welcome, the life of everything that spreads.”

And because it was all this, and more, the Hindu saw in it something greater than a mere luminary, – a planetary body; he endowed it with Divine attributes, he made it a god, he gave it his worship, and by an elaborate symbolism kept it ever before him.

A necessary consequence of this deification of the sun was the deification of the other bodies that shared with him the firmament; but as they were inferior in splendour and utility, they naturally became recognized as inferior gods. And when once the religious feeling of humanity had gone thus far, its further development became only a question of time. The homage given to the stars was soon extended to the winds and streams and groves. A legion of gods sprang into existence, and for a while they seemed to satisfy the needs and aspirations of humanity. But as the thoughts of men expanded, as their intellect ripened with the ages, and grew strong enough to doubt, and bold enough to question the conclusions of the common faith, a revolt took place against “the contradictions of a mythological phraseology, though it had been hallowed by sacred customs and traditions.” Men grew tired of so complex and cumbrous a religious system, and having observed a definite fundamental unity of nature in spite of the diversity of its operations, they came to believe in a similar unity of the Divine Power. The idea of a supreme authority once entertained, men soon understood that supremacy meant oneness; that if there were a God over all, He must be one and indivisible. One of the earliest proclamations of this sublime truth is found in the Rig-Veda, which says:³—

“That which is one the sages speak of in many ways – they call it Agni, Yama, Malarisvan.”

And again:⁴—

“In the beginning there came the Source of golden light – He was the only true Lord of all that is – He stablished the earth and this sky: – Who is God to whom we shall offer our sacrifice?

“He who gives life, He who gives strength; whose blessing all the bright gods desire; whose shadow is immortality; whose shadow is death: – Who is the God to whom we shall offer our sacrifice?

“He who through His power is the only 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?

“He whose power these snowy mountains, whose power 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?

“He through whom the sky is bright and the earth firm – He through whom heaven was stablished – nay, the highest heaven – He who measured out the light in the air: – Who is the God to whom we shall offer our sacrifice?

“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?

“Wherever the mighty water-clouds went, where they placed the reed and lit the fire, thence even He, who is the only life of the bright gods: – Who is the God to whom we shall offer our sacrifice?

“He, who of His might looked even over the water-clouds, the clouds which gave strength and lit the sacrifice, He *who is God above all gods*: – Who is the God to whom we shall offer our sacrifice?

³ Rig-Veda, i. 164, 46.

⁴ Rig-Veda, x. 121, by Max Müller.

“May He not destroy us – He the creator of the earth; or He, the righteous, who created Heaven; He who also created the bright and mighty waters: – Who is the God to whom we shall offer our sacrifice?”

The creed of a plurality of gods was one that carried in itself the seeds of its destruction. But there was another cause of weakness in their mortal attributes. Deriving their existence from the life of nature, they were subject to the accidents which that life involved. Thus, the sun at noonday might glow with splendour, but at night it was conquered by the shadows, and in winter it seemed to yield to some stronger Power. The moon waxed and waned, and was frequently eclipsed. As nature is subject to change, so also must be the gods that represent its forces and aspects. Such instability, such inherent weakness could not long satisfy the human mind; having risen to the height of the idea of one God, it next demanded that that God should be immutable. What rest, what contentment would it find in the supposition of deities as changeful as the winds? Tossed about by the currents of passion and feeling, buffeted by adverse circumstances, the soul yearns intensely for something fixed, something absolute, something unaffected by vicissitude, and finds it in the Divine Being, the same to-day as yesterday, and the same to-morrow as to-day.

These two opposite principles did not come into immediate collision; the priests of heathendom laboured long and earnestly to avert such a catastrophe. In Greece they succeeded by transferring the mortal or changeable element from “the gods” to “the heroes.”⁵ The human details in the characters and lives of Zeus and Apollon were transferred to the demi-gods or heroes represented as the sons or favourites of the gods. The two-fold character of Herakles as a god and a hero is recognized even by Herodotus; and indeed, some of the epithets applied to him sufficiently indicate his solar and originally divine personality. But to make some of the solar myths of which Herakles was the centre intelligible and conceivable, it became needful to depict Herakles as a mere human being, and to raise him to the seat of the Immortals only after he had endured toils and sufferings incompatible with the dignity of an Olympian divinity.

In Peru the same treatment was adopted, but with different results. A thinking, or, as he was called, a free-thinking Inca, remarked that the sun’s perpetual travelling – he knew nothing, of course, of the Copernican theory – was a sign of servitude, and he threw doubts on the divine nature of aught so restless as the great luminary appeared to him to be. These doubts led to a tradition, which, even if unhistorical was not wholly untrue, that in Peru had existed an earlier worship – that of an Invisible Deity, the Creator of the World – Pachacamac.

“In Greece, also, there are signs of a similar craving after the ‘Unknown God.’ A supreme God was wanted, and Zeus, the stripling of Creta, was raised to that rank. He became God above all gods – *ἁπάντων κύριος*, as Pindar calls him. Yet more was wanted than a mere Zeus; and then a supreme Fate or Spell was imagined before which all the gods, and even Zeus, had to bow. And even this Fate was not allowed to remain supreme, and there was something in the destinies of man which was called *ὑπέρομον* or ‘beyond Fate.’ The most awful solution, however, of the problem belongs to Teutonic mythology. Here, also, some heroes were introduced; but their death was only the beginning of the final catastrophe. ‘All gods must die.’ Such is the last word of that religion which had grown up in the forests of Germany, and found a last refuge among the glaciers and volcanoes of Iceland. The death of Sigurd, the descendant of Odin, could not avert the death of Balder, the son of Odin, and the death of Balder was soon to be followed by the death of Odin himself, and of all the immortal gods.”

Such a catastrophe was inevitable, so that Prometheus, the man of forethought, could safely predict the fall of Zeus.⁶

A similar issue was worked out in India, but with this difference; that the seeming triumph of reason threatened to end in the destruction of all religious belief. At the outset no vehement

⁵ The thought in this paragraph, and several of the expressions, are from Max Müller.

⁶ So in Shelley’s lyrical drama of “Prometheus Unbound:” —

contention took place. On the basis of the old mythology arose two new formations, – the Brahmanical philosophy and the Brahmanical ceremonial; the former opening up all avenues of philosophical inquiry, the latter immuring religious sentiment and sympathy within the narrowest possible barriers. Both, however, claimed to find their origin and antiquity in the sacred book of the Veda.

It was in the sixteenth or fifteenth century before Christ that the Brahmans, a branch of the white Aryans, passed into Hindustan from the north-west, and mixed with a more numerous race of coloured and barbarous aborigines. Among their immigrants the sacerdotal and the royal or noble classes already occupied an authoritative and a distinct position; and soon after their settlement in India, the lower classes, by a natural process, sank into the markedly inferior condition of the aborigines. Thus was established a singularly rigorous system of caste, – the priesthood and the aristocracy combining to oppress and keep down the two inferior orders of the Brahmans and the aborigines. Intermarriage was strictly forbidden, and every device adopted which could be made useful in strengthening and perpetuating the class-distinction.

This revolution in the social world assisted the revolution in the religious; and the educated classes rapidly abandoned their nature worship in favour of the idea of an infinite and everlasting Godhead, which soared far above the feeblenesses and sins of humanity. To become one with this Godhead by throwing off the personality linked with a mind that was mean and miserable, thenceforth constituted the religious aspiration of the Brahman. And in attaining this object he was instructed to seek the help of the Brahmanical priesthood; nay, he was taught that without that help he would never succeed, and for this purpose a complex and comprehensive ceremonial was enjoined upon him. From his cradle to his grave it dogged his footsteps. Put forward as a stay and support, it was really a clog, an encumbrance. Not an event in his life could take place for which a formula of praise or prayer was not invented. Thanksgiving and sacrifice were alike minutely regulated. For the benefit of the inferior castes the old Pantheon of gods and demons had been retained, and the priesthood allotted to each his share of the worshipper's offerings and oblations. Each was represented as insisting so strongly on certain observances, and punishing so heavily any neglect or violation of them, that the votary feared to approach their shrine unless under the protection and guidance of their priests. Otherwise he might unwittingly rush into all kinds of sins. They alone knew what food might be eaten, what dress might be worn, what god might be addressed, what sacrifice paid. An error in pronunciation, a mistake about clarified butter, an unauthorised arrangement of raiment or hair, might involve the unassisted worshipper in pains and penalties of the most awful character. Never was so complete and absolute a ceremonial system known as that by which the Hindu priesthood obtained an entire mastery over the Hindu people. Never was any law more minute in its provisions, or more Draconic in the severity with which it punished their violation.

Yet, strange to say, this ceremonial did not interfere with liberty of thought. Any amount of heresy was compatible with its observance. A man might think as he liked so long as he complied with its various conditions. In some of the Brahmanical schools of thought the names of the devas or gods were never heard; in others their existence was ignored, was virtually contradicted. Thus, one philosophical system maintained the existence of a single Supreme Being, and asserted that everything else which seemed to exist was but a dream and an illusion which might and would be dispelled by a true knowledge of the One God. Another contended for two principles, – first, a Mind, subjective and self-existent; second, Matter endowed with qualities; and explained that the world with its cloud and sunshine, its sorrows and joys, was the result of the subjective self, reflected in the mirror of Matter, and that the freedom of the soul could be secured only by diverting the gaze from the shows and phantasms of Nature, and becoming absorbed in the knowledge of the true and absolute self. A third system allowed the existence of atoms, and referred every effect, including the elements and the mind, gods, men, and animals to their fortuitous concourse. This was identical with the Lucretian system, which in its turn was related to the Epicurean. Hence it has been said that the history of the philosophy of India is an abridgment of the history of philosophy. Each of these systems was traced

back to the sacred books of the Vedas, Brâhmanas and Upanishads; and those who believed in any one of them was considered as orthodox as the most devout worshipper of Agni, – if the latter were saved by works and faith, the former was saved by faith and knowledge, – a distinction not unknown in the Christian philosophy.⁷

Out of this condition of the Hindu mind arose Buddhism, springing from it as naturally as the flower from the seed.

The remarkable man⁸ who founded this wide-spread religion is reputed to have been a prince of the name of Siddhartha, son of Suddhodana, king of Kapilavastu, a territory supposed to have been situated on the borders of Oudh and Nipal. He is often called Sakya, after his family, and also Gautama, from the great “Solar” race of which the family was a branch.⁹ Having at an early age exhibited an ascetic and contemplative tendency, his father fearing he might be induced to abandon his high station as Kshatriga, found him a wife in a princess of great personal charms, and involved him in all the pomp and luxury of a magnificent court. But Siddhartha drank of the cup only to taste the bitter in the draught; and each year’s experience of the world convinced him of its inability to satisfy the aspirations of the soul; so that, like Solomon, he would exclaim, “Vanity, vanity, all is vanity.” The joys of life could not render him forgetful of its sorrows. The thought would force itself upon him that at any moment he might be afflicted with some loathsome or torturing disease; that his friends might be suddenly snatched away; that however sunny and bright the present, it could not prevent the inevitable approach of old age, with its grey hairs, its wrinkled brow, and its tottering limbs; and that the moral of the whole show was to be sought in the darkness of the grave. Unable to endure any longer the mental conflict begotten of his keen sense of the realities as compared with the illusions of the world, he stole from the guarded palace, and at the age of 29 or 30, went forth as a beggar, or religious mendicant, to study in the schools of the Brahman priests. He underwent their penances; he mastered their philosophy; but dissatisfied with their cumbrous code of superstitious ceremonial, he withdrew into the forest, and adopted a course of religious asceticism.

This lasted for six or seven years, but brought him no repose. Then he resolved on returning once more to human companionship. Beset by the Spirit of Evil he fought long and bravely against temptation, and having triumphed, prepared to attain the secret of happiness by giving himself up to abstruse meditation. Week after week he was absorbed in thought, continually investigating the origin of things, and the mystery of existence. All the evils under which he, in common with his fellow-men, groaned, he traced back to birth. Were we not born, we could not suffer. But whence comes birth or continued existence?.. We have no room, however, to dwell on his processes of thought; enough to say that he came to the conclusion that the ultimate cause of existence is ignorance, and that the removal of ignorance means, therefore, the termination of existence, and of all the pain and sorrow which existence implies and induces. Realising this absolute unconsciousness of the outer world in his own self, he claimed and assumed the name of the Buddha, or “Enlightened.”

The scene of his victory over life and the world received the name of Bodhimanda, (the seat of intelligence,) and the tree under which the religious reformer sat in his hour of moral and intellectual triumph was called Bodhidruma, (the tree of intelligence,) whence Bo-tree. The Buddhists believe that it marks the centre of the earth. Hiouen-thsang, the Chinese pilgrim, professes to have found the Bodhidruma, or some tree that passed for it, twelve hundred years after Buddha’s death, at a spot near Gaya Proper, in Bahar, where still may be seen an old dagoba, or temple, and some considerable ruins.

Having at last attained to a knowledge of the causes of human suffering, and of the method of removing and counteracting them, the Buddha felt that the task was imposed upon him of

⁷ Max Müller, pp. 13, 14.

⁸ Professor Wilson propounded a theory to the effect that there never was any such man as Buddha, but the theory has found few supporters.

⁹ The name “Sakya” is made into “Sakya-muni,” —*muni* in Sanskrit meaning “solitary,” (Greek, μόνος,) alluding to his solitary habits; and to Gautama is often prefixed “Sramana,” or “ascetic.”

communicating that knowledge to others. He began “to turn the wheel of the law,” – that is to preach, – at Benares; and among his earliest disciples was Bimbisara, the ruler of Magadha. His career as a teacher extended over forty years, during which period he travelled over almost every part of Northern India, making a large number of converts, and firmly establishing his religious system. He died at Kusinagara in Oudh, in 543 B.C., at the age of eighty, and his body being burned, the relics were distributed among numerous claimants, who raised monumental tumuli, or topes, for their preservation.

All the expositions and teachings of the Buddha were oral, and the task of committing them to writing was undertaken by the chief of his disciples shortly after his death. These canonical books are divided into three classes, forming the “Tripitaka,” or “three-fold basket.” In the first class we find the *Soutras*, or Sermons of the Buddha; in the second, the *Vinaya*, or book of discipline; in the third, the *Abhidharma*, or philosophy. After a period of a century or so, the Buddhist leaders met and revised the Tripitaka, and a third revision took place in 250 or 240 B.C., since which date the text has remained without alteration.

The doctrine of Buddha has been defined as a development of four main principles, (or “Sublime Verities.”) 1st. That every kind of existence is painful and transitory; 2nd. That all existence is the result of passion; 3rd. That, therefore, the extinction of passion is the one means of escape from existence and from the misery necessarily attendant upon it; 4th. That all obstacles to this existence must be swept away.

But what is meant by existence? That separation from the general Being of the world which is involved in individual life, and in the opposition of the subject which thinks, and the object which is thought about. And what is meant by its extinction? Not so much annihilation, as the becoming one with nature, wherein that form of consciousness which separates subject and object is set aside. This extinction Buddha called Nirvâna, or “the blowing out of the lamp;” it does not necessarily mean the annihilation of consciousness altogether, but only of a finite form of it, which may be as the light of a lamp compared with the light of day.

Buddha’s doctrine has been stigmatised as Atheism and Nihilism, and was unquestionably liable on its metaphysical side to both charges. It was Atheistic, not because it denied, for it simply ignored, the existence of such gods as Indra and Brahma, but because, like the Sankhya philosophy, it admitted but one subjective Self, and considered creation as an illusion of that Self, imaging itself for a while in the mirror of Nature. If there were no reality in nature, there would be no real Creator.

Says Max Müller,¹⁰ stating with his usual clearness a problem which has perplexed most students of the history of religion: “How a religion which taught the annihilation of all existence, of all thought, of all individuality and personality, as the highest object of all endeavours, could have laid hold of the minds of millions of human beings, and how at the same time, by enforcing the duties of morality, justice, kindness, and self-sacrifice, it could have exercised a decided beneficial influence, not only on the natives of India, but on the lowest barbarians of Central Asia, is one of the riddles which no philosophy yet has been able to solve. The morality which it teaches is not a morality of expediency and rewards. Virtue is not enjoined because it necessarily leads to happiness. No; virtue is to be practised, but happiness is to be shunned, and the only reward for virtue is, that it subdues the passions, and thus prepares the human mind for that knowledge which is to end in complete annihilation.”

Probably no religious system has ever attained a wide-spread influence over the minds of men which has held out so few of those inducements most alluring to human nature. The idea of complete annihilation might recommend itself to a philosopher, but would hardly have been regarded as likely to attract the masses. We suppose the explanation is to be found in the particularity of ritual enjoined by the Buddhist priests, this particularity of ritual having always had a fascination for the multitude.

¹⁰ Max Müller, pp. 14, 15.

“There are ten commandments which Buddha imposes on his disciples. They are – not to kill, not to steal, not to commit adultery, not to lie, not to get intoxicated, to abstain from unseasonable meals, to abstain from public spectacles, to abstain from expensive dresses, not to have a large bed, not to receive silver or gold. The duties of those who embraced a religious life were most severe. They were not allowed to wear any dress except rags collected in cemeteries, and these rags they had to sew together with their own hands; a yellow cloak was to be thrown over these rags. Their food was to be extremely simple, and they were not to possess anything except what they could get by collecting alms from door to door in their wooden bowl. They had but one meal in the morning, and were not allowed to touch any food after midday. They were to live in forests, not in cities, and their only shelter was to be the shadow of a tree. There they were to sit, to spread their carpet, but not to lie down, even during sleep. They were allowed to enter the nearest city or village in order to beg, but they had to return to their forest before night, and the only change which was allowed, or rather prescribed, was, when they had to spend some nights in the cemeteries, there to meditate on the vanity of all things. And what was the object of all this asceticism? Simply to guide each individual towards that path which would finally bring him to Nirvâna, to utter extinction or annihilation. The very definition of virtue was that it helped man to cross over to the other shore, and that other shore was not death, but the cessation of all being. Thus charity was considered a virtue; modesty, patience, courage, contemplation, and science, all were virtues, but they were practised only as a means of arriving at deliverance.”

Buddha himself was an incarnation of the virtues. His charity, for example, was melting as day. When he saw a tigress standing, and unable to feed her cubs, he offered up his body to be devoured by them. The Chinese pilgrim, visiting the spot on the banks of the Indus where this miracle was supposed to have occurred, remarks that the soil was still red with the blood of Buddha, as were also the trees and flowers.

Then as to his modesty, it was as supreme as that of a virgin who has never seen men. One day Prasenagit, his royal disciple and protector, besought him to work some miracles in order to silence his adversaries, the Brahmans. Buddha complied, and performed the required miracles; but at the same time he exclaimed, “Great King, I do not teach the law to my pupils, telling them, Go, ye saints, and before the eyes of the Brahmans and householders perform, by means of your supernatural powers, miracles greater than any man can perform. I tell them, when I teach the law, Live, ye saints, hiding your good works and showing your sins.” And yet, all this self-sacrificing charity, all this self-sacrificing humility by which the life of Buddha was distinguished throughout, and which he preached to the multitudes that came to listen to him, had but one object, and that object was final annihilation.¹¹

Annihilation! what drearier prospect can be opened to the heart, or soul, or mind of man? The utter cessation of that individuality of which the meanest and wretchedest among us feels proudly conscious; of the thoughts which animate, the desires which warm, the dreams that delight, the hopes that stimulate, the affections that inspire! Do we indeed suffer all the sorrows and uncertainties of life, – do we indeed strive, and endure, and struggle, – do we, indeed, learn to labour and to wait, to bear the burden of the day and the torture of the night, for no other purpose, with no other prospect, than when the brief fever is over, to pass away into nothingness? With so much difficulty can the mind reconcile itself to such a dreary hypothesis that the creed of almost every race and people has contemplated a future stage of existence, even when it has failed to attain to anything like a clear and full conviction of the immortality of the soul. The law of compensation seems to demand that a future life shall redress the inequalities of the present.

Yet this doctrine of Annihilation was preached by Buddha, and apparently accepted by the millions who became his disciples. But did they really accept it as he preached it? No; the truth is, they read into it, as it were, their own innate, unconquerable belief in a hereafter, and converted his

¹¹ Max Müller, pp. 15, 16, 17.

Nirvâna into a Paradise, which they embellished with the bright colours of imagination. It can hardly be doubted that this was not the meaning or intention of Buddha himself. Look, for a moment, at his “Four Verities.” The first of these, as we have already stated, asserts the existence of pain; the second, that the cause of pain is sin; the third, that the cessation of pain may be secured by Nirvâna; the fourth, that the way to this Nirvâna consists of eight things: right faith or orthodoxy, right judgment or logic, right language or veracity, right purpose or honesty, right practice or religious life, right obedience or lawful life, right memory, and right meditation.

These precepts may be understood as the usual laws of an elevated morality, pointing to and terminating in a state of meditation on the highest object of thought, such as has been enjoined by several philosophical or religious systems; – such as was revived in France and Germany in the seventeenth century under the name of Pietism. There is nothing in this teaching incompatible with a belief in the immortality of the soul and the existence of a God. But with the Buddhist Nirvâna it is otherwise. Its motive principle, by the way, is a mean and cowardly one, for it makes happiness depend upon the cessation of pain; represents as the highest purpose of human effort the escape from pain. The Buddhist insists that life is a prolonged misery; that birth is the cause of all evil; and he adds that even death cannot deliver him from this evil, because he believes in transmigration, or an eternal cycle of existence. To escape from it we must free ourselves from the bondage, not of life only, but of existence; and this must be done “by extirpating the cause of existence.”

But what *is* that cause?

The Buddhist teacher, involving himself in a cloud of metaphysics, answers, that it is attachment; an inclination towards something, having its root in thirst or desire. “Desire presupposes perception of the object desired; perception presupposes contact; contact, at least a sentient contact, presupposes the senses; and as the senses can only perform what has form and name, or what is distinct, distinction is the real cause of all the effects which end in existence, birth, and pain. Now this conception is itself the result of conceptions or ideas; but these ideas, so far from being, as in Greek philosophy, the true and everlasting forms of the Absolute, are in themselves mere illusions, the effects of ignorance. Ignorance, therefore, is really the primary cause of all that seems to exist. To know that ignorance, as the root of all evil, is the same as to destroy it, and with it all effects that flowed from it.”

In Buddha’s own case we may see how such teaching operated upon the individual.

He entered into the first stage of meditation when he became conscious of freedom from sin, acquired a knowledge of the nature of all things, and yearned after nothing but Nirvâna. But he was still open to the sensation of pleasure, and could employ his powers of discrimination and reasoning.

In the second stage he ceased to use those powers, and nothing remained but the desire of Nirvâna, and the satisfaction inherent to his intellectual perfection.

In the third stage indifference succeeded to satisfaction; but self-consciousness remained, and a certain amount of physical gratification.

These, too, faded away in the fourth stage, along with memory, and all sense of pain; and before the neophyte opened the doors of Nirvâna.

After having gone through the four stages once, Buddha began them a second time, but died before he attained the fourth stage.

After passing through the four stages of meditation, every Buddhist enters into the infinity of space; thence rises into the infinity of intelligence; to soar, afterwards, into the region of Nothing. But even there he finds no repose; something still remains – the idea of the Nothing in which he rejoices. This is annihilated in the fourth and last region, and then he enjoys absolute, perfect rest, “undisturbed by nothing, or what is not nothing.”

Buddha taught that this Nirvâna – which to most persons will seem a metaphysical incomprehensibility – could be attained by all men. As there is no difference between the body of a

prince and the body of a beggar, so is there none between their spirits. Every man is equally capable of coming to a knowledge of the truth, and if he but *will* to do so, of working out his own emancipation.

It is important to observe the absence of any theological element in Buddhism. Its founder seems never to have spoken of God, and his Nirvâna is wholly different from the Brahmanic idea of absorption into the Divine Essence. Of the gods of the people he taught that they were, like men, subject to the law of Metempsychosis, or Transmigration, and therefore that as they were unable to deliver, they were unworthy to be worshipped. A recent writer thinks it would be incorrect to speak of Buddha either as a theist or an atheist, and asserts that he simply describes a condition of absolute rest as an escape from the popular metempsychosis, which may be interpreted either in a theistic or an atheistic sense. But a careful examination of his system shows, we think, that it was wholly alien to a belief in a Supreme Spirit.

“Buddhism,” says Barthélémy Saint-Hilaire, “has no God; it has not even the confused and vague notion of a Universal Spirit, in which the human soul, according to the orthodox doctrine of Brahmanism, and the Sâmkhya philosophy, may be absorbed. Nor does it admit Nature, in the proper sense of the word, and it ignores that profound division between spirit and matter which forms the system and the glory of Kapila. It confounds man with all that surrounds him, all the while preaching to him the laws of virtue. Buddhism, therefore, cannot unite the human soul, which it does not even mention, with a God, whom it ignores; nor with nature, which it does not know better. Nothing remained but to annihilate the soul; and in order to be quite sure that the soul may not re-appear under some new guise in this world, which has been cursed as the abode of illusion and misery, Buddhism destroys its very elements, and never wearies of glorying in this achievement. What more is wanted? if this be not the Absolute Nothing, what is Nirvâna?”

Repellent as seems to us the central doctrine of Buddhism, it extended rapidly. This extension was due, however, to the simplicity of the ritual which Buddha enjoined; the pure morality which he advocated; the equality of all men on which he insisted; and the spirit of love, tenderness, gentleness, compassion, and toleration which he inspired. Hence it came to pass that his disciples multiplied in the north-western territories of Hindustan, and his creed found acceptance, at a later period, probably about three centuries before Christ, all over India. In Ceylon it was adopted at a very early period; but it was not until the second century before Christ that it made its way into China and Tibet. From Ceylon it spread into Birmah and Siam, and the islands of the Indian Archipelago, and from China it penetrated into Japan. It is now the religion of more than one fifth of the whole human race.

Its influence has been very considerable, and may distinctly be traced in some of the Gnostic teaching and in the Alexandrine or Neo-Platonic philosophy. It modified the old Brahmanic religion, which, acting under its impulse, threw off its human sacrifices and more barbarous rites. The festival of Juggernaut, which for the time places in abeyance all caste distinctions, and adopts many Buddhist symbols, shows that the Brahmans, even when they drove it out of India, were compelled to retain some of its relics, just as they were under the necessity of recognising Buddha as one of the Avatars of their god Vishnu. Buddhism may be described as “the parent of Indian architecture,” which, fashioned at first on the Greek patterns, speedily assumed a character of its own, as may be seen in its colossal temples.

But, as is the case with all religious systems of purely human origin, Buddhism gradually fell away from the standard of its founder. The heart craves an object of worship, a something or some one on which or on whom to rest its hopes and fears, and the Buddhists, untaught to reverence a Supreme Being, transferred their adoration to Buddha himself, whose life and work they involved in a cloud of myth and legend. His relics came to be worshipped, and reliquary towers for their preservation were everywhere erected.

The enthusiasm which fired the Buddhists, and largely contributed to the rapid extension of their creed, for Buddhism, unlike Brahmanism, is a proselytising religion, finds a striking illustration in the career of Hiouen-thsang, the Chinese pilgrim, who, in the middle of the seventh century,

crossed the deserts and mountains which separate China from India, and visited the principal cities of the Indian Peninsula.

Hiouen-thsang, a Buddhist Pilgrim.¹²

Hiouen-thsang was born in a provincial town of China, in one of the revolutionary and anarchical periods of the Chinese Empire. His father, having quitted the public service, was able to devote his leisure to the education of his four children, one of whom, Hiouen-thsang, was distinguished at an early age by his genius and his thirst for knowledge. After receiving instruction at a Buddhist monastery, he was admitted as a monk, when only thirteen years old. During the next seven years, he travelled about with his brethren from place to place, in order to profit by the lectures of the most eminent professors; but his peaceful studies were frequently interrupted by the horrors of war, and he was forced to seek refuge in the more remote provinces of the empire.

At the age of twenty he took priest's orders, having already become famous for his multifarious learning. He had studied the chief canonical book of the Buddhist faith, the records of Buddha's life and teaching, the system of ethics and metaphysics, and had completely mastered the works of K'ung-fu-tze and Lao-tse. But, like many inquiring minds, he was tortured by doubt. For six years more he prosecuted his studies in the principal places of learning in China, and was frequently solicited to teach when he had come to learn. Baffled in all his efforts to satisfy his anxious and restless intellect, he resolved at last on paying a visit to India, the parent-land of Buddhism, where he knew he should find the original of the works, which, in their Chinese translation, had proved so dubious and excited so much mistrust. From the records of his pilgrim predecessors he was aware of the dangers of his journey; yet the glory, as he says, of recovering the Law, which was to be a guide to all men, and the means of their salvation, seemed to him worthy of attainment. In common with several other priests, he applied for the Imperial permission to travel out of China. It was refused, and his companions lost heart. But Hiouen-thsang was made of sterner stuff. His mother had often told him how, before his birth, she had had visions of her future offspring travelling to the Far West in search of the law; and he himself had been similarly encouraged.

Having no worldly pleasures to enfeeble him, and believing only in one object as worth living for, he resolved to face danger and difficulty; made his way to the Hoang-Ho, and the place of departure of the caravans for the West, and, eluding the vigilance of the Governor, succeeded in crossing the frontier. He was without friends or helpers; but after spending the night in fervent prayer, found a guide in a person who, next morning, unexpectedly presented himself. For some distance this guide conducted him faithfully, but abandoned him when they reached the Desert. There were still five watch-towers to be passed, and the uncertain track through the Desert was indicated only by skeletons and the hoof-marks of horses. Bravely went the pilgrim on his way, and though misled by the "mirage" of the Desert, he safely reached the first tower. There he narrowly escaped death from the arrows of the watchman, but the officer in command was himself a devout Buddhist, and he not only allowed Hiouen-thsang to proceed, but gave him letters of recommendation to the governors of the other towers. At the last tower, however, he was refused leave to pass, and neither bribes nor entreaties proved of any avail. He was compelled to retrace his steps, and make a long détour, in the course of which he lost his way. His water-bag burst, and for the first time his courage wavered. Should he not return? But no; he had taken an oath never to make a step backward until he had reached India. It were better to die with his face to the West, than return to the East and live.

For four nights and five days he traversed the Desert, without a drop of water to quench his thirst, with no other refreshment than that which he derived from his prayers; and that these should

¹² The following sketch is founded on M. Stanislas Julien's "Voyages des Pèlerins Buddhistes," and on Max Müller's review of that valuable work.

afford any hope or consolation seems strange enough, when we remember that Buddhism held out to him no hope of a God or a Saviour. "It is incredible in how exhausted an atmosphere the Divine spark within us will glimmer on, and even warm the dark chambers of the human heart." Comforted by his prayers, he resumed his onward march, and in due time arrived at a large lake in the country of the Oigom Tatars, by whom he was received with an abundant hospitality. One of the Tatar Khans insisted that he should reside with him and teach his people; and as he would listen to no remonstrances or explanations, Hiouen-thsang was driven to a desperate expedient. The king, he said, might fetter his body, but had no power over his mind and will; and he refused all food, with a view to put an end to a life which he no longer regarded as of value. In this resolution he persisted for three days, and the Khan, afraid that he would perish, was compelled at last to yield. But he extracted from him a promise that on his return to China he would visit him, and abide with him for three years. At last, after a month's detention, during which the Khan and his court daily attended the lectures of the pious monk, he resumed his journey, attended by a strong escort, and furnished with letters of introduction to the twenty-four princes whose dominions he must cross.

His route lay through what is now called Dsungary, across the Musur-dabaghan mountains, the northern chain of the Belur-tag, the valley of the Yaxartes, Bactria, and Kabulistan. The pilgrim's description of the scenes through which he passed is interesting and vivid; he was a keen observer, and gifted with considerable powers of expression.

Of the Musur-dabaghan mountains he says: —

"The crest of these heights rises to the sky. Since the beginning of the world the snow has been accumulating, and it is now transformed into masses of ice, which never melt, either in spring or summer. Hard shining sheets of snow are spread out until they vanish into the infinite, and mingle with the clouds. If one looks at them, one's eyes are dazzled by the splendour. Frozen peaks impend over both sides of the wood, some hundred feet in height, and some twenty or thirty feet in thickness. It is not without difficulty and danger that the traveller can clear them or climb over them. Sudden gusts of hurricane and tornadoes of snow attack the pilgrims. Even with double shoes, and in thick furs, one cannot help trembling and shivering."

But as Max Müller justly observes, what is more important in the early portion of our traveller's narrative than any descriptions of scenery, is his account of the high degree of civilisation that then obtained among the tribes of Central Asia. Historians have learned to believe in the early civilisation of Egypt, Babylon, China, India; but they will have to abandon all their old ideas of barbarism and barbarians now that they find the Tatar hordes possessing, in the seventh century, "the chief arts and institutions of an advanced society." The theory of M. Oppert, who gives to a Turanian or Scythian race the original invention of the cuneiform letters and a civilisation anterior to that of Babylon and Nineveh, ceases to be improbable; since no new wave of civilisation could have touched these countries between the cuneiform period of their literature and history and the epoch of Hiouen-thsang's visit.¹³

"In the kingdom of Okini, on the western portion of China, Hiouen-thsang found an active commerce, gold, silver, and copper coinage; monasteries, where the chief works of Buddhism were studied, and an alphabet derived from Sanskrit. As he travelled on he met with mines, with agriculture, including pears, plums, peaches, almonds, grapes, pomegranates, rice, and wheat. The inhabitants were dressed in silk and woollen materials. There were musicians in the chief cities who played on the flute and the guitar. Buddhism was the prevailing religion, but there were traces of an earlier worship, the Bactrian fire-worship. The country was everywhere studded with halls, monasteries, monuments and statues. Samarkand formed at that early time a kind of Athens, and its manners were copied by all the tribes in the neighbourhood. Balkh, the old capital of Bactria, was still an important place on the Oxus, well-fortified, and full of sacred buildings. And the details which our traveller gives of the

¹³ Max Müller, p. 36.

exact circumference of the cities, the number of their inhabitants, the products of the soil, the articles of trade, can leave no doubt in our minds that he relates what he had seen and heard himself. A new page in the history of the world is here opened, and new ruins pointed out, which would reward the pickaxe of a Layard.”

Hiouen-thsang passed into India by way of Kabul. Shortly before he reached Pou-lou-cha-pou-lo, the Sanskrit Purushapura, the modern Peshawar, he was informed of a remarkable cave, where Buddha had converted a dragon, and had promised to leave it his shadow, in order that, whenever the fierce passions of its dragon-nature should awake, it might be reminded of its vows by the presence of its master’s shadowy features. The promise was fulfilled, and the dragon-cave became a favourite resort for pilgrims. Our traveller was warned that the roads to the cave were haunted by robbers, so that for three years no pilgrim had been known to return from it. But he replied that it would be difficult during a hundred thousand Kalpas to meet once with the true shadow of Buddha, and that having come so near it in his pilgrimage, he could not pass on without paying the tribute of his adoration.

He left his companions in their security, and having, with some difficulty, obtained a guide, proceeded on his way. They had accomplished but a few miles when they were attacked by five robbers. Hiouen-thsang showed them his shaven head and priestly robes. “Master,” said one of the fraternity, “where are you going?” “I desire,” replied Hiouen-thsang, “to adore the shadow of Buddha.” “Master,” said the robber, “do you not know that these roads are full of bandits?” “Robbers are men,” was the answer, “and as for me, when I am going to adore the shadow of Buddha, though the roads might be full of wild beasts, I shall walk on fearless. And inasmuch as I will not fear you, because you are men, you will not be insensible to pity.” These words, in their simple faith, produced a strange effect upon the robbers, who opened their minds to the enlightenment of the wise man’s teaching.

Hiouen-thsang resumed his journey, with his guide, and passed a stream which rushed tumultuously between the walls of a precipitous ravine. In the rock was a door opening into a depth of darkness. With a fervent prayer the pilgrim entered boldly, advanced towards the east, then moved fifty steps backwards, and began his devotions. He made one hundred salutations, but saw nothing. This he conceived to be a punishment for his sins; he reproached himself despairingly and wept bitter tears, because he was denied the happiness of seeing Buddha’s shadow. At last, after many prayers and invocations, he saw on the eastern wall a dim patch of light. But it passed away. With mingled joy and pain he continued to pray, and again he saw a light, and again it vanished swiftly. Then, in his ecstasy of loving devotion, he vowed that he would never leave the place until he had seen the “Venerable of the age.” After two hundred prayers, he saw the cave suddenly fill with radiance, and the shadow of Buddha, of a brilliant white colour, rose majestically on the wall, as when the clouds are riven, and all at once flashes on the wondering eye the marvellous image of the “Mountain of Light.” The features of the divine countenance were illuminated with a dazzling glow. Hiouen-thsang was absorbed in wondering contemplation, and from an object so sublime and incomparable he could not turn his eyes away.

After he awoke from his trance, he called in six men, and bade them kindle a fire in the cave, that he might burn incense; but as the glitter of the flame made the shadow of Buddha disappear, he ordered it to be extinguished. Five of the attendants saw the shadow, but the sixth saw nothing; and the guide, when Hiouen-thsang told him of the vision, could only express his astonishment. “Master,” he said, “without the sincerity of your faith and the energy of your vows, you could not have seen such a miracle.”

Such is the account which Hiouen-thsang’s biographers give of his visit to Buddha’s cave; but Max Müller remarks, to the credit of Hiouen-thsang himself, that in the *Si-yu-hi*, which contains his own diary, the story is told much more simply. After describing the cave, he merely adds: – “Formerly, the shadow of Buddha was seen in the cave, bright, like his natural appearance, and with all the marks

of his divine beauty. One might have said, it was Buddha himself. For some centuries, however, it has not been possible to see it completely. Though one does perceive something, it is only a feeble and doubtful resemblance. If a man prays with sincere faith, and if he have received from above a secret impression, he sees the shadow clearly, but cannot enjoy the sight for any length of time.”

From Peshawer the undaunted pilgrim proceeded to Kashmir, visited the principal towns of Central India, and arrived at last in Magadha, the Holy land of the Buddhists. There, for a space of five years, he devoted himself to the study of Sanskrit and Buddhist literature; he explored every place which was consecrated by memories of the past. Passing through Bengal, he travelled southward, with the view of visiting Ceylon, the chief seat of Buddhism. But, unable to carry out his design, he crossed the peninsula from east to west, ascended the Malabar coast, reached the Indus, and after numerous excursions to scenes of interest in North-Western India, returned to Magadha to enjoy, with his old friends, the delights of learned leisure and intellectual companionship.

Eventually, his return to China became necessary, and traversing the Punjab, Kabulistan, and Bactria, he struck the river Oxus, following its course nearly up to its springhead on the remote Pamir tableland; and after a residence of some duration in the three chief towns of Turkistan, Khasgar, Yarkand, and Khoten, he found himself again, after sixteen years of varied experience, in his native land. By this time he had attained a world-wide reputation, and he was received by the Emperor with the honours usually accorded to a military hero. His entry into the capital was marked by public rejoicings; the streets were decked with gay carpets, festoons of flowers, and waving banners. The splendour of martial pomp was not wanting; the civic magistrates lent the dignity of their presence to the scene; and all the monks of the district issued forth in solemn procession.

If this were a triumph of unusual character, not less unaccustomed were the trophies which figured in it.

First, 150 grains of Buddha’s dust;

Second, a golden statue of Buddha;

Third, another statue of sandal-wood;

Fourth, a statue of sandal-wood, representing Buddha as descending from heaven;

Fifth, a statue of silver;

Sixth, a golden statue, representing Buddha victorious over the dragon;

Seventh, a statue of sandal-wood, representing Buddha as a preacher; and

Eighth, a collection of 657 Buddhist works in 520 volumes.

Admitted to an audience of the Emperor in the Phoenix Palace, he was offered, but declined, a high position in the Government. “The doctrine of Confucius,” he said, “is still the soul of the administration;” and he preferred to devote his remaining years to the study of the Law of Buddha. The Emperor invited him to write a narrative of his travels, and placed at his disposal a monastery where he might employ himself in peaceful and happy seclusion in translating the works he had brought back from India. He quickly wrote and published his travels, but the translation of the Sanskrit MSS. occupied the rest of his life. It is said that the number of the works he translated, with the assistance of a large staff of monks, amounted to 740, in 1335 volumes. Often he might be seen pondering a passage of difficulty, when suddenly a flash of inspiration would seem to enlighten his mind. His soul was cheered, as when a man walking in darkness sees all at once the sun piercing the clouds and shining in its full brightness; and, unwilling to trust to his own understanding, he used to attribute his knowledge to a secret inspiration of Buddha and the Bôdhisattvas.

When his last hour approached, he divided all his property among the poor, invited his friends to come and see him, and take a cheerful farewell of the impure body of Hiouen-thsang. “I desire,” he said, “that whatever merits I may have gained by good works may fall upon other people. May I be born again with them in the heaven of the blessed, be admitted to the family of Mi-le, and serve the Buddha of the future, who is full of kindness and affection. When I descend again upon earth to

pass through other forms of existence, I desire at every new birth to fulfil my duties towards Buddha, and arrive at the last at the highest and most perfect intelligence.” He died in the year 664.

The life of Hiouen-thsang, and his narrative of travel, have been translated into French by M. Stanislas Julien.¹⁴ The foregoing particulars have been borrowed from a review of M. Julien’s work, by Max Müller, which originally appeared in the “Times” of April 17 and 20, 1857.

We translate from Stanislas Julien’s “Vie et Voyages de Hiouen-thsang” the Chinese narrative of the pilgrim’s last days: —

“After completing his translation of the Pradjñâ, the Master of the Law became conscious that his strength was failing, and that his end was near at hand. Accordingly he spoke to his disciples: ‘If I came into the palace of Yu-hoa-kong, it was, as you know, on account of the sacred book of the Pradjñâ. Now that the work is finished, I feel that my thread of life is run out. When after death you remove me to my last resting-place, see that everything be done in a modest and simple manner. You will wrap my body in a mat, and deposit it in some calm and solitary spot in the bosom of a valley. Carefully avoid the neighbourhood of palace or convent; a body so impure as mine should be separated from it by a great distance.’

“On hearing these words, his disciples broke out into sobs and cries. Drying their tears, they said to him: ‘Master, you have still a reserve of strength and vigour; your countenance is in no wise altered; why do you give sudden utterance to such miserable words?’

“‘I know it through and in myself,’ replied the Master of the Law; ‘how would it be possible for you to understand my presentiments?’

“On the first day of the first moon in the spring of the first year *Lin-te* (664), the neighbouring interpreters and all the religious of the convent, came to solicit him, with the most pressing earnestness, to translate the collection of the *Ratnakoûta sôûtra*.

“The Master of the Law, yielding to their fervid persistency, made an effort to overcome his weakness, and translated a few lines. Then, closing the Hindu text, he said: ‘This collection is as great as that of the *Pradjñâ*, but I feel I have not sufficient strength to complete such an enterprise. My last moments have arrived, and my life can be only of short duration. To-day I would fain visit the valley of Lantchi, to offer my last homages to the statues of the innumerable Buddhas.’

“Accordingly, he set forth with his disciples. The monks, at his departure, did not cease to shed tears.

“After this pious excursion he returned to the convent. Thenceforward he ceased to translate, and occupied himself solely in his religious duties.

“On the eighth day, one of his disciples, the monk Hiouen-Khio, originally of Kao-tch’ang, related to the Master of the Law a dream which he had had. He had seen a *Fesu-thou* (or *Stoûpa*,) of imposing aspect and prodigious height, crumble suddenly to the ground. Awakened by the fall, he ran to inform the Master of the Law. ‘The event does not concern you,’ said Hiouen-thsang; ‘it is the presage of my approaching end.’

“On the evening of the ninth day, as he crossed the bridge of a canal in the rear of his residence, he fell, and injured his leg. From that moment his strength declined perceptibly.

“On the sixteenth day he cried out, as if awaking from a dream: ‘Before my eyes I see an immense lotus-flower, charming in its freshness and purity.’

“He had another dream on the seventeenth day, in which he saw hundreds and thousands of men of tall stature, who, decorated with garments of embroidered silk, with flowers of marvellous beauty, and jewels of great price, issued from the sleeping-chamber of the Master of the Law, and proceeded to set out, both internally and externally, the hall consecrated to the translation of the holy books. Afterwards, in the rear of that hall, on a wooded mountain, they everywhere planted rich

¹⁴ Voyages des Pèlerins Bouddhistes. Vol. I. Histoire de la Vie de Hiouen-thsang, et ses Voyages dans l’Inde, depuis l’an 629 jusqu’en 645, par Hoëi-li et Yen-thsong; traduite du Chinois par Stanislas Julien.

banners of the most vivid colours, and created an harmonious music. He saw moreover, without the gate, an innumerable multitude of splendid chariots loaded with perfumed viands and fruits of more than a thousand kinds, as beautiful in form as in colour; no fruits were there of terrestrial growth! The people brought them to him, one after the other, and offered him a profusion; but he refused them, saying: ‘Such viands as these belong only to those who have obtained the superior intelligence. Hiouen-thsang has not yet arrived at that sublime rank: how could he dare to receive them?’ In spite of his energetic refusal they continued to serve him without intermission.

“The disciples who watched by him happening to make some slight sound, he opened his eyes suddenly, and related his dream to the sub-director (*Karmmadana*), a certain Hoeï-te.”

“And from these omens,’ added the Master, ‘it seems to me that such merits as I have been able to acquire during my life have not fallen into oblivion, and I believe, with an entire faith, that it is not in vain one practises the doctrine of the Buddha.’

“Immediately, he ordered the master Kia-chang to make a written list of the titles of the sacred books and the treatises which he had translated, forming altogether seven hundred and forty works and thirteen hundred and thirty-five volumes (*livres*). He wrote down also the *Kôti* (ten millions) of paintings of the Buddha, as well as the thousand images of *Mi-le* (*Mâitrêya bôdhisattva*), painted on silk, which he had caused to be executed. There were, moreover, the *Kôtis* (one hundred millions) of statuettes of uniform colour. He had also caused to be written a thousand copies of the following sacred books:

Nong-touan-pan-jo-king (Vadjra tchhêdika pradjñâ parâmitâ soûtra).

Yo-sse-jou-laï-pou-youen-kong-te-king (Arya bhagavati bhâichadja gourou
poûrwa pranidhâna nâma mahâ yâna soûtra).

Lou-men-t’o-lo-ni-king (Chat moukhi dhârani).”

He had ministered to the wants of upwards of twenty thousand persons among the faithful and heretical; he had kindled a hundred thousand lamps, and purchased thousands upon thousands (*ocean*) of creatures.

When Kia-chang had finished this long catalogue of good works, he was ordered to read it aloud. After hearing it, the religious crossed their hands and loaded the Master with congratulations. Then he said to them: – “The moment of my death approaches; already my mind grows feeble and seems to be on the point of quitting me. Distribute at once in alms my clothes and goods; let statues be fabricated; and order the religious to recite some prayers.”

On the twenty-third day, a meal was given to the poor, at which alms were distributed. On the same day, he ordered a moulder named Song-kia-tchi, to raise, in the Kia-cheou-tien palace, a statue of the Intelligence (Buddha); after which he invited the population of the convent, the translators, and his disciples, to bid “a joyous farewell to that impure and contemptible body of Hiouen-thsang, who, having finished his work, merited no longer existence. I desire,” he added, “to see poured back upon other men the merits which I have acquired by any good works; to be born with them in the heaven of the Touchitas; to be admitted into the family of *Mi-le* (*Mâitrêya*); and to serve the Buddha, full of tenderness and affection. When I shall return to earth to pass through other existences, I desire, at each new birth, to discharge with boundless zeal my duties towards the Buddha, and finally to arrive at the Transcendent Intelligence (*Anoutrara samyak sambôdhi*).”

After having made these adieux, he was silent, and engaged in meditation; then with his dying tongue he faltered forth his bitter regret that he did not enjoy more of the “world of the eyes” (the faculty of seeing), of the “world of the thought” (the faculty of thinking), of “the world of the knowledge which springs from observation” (the knowledge of sensible objects); of the “world of the knowledge which springs from the mind” —*l’esprit* (the perception of spiritual things); and that he did not possess the fulness of the Intelligence. Finally, he pronounced two *gubhas*, which he caused to be repeated to the persons near him: —

“Adoration to *Maitrêya Tathagata*, gifted with a sublime intelligence! I desire, with all men, to see your affectionate visage.

“Adoration to *Maitrêya Tathagata*! I desire, when I quit this life, to be born again in the midst of the multitude who surround you.”

The Master of the Law, after having long fixed his gaze upon Te-hoeï, the sub-director of the convent (*Karmmadana*), raised his right hand to his chin and his left upon his breast; then he stretched out his legs, crossed them, and lay down on the right side.

He remained thus, immovable, without taking anything, until the fifth day of the second moon. In the middle of the night his disciples asked him:

“Master, have you at length obtained to be born in the midst of the assembly of *Maitrêya*?”

“Yes,” he replied, with a failing voice. And having spoken, his breathing grew rapidly weaker, and in a few moments, his soul passed away.

His servants, feeling quietly, found that his feet were already cold, but that the back part of the head retained its warmth.

On the seventh day (of the second moon) his countenance had not undergone any alteration, and his body exhaled no odour.

The religious of the convent having passed several days in prayers, it was not until the morning of the ninth day that the sad news reached the capital.

The Master of the Law was seven *tchi* high; his face was of a fresh complexion. His eyebrows were wide apart, his eyes brilliant. His air was grave and majestic, and his features were full of grace and vivacity. The quality or tone (*timbre*) of his voice was pure and penetrating, and his language at times soared to a lofty eloquence, so noble and so harmonious that one could not refuse to listen. When he was surrounded by his disciples, or animated by the presence of an illustrious guest, he would often speak for half-a-day, while his hearers sat riveted in an immovable attitude. His favourite attire was a robe of fine cotton stuff, proportioned to his height and figure; his gait was light and easy; he looked straight before him, throwing his glances neither to the right nor to the left. He was majestic as those great rivers which embrace the earth; calm and shining as the lotus which springs in the midst of the waters. A severe observer of discipline, he was unchanged and unchangeable. Nothing could equal his affectionate benevolence and tender pity, the fervour of his zeal or his inviolable attachment to the practices of the Law. He was reserved in his friendship, made no hasty bonds, and when once he had entered his convent, nothing but an imperial decree could have drawn him from his pious retreat.

On the third day of the second moon (of the period *Lin-te*, – 664), the Master of the Law had sent Hiu-hiuen-pi to inform the Emperor of the wound he had received, and of the malady it had induced.

On the seventh day of the same month the Emperor, by a decree, ordered one of the imperial physicians to take with him medicaments and attend upon the Master of the Law, but by the time he arrived, the Master was already dead. Teou-sse-lun, governor of Fang-tcheou, announced by a report this melancholy event.

At the news, the Emperor shed tears copiously, and cried aloud in his sorrow, declaring that he had just lost the treasure of the empire. For several days he suspended the usual audiences.

All the civil and military functionaries abandoned themselves to groans and tears: the Emperor himself was unable to repress his sobs or moderate his grief. On the next day but one, he spoke to his great officers as follows:

“What a misfortune for my empire is the loss of Thsang, the Master of the Law! It may well be said that the great family of Cakya has seen its sole support shattered beneath it, and that all men remain without master and without guide. Do they not resemble the mariner who sees himself sinking into the abyss, when the storm has destroyed his oars and his shallop? the traveller astray in the midst of the darkness, whose lamp dies out at the entrance to a bottomless gulf?”

When he had uttered these words, the Emperor groaned again, and sighed many times.

On the twenty-sixth day of the same month, the Emperor issued the following decree:

“In accordance with a report addressed to me by Teou-sse-lun on the death of the Master of the Law, Hiouen-thsang, of the convent *Yu-hoa-sse*, I order that his funeral take place at the expense of the State.”

On the sixth day of the third moon, he issued a new decree as follows:

“By the death of Thsang, the Master of the Law, the translation of the sacred books is stopped. In conformity to the ancient ordinances, the magistrates will cause the translations already completed to be copied carefully: as for the (Indian) manuscripts which have not yet been translated, they will be handed over in their entirety to the director of the convent *Ts'e'-en-sse* (of the Great Beneficence,) who will watch over their safety. The disciples of Hiouen-thsang and the translators' company, who previously did not belong to the convent *Yu-hoa-sse*, will all return to their respective convents.”

On the fifth day of the third moon appeared the following decree:

“On the day of the funeral of the Master of the Law, Hiouen-thsang, I permit the male and female religious of the capital to accompany him *with banners and parasols* to his last resting-place. The Master of the Law shone by his noble conduct and his eminent virtues, and was the idol of his age. Wherefore, now he is no more, it is just that I should diffuse again abundant benefits to honour the memory of a man who has had no equal in past times.”

His disciples, faithful to his last wishes, formed a litter of coarse mats, removed his body to the capital, and deposited it in the convent of the Great Beneficence, in the middle of the hall devoted to the labours of translation. United by the sentiment of a common sorrow, they uttered such cries as might have shaken the earth. The religious and the laics of the capital hastened to the spot, and poured out tears mingled with sobs and cries. Every day the crowd was swollen by fresh arrivals.

On the fourteenth day of the fourth month, preparations were made for his interment in the capital of the West. The male and female religious, and a multitude of the men of the people, prepared upwards of five hundred objects necessary for the celebration of his obsequies; parasols of smooth (*unia*) silk, banners and standards, the tent and the litter of the *Ni-ouan* (Nirvâna); the inner coffin of gold, the outer one of silver, the *so-lo* trees (*salas*.) and disposed them in the middle of the streets to be traversed by the procession. The plaintive cadences of the funereal music, and the mournful dirges of the bearers resounded even to Heaven. The inhabitants of the capital and of the districts situated within a radius of five hundred *li* (fifty leagues,) who formed the procession, exceeded one million in number. Though the obsequies were celebrated with pomp, the coffin of the Master nevertheless was borne upon a litter composed of rude coarse mats. The silk manufacturers of the East had employed three thousand pieces of different colours in making the chariot of the Nirvâna, which they had ornamented with flowers and garlands, loaded with precious stones. They had asked permission to place the body of the Master of the Law upon this resplendent catafalque; but afraid of infringing his dying command, his disciples had refused. So it went first, bearing the Master's three robes and his religious mantle, of the value of one hundred ounces of silver; next came the litter constructed of coarse mats. Not one of the assistants but shed copious tears or was almost choked with grief!

Upwards of thirty thousand religious and laics spent the night near his tomb.

On the morning of the fifteenth day the grave was closed; then, at the place of sepulture, an immense distribution of alms was made, and the crowd afterwards dispersed in silence.

On the eighth day of the fourth moon of the second year of the Tsong-tchang period (669,) the Emperor decreed that the tomb of the Master of the Law should be transported into a plain, situated to the west of the *Fan-tch'ouen* valley, and that a tower should be erected in his honour.¹⁵

¹⁵ Hoei-li terminates the last book of his biography of the Master with a long and pompous panegyric of Hiouen-thsang. This *morceau*, which forms (says Stanislas Julien,) twenty-five pages in the Imperial edition and ten in the *Nan-king*, offers an analysis of the life and voyages of the Master of the Law; but it contains no new fact or one of any interest in relation to the history and geography of India or the Buddhist literature. No English version has appeared of M. Julien's elaborate translation of the Chinese History of Hiouen-thsang.

CHAPTER II. *MAGIANISM: THE PARSEES*

The Zendavesta.¹⁶

When the pure morality of Christianity is adduced as a proof of its high origin, one of the favourite devices of Modern Unbelief is to claim an equally high standard for the morality inculcated by the primitive creeds, and to rain praises upon the ethical systems embodied in the Soûtras of the Buddhists, the Rig-Veda of the Brahmans, or the Zendavesta of the Parsees. In making this claim our philosophers probably calculate on the little knowledge which the multitude possess of any creeds but their own. They are well aware that, to the popular mind, the teaching of Buddha or Zoroaster is necessarily a sealed book, and that the whole extent of its purport is known only to a few scholars. Hence, when they come to support their thesis by quotations, they are able to select those isolated passages which shine with the lustre of genuine diamonds, and produce an absolutely false impression of the general character of the writings in which they occur; thin veins of precious metal shining here and there through masses of worthless ore. No doubt the Veda contains numerous utterances of the highest beauty, in which the soul's devotion to a Supreme Power is expressed with a lyrical fervour inferior only to that of the Sweet Singer of Israel. No doubt the Zendavesta, or the books of K'ung-fu-tze, like the works of later and maturer intellects – a Xenophon and a Plato, a Seneca and a Marcus Aurelius – are enriched with thoughts of the loftiest description, and frequently breathe the most exalted aspirations. But what we have to remember is, that these are wholly exceptional; that they are the most arduous efforts of each self-absorbed thinker, and the indications of his boldest flights. At other times the wing grows feeble; at other times the music is faint and even discordant; the bird can do no more than creep along the ground. In the sayings of our Lord, however, or in the writings of His Apostles, the tone is always sustained, clear, definite. There is no uncertainty or hesitation. Nothing mean or unworthy is woven in their texture. No concessions are made to man's coarser desires or grosser passions. The system set before us is rounded in perfection, and shows not a flaw from beginning to end. We feel that He who speaks, whether in His own Person or through His disciples, speaks as never man spoke before; and that the Voice which fills our ears and stirs our hearts is, in deed and in truth, a Voice from Heaven.

We propose to furnish in this chapter a general view of the construction and teaching of the Parsee Scriptures, with the view of showing the signal inferiority of the creed it embodies to Christianity in all that can elevate the mind and satisfy the soul. At the same time we admit that the Parsee creed, and all similar creeds, possess an intrinsic value, apart from their ethical deficiencies, as illustrating the recognition of an Almighty Will, an Eternal and Supreme Force, by all the higher races of mankind. They show us the hopes, fears, and desires of great tribes and peoples which existed in the days before men wrote history; and they show us how their wisest teachers groped in the dark, and stumbled in the thorny path, – favoured occasionally, it is true, with a wonderful glimpse of light, and striking now and again into the pleasant places, but never rejoicing in the glory which rose upon earth with the Sun of Righteousness, never treading in that narrow but secure way which leads to Eternal Life. We see in them the great minds of the early world, like children on the seashore, perplexed by a music which they could not comprehend, and astonished by a power which they were unable to define. Yet happier and wiser they than the cold materialist of a later age, who resolves all mysteries,

¹⁶ More correctly, Avesta-Zend.

all phenomena, into the working of a blind inflexible Law, and takes out of creation its light, beauty, and joy by denying the existence of an all-powerful and all-loving Creator.

The religion professed by the ancient Persians, and still accepted by the Parsees of Western India, and by a scattered population in Yezd and Kerman, is taught in the books known as the Zend-Avesta. This title comes from the Sassanian term *Avesta* or *Apusta*, that is, the text;¹⁷ and *Zend*, or *Zand*, that is, the commentary upon it. The meaning of the latter word, however, seems to have varied at different periods. Originally it signified the interpretation of the sacred texts handed down from Zoroaster (or Zarathustra) and his disciples. In course of time the interpretation came to be esteemed not less authoritative and sacred than the original text, and both were called *Avesta*. But the language in which they were written having died out, they became unintelligible to the majority of the people, and a new *Zend* or commentary was required before they could be understood. The new “Zend” was the work of the most learned priests of the Sassanian period, and consisted of a translation of the double “Avesta” into the vernacular language then in vogue.¹⁸ And as this translation is the only key which the priests of modern Persia possess to the old creed as taught by Zarathustra, it has usurped the place of the original *Zend*, and is now the recognised official commentary.

But, anciently, the word “Zend” implied something more than a simple interpretation of the “Avesta,” or sacred texts. That interpretation was the source of certain new doctrines, the whole of which were considered orthodox, and designated *Zandi-agahi*, or *Zend* doctrines; doctrines which, it can hardly be doubted, supplied Plutarch and some other of the Greeks with ethical suggestions. The name *Pazend*, which frequently occurs in connection with *Avesta* and *Zend*, denotes a further exposition of Zarathustrian teaching, as contained in the *Vendidad*, to which we shall shortly refer.

Thus far we have been indebted to Dr. Haug’s account of the origin of the *Zendavesta*. His views are confirmed by Westergaard, who asserts that the sacred books belong to two epochs; that is, that they are written in one age, and collected and systematised in another, in much the same way as, according to Wolf, the Homeric poems were produced and assumed their present form. All the earlier traditions ascribe their origin to Zarathustra; but modern philologists affirm that they could not have sprung from any single mind, because they present no defined or self-consistent system of religious belief or moral economy. Like the hymns of the Vedas, and the strains of the Norse Edda, the several portions of the *Zendavesta*, so they say, must have been composed by different bards, each of whom coloured his particular theme according to the hues of his lively imagination. This theory, however, though it may have an element of truth in it, is hardly the whole truth. The *Zendavesta* is unquestionably wanting in unity and completeness. But it seems to us that traces of a dominant mind are everywhere visible; that the various parts are held together as on a thread by the teaching of Zarathustra himself; and that the additions made by later and inferior writers are not such as wholly to obscure the original work.

It is to the celebrated Frenchman, Anquetil Duperron, that the scholars of the West owe their knowledge of these remarkable books. Happening to see a facsimile of a few pages written in *Zend* characters, he resolved on setting out for India in order to purchase manuscripts of all the sacred books of the Zarathustrian religion, to acquire a thorough insight into their signification, and to obtain a knowledge of the rites and religious observances of the Parsees. His means being limited, he entered himself as a sailor on board a ship of the Dutch Indian Company, and worked his way out to Bombay in 1754. With money supplied by the French Government to assist him in his ingenious researches, he bribed one of the most learned *dustoors* or priests, *Dustoor Darat*, or *Surat*, to procure the treasures he desired, and to instruct him in the *Zend* and *Pehlvi* languages. As soon as he had acquired the requisite proficiency, he addressed himself to the task of translating the whole of the *Zendavesta* into French. This was in 1759. Returning to Europe, he convinced himself of the genuineness of his

¹⁷ Sanscrit, *Avasthâ*. This is Haug’s conjecture.

¹⁸ The *Pazend* language was identical with the *Parsi*, i.e., the ancient Persian.

purchases by comparing them with MSS. in the Bodleian Library; and, after several years of arduous labour, produced the first European version in 1771. At the outset, the authenticity of his work was challenged both in England and Germany; but all doubts have been set at rest by the inquiries of Rask and others; and thus, through the fanciful enterprise of a young Frenchman, the veil has been lifted which for so long a period shrouded the mysterious religion of the Magi.

We do not, however, possess the whole of the Avesta. It is asserted by an Arabian writer that Zarathustra himself covered with his verses no fewer than twelve thousand parchments, and who shall compute the extent of the literature accumulated by his disciples? Whether this literature perished at the epoch of the Macedonian conquest of Persia, or whether it was destroyed by Alexander the Great, or whether it gradually perished as the influence of the Greek philosophy prevailed over the Zarathustrian theology, it is impossible to determine. The remains of the sacred books, however, with short summaries of their contents, have been handed down to us. Originally they were twenty-one in number, called *Nosks*, and each *Nosk* consisting of “Avesta” and “Zend” – text and commentary. The number twenty-one corresponded to the number of words composing the “Honovar,” or most sacred prayer, of the Zarathustrians. It is, we may add, a magical number, being the result of the multiplication of the sacred numbers, *three* and *seven*.

Of these divisions the *précis* now extant, and collected for the first time by the Danish scholar Westergaard, comprise the following books: First, the *Yasna*, which sets before us the devotions proper to be offered in connection with the sacrificial ceremonies. This *Yasna* is divided into seventy-two chapters, representing the six *Yahânârs*, or “seasons” during which Ahura-Mazda, the Good Principle, created the world. The reader will here note the coincidence between the six creative seasons of the Magian seer, and the six creative days of the Hebrew lawgiver. The *Yasna* consists of two parts, the older of which is written in what is called the *Gâtha* dialect, and had acquired a peculiar sanctity prior to the date of composition of the other books. It may be described as a treasury of songs, hymns, and metrical prayers, which embody a variety of abstruse reflections upon subjects of metaphysical inquiry, and are much better adapted to stimulate the intellect of the student than to foster the devotion of the worshipper. They are rhymeless, like the poetical effusions of Cædmon, and in their metrical structure bear a curious resemblance to the Vedic hymns. Of these collections, or *Gâthas*, there are five, and their leading title seems to be: “The Revealed Thought, the Revealed Word, and the Revealed Deed of Zarathustra the Holy.” It is added that the Archangels first sang the *Gâthas*. Their general purport is an exposition of the work and teaching of the great founder of Magianism, who is represented as inveighing against a belief in the *devas*, or gods, and exhorting his disciples to lift up their hearts only to Ahura-Mazda, the Supreme Goodness.

Now it seems necessary to correct a popular error, that the *Zendavesta* is largely liturgical: an error confirmed by the assertion of Gibbon, who says: “Every mode of religion, to make a deep and lasting impression on the human mind, must exercise our obedience, by enjoining practices of devotion for which we can assign no reason; and must acquire our esteem by inculcating moral duties analogous to the dictates of our own hearts. The religion of Zoroaster was abundantly provided with the former, and possessed a sufficient portion of the latter.” But Zarathustra himself, in one of his best-known precepts, warns his followers that “he who sows the ground with care and diligence, acquires a greater stock of religious merit than he would gain by the repetition of ten thousand prayers.” It is the tendency of all ethico-religious systems, at least in their earliest stage of development, to discourage purely liturgical observances, and to enjoin on the disciple a state of self-concentration and self-absorption varied only by physical activity. Unaided by a divine Revelation, their founders never rise higher than the passive virtues of endurance and patience. As time passes away, and the new creed falls into the hands of a special school of expounders, minute rites and rigid practices are accumulated in order to impose upon the neophyte, and deepen the influence of those who alone possess a clue to their meaning. The formalities which encumber the Zarathustrian worship were invented long after the death of the master, and no indication of them appears in the

oldest section of the Zendavesta. They are to be found chiefly in the much later pages of the *Sadder*, where fifteen different genuflexions and prayers are required of the devout Persian every time he cuts his finger-nails!

To return to the Yasna. The Gâthas, of which we have been speaking, were not improbably composed by Zarathustra himself, and may be held to express his belief and his thoughts in his own words. The second part, or “Younger Yasna,” is of a much later date and less lofty tone. The invention of some of the Master’s disciples or priests, it re-establishes the Polytheism which Zarathustra so strenuously condemned; and furnishes the believer with a manual of prayers and incantations (in prose) to the genii of the woods and streams and hills, the powers of fire and earth and water, and all the invisible spirits which haunt the luminous air.

We come next to the *Visparad*, a collection of prayers in three-and-twenty chapters, written in Zend, and of a similar tenour to those in the younger Yasna. These prayers refer to the preparation of the sacred water, and the consecration of certain offerings – such as the sacred bread – which are carried round about the sacred fire, and after having been exhibited to it, are eaten by the priest and by the votary on whose behalf the ceremony is performed.

The *Yashts* (Yêsti) – that is, worship by prayers and sacrifices – fall to be considered in the third place. Of these devotions, which are consecrated to the praise and worship of one Divine Being, and of a certain limited group of inferior deities, twenty-four are extant. In using them the votary endeavours, by a wearisome enumeration of the glorious achievements of the deity he is addressing, and of the miracles he has wrought, to induce him to come and enjoy the meal prepared for him, and then to bestow on his fervid worshipper a blessing not inferior to the boons bestowed on his children in bygone times. So far as concerns the legendary history of the ancient Iranians, and in connection with their belief in the pantheon of Magianism, the Yashts are of great value, and indeed, from this point of view, are the most precious portion of the Zendavesta.

While the three parts already described exhibit more or less of a liturgical character, the fourth division, known as the *Vendidad*, forms a collection of customs, observances, laws, pains, and penalties, the growth of a period much later than that of Zarathustra, when Ritual began its encroachments on Religion. It is the essence of all *genuine* Ritual that it should illustrate and explain Doctrine, but this is never found to be the case in the primitive creeds. In all such it becomes merely the ingenious invention of a subtle priesthood, by which its members established their influence over an ignorant community. In the eyes of the unlearned its complex character invested it with an air of mystery; they were led to look upon the “form” as of greater importance than the “spirit,” and to attribute a strange, a wonderful potency to rites and ceremonies which they could not understand. While it is the special feature of the faith of Christ that it appeals in its sweet simplicity to every heart, and that it requires of the believer to present himself before the altar with the innocence and trustfulness of a little child; that it seeks not to confuse by a multiplicity of minute observances, and even sums up its leading tenets in two brief and easily intelligible commandments; Magianism, conscious of its inherent defects, unable to fall back on the redeeming sacrifice of a Saviour, deficient in any enduring principle of vitality, sought to build up its structure on a foundation of ceremonies and formalities. And when it could not feed the soul with the bread of truth, it dazzled the senses by imposing spectacles, and confused the imagination with a cumbrous code of the most complicated ritualistic frivolities; so that the Persian worship, with its incantations and devices, laid the foundation of the later Magic.

Turning our attention now to that portion of the Zendavesta which is called the *Vendidad*, we find that it is divided into twenty-two Fargards, or chapters.

In the first of these we find an account of the creation by Ahura-Mazda, of sixteen holy regions, sinless spotless Edens, localities of perfect bliss; each of which is destroyed in succession by Ahriman, the Spirit of Evil, – a fable evidently suggested by the Mosaic history of Paradise. The second treats of a certain king, Yimo Vivaugham, who introduced agriculture into the land of Iran. The third sets

forth the various means by which Zoma, or the Earth, may be rendered happy. You must beware of excavating deep holes in it, for through these the *devs*, or demons, pass to and fro between hell and earth; nor must you bury within it the dead bodies of men or dogs, or other animals. The fourth chapter enumerates six categories of crime, and the several punishments connected with them. The fifth and sixth are occupied with a description of various kinds of impurity. The seventh and eighth contain liturgical directions in reference to the disposal of the carcasses of men and dogs;¹⁹ and it is stated that whoever eats of flesh so unclean can never be purified, but that hell will undoubtedly be his portion. Even the house in which a man or a dog dies must immediately be purified by the use of incense or sweet-smelling odours; a sanitary precaution of some importance in hot climates. In the ninth occurs an elaborate detail of the rite of purification denominated the *Barathium*, to be performed by, and on behalf of a person who shall have been unwittingly defiled by touching the dead. The tenth and eleventh are not less minute in their directions what word must be repeated twice, and thrice, and four times at the different *Gâthas*, in order that Ahriman and his lieutenants may be expelled from men and women who have been in contact with the dead, and from houses, cities, and provinces into which they have obtained an entrance.

The twelfth Fargard treats of various funeral ceremonies, and repeats a number of injunctions relative to the cleansing of places, of clothes and other articles, polluted by lifeless bodies. It concludes with elaborate warnings against a two-footed *dev*, called Ashmog. The thirteenth and fourteenth run riot in praise of the noble qualities of dogs, and severe in their rebuke of the “superior animals” who ill-use them. The fifteenth reads like a Commination Service, in its denunciation of certain crimes which can never be undone even by the profoundest penitential offices, and are punished by Ahura-Mazda with eternal condemnation. The seventeenth, like the sixteenth, is tediously liturgical, and discusses such minutiae as the arrangement of the hair of the head, the extraction of bad or gray hairs, and the cutting of nails. If these operations are performed without certain prescribed ceremonies, the *devs* come upon earth, and parasitical organisms are produced to the great discomfort and injury of man. The eighteenth lays down the distinctions which should characterise an *Athrava*, or priest. He must wear the *padan*, a mouth-cover, of two fingers’ breadth; must carry an instrument for disposing of parasitical insects; devote his nights to study, keep alive the sacred fire, and succour the distressed. The nineteenth chapter recounts the perils to which Zarathustra was exposed, when he had left the south on his mission, from the murderous assaults of Ahriman and his host, who hastened up from the north; the north, to an inhabitant of the warm sunny south, naturally appearing the fit home and haunt of the Spirit of Evil. The twentieth is devoted to the praise of Taneslied, who is represented as having swept away disease, death, bloodshed, war, evil-doers, falsehood, and all kinds of wickedness. The twenty-first enjoins the salutations to be paid to the sacred Bull, and extols some of its illustrious qualities. Finally, the twenty-second narrates the mission of Zarathustra, and describes the evil he will dispel through the influence of the Word; Ahura-Mazda having ordered him to establish his worship in the region called Airya-Mava, or Irman, so that it may become bright, pure, and happy as the abode of Ahura-Mazda himself, free from sin, and, consequently, free from sorrow and suffering.

From this brief summary it will be seen that the religion of the Parsees in its present form is a definite Dualism, recognizing the existence of two distinct principles, Good and Evil, impersonated by spirits of equal power, named Ahura-Mazda, (or Spento-Manyus,) and Ahriman, (or Angro-Manyus.) But no such doctrine was taught by Zarathustra himself. His creed, like all the earliest creeds, was purely Monotheistic. He set before men, as the sole object of their love and adoration, one Supreme Being, Ahura-Mazda, the great “Life-Giver” or the “Living Wisdom,” as the name is variously explained. Nor was his conception of this one God altogether unworthy of the Founder of a Religion. He does not represent Him, indeed, as the “Father,” loving, sympathetic, compassionate,

¹⁹ Dogs are here associated with man on account of their high value in an early stage of civilisation. Zarathustra protected them by special ordinances and penalties.

and so full of condescension, that He is willing to give His Son to die for the salvation of erring Humanity; for he did not enjoy that fuller revelation of the Divine Nature which was vouchsafed to the Hebrew race. But he shows Him as the “Lord over all lords, the Forgiving, the Omniscient.” He is ineffably pure, the source of all Truth, the Holy God. In the Khordah Avesta, Zarathustra is introduced as inquiring: “Tell me the name, O pure Ahura-Mazda, which is Thy greatest, best, and fairest name?” Ahura-Mazda replies: “My name is He who may be questioned: the Gatherer of the people: the Most Pure: He who takes account of the actions of men. My name is God (Ahura); My name is the Great Wise One (Mazdas.) I am the All-Seeing, the Desirer of Good for My creatures, He who cannot be deceived: the Protector: the Tormentor of tormentors: He who smiteth once and only once: the Creator of All.”

His happiness, like His holiness, is without spot or blemish; every blessing is His that man can imagine – health and wealth, virtue, wisdom, prosperity, immortality; and these blessings He is willing to bestow on His creatures if in thought and word and deed they eschew impurity. But we nowhere read that He will assist them in the struggle against sin by creating in them a new heart, or by vouchsafing the grace of His Holy Spirit. The mystery of the Atonement was beyond the reach of the soul and intellect even of Zarathustra; and the highest conception of God to which he could attain was that of a Being of perfect Goodness, sitting enthroned in a strange awful loneliness, with no other feeling than that of approval of Good and disapproval of Evil. He is, of course, the supreme type of Power: all that *is* flows from Him, as light from the Sun: He creates both the shadow and the brightness of the human existence, good and ill, fortune and misfortune. So far above all human intelligence is He placed, that images of Him are forbidden, though He is understood to be symbolised by the sun and by fire. He can be served only by prayers and offerings, by a life of purity and truth, by abstinence from sinful passions, by the banishment of sinful thoughts. Thus Herodotus says of the Zarathustrians, that they reject the use of temples, of altars, and of statues. “They smile,” he says, “at the folly of those nations who imagine that the Gods are descended from, or have any affinity with, human nature. The loftiest mountain-tops are the places chosen for their sacrifices. Hymns and prayers are their principal forms of worship. And the Supreme God, who fills the vast sphere of Heaven, is the object to whom they are addressed.”

The service of Ahura-Mazda consisted, then, as we see, in the performance of good works, in the cultivation of virtue, and in the due offering up of prayer and praise. It was an intellectual worship that Zarathustra prescribed; a worship that might assist in the development of a high morality, but could not inculcate a deep and true religious feeling. Of contrition for sin, of humbling oneself before God, of self-sacrifice and self-abnegation, of love, and faith, and hope, the creed of Zarathustra took no account. And here, as well as elsewhere, we observe its vast inferiority to the religion of Christ. It made no provision for the awakening and fostering of those tender emotions of profound humility, thankful adoration, and unutterable gratitude which are awakened in the Christian’s heart by the name of Jesus. It could never have called forth such an utterance of the son’s glad submission to the will of the Father as we find, for example, in the ejaculatory verse of Ben Jonson:

“Hear me, O God!

A broken heart
Is my best part:
Use still Thy rod,
That I may prove
Therein Thy love.

“If Thou hadst not
Been stern to me,
But left me free,

I had forgot
Myself and Thee.

“For sin’s so sweet,
As minds ill-bent
Rarely repent,
Until they meet
Their punishment.”

Such lines as these indicate a relation between man and his God which could never obtain between the Zarathustrian and his Ahura-Mazda. His was a cold, unimpassioned, logical creed, warmed by no single heart-throb of Divine love and mercy; a creed which demanded human worship for a sinless God, but did not invite human faith in a loving Redeemer; and, consequently, a creed which left untouched the deepest springs and most responsive chords of our humanity.

Both the excellencies and the short-comings of Magianism are shown in the confessions and prayers included in the Zendavesta. For example, there is much that is elevated and noble in the following, yet its tone is curiously Pharisaical, and may be contrasted with that of Ben Jonson’s verses. Instead of being the aspiration of a sinful soul after forgiveness, and a reaching forth towards love and light, it is the self-eulogium of a mind confident in its own sustaining power, and to appreciate its weakness we need only to contrast it with the fervour of a David or a S. Paul. We remember that the Hebrew king exclaimed: “My heart panteth, my strength faileth me: as for the light of mine eyes, it also is gone from me,” and how the Apostle confessed himself “the chief of sinners.” With no such aching consciousness of weakness does the Zarathustrian bow himself before God. There is all the pride of self-righteousness in his prayer. Thus:

“I remain standing fast in the statutes of the law which Ahura-Mazda gave to Zarathustra. As long as life endures I will stand fast in good thoughts in my soul, in good words in my speech, in good deeds in my actions. With all good am I in harmony, with all evil am I at variance. With the punishments of the future life I am content. I have taken hold of good thoughts, words, and works. I have forsaken evil thoughts, words, and works. May the power of Ahriman be broken! may the reign of Ahura-Mazda increase!”

And again:

“I am steadfast in this faith, and turn myself not away from it, for the sake of a happy life, or for the sake of a longer life, nor for power, nor for a kingdom. If I must give up my body for the sake of my soul, I give it willingly. I believe firmly in the good Mazda-yusaian faith; in the Resurrection; in the bridge of souls,²⁰ in the invariable reward of good deeds and punishment of bad deeds, in the everlasting continuance of paradise and the annihilation of hell; and I believe that, at the last, Ahura-Mazda will be victorious, and Ahrimanes will perish with the Devs, and all the children of darkness... I am full of hope that I shall attain to Paradise and the shining Garathânan, where all majesty dwelleth. I make this confession in the hope that I may hereafter become more zealous to accomplish good works and keep myself more from sin; and that my good deeds may serve for the diminution of evil and the increase of good till the rising again.”

We know the form of prayer taught us by Jesus Christ; how simple it is, how complete, how absolute in its renunciation of self, how comprehensive in its charity. “Thy will be done”... “Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive them who trespass against us”... “Lead us not into temptation.” Such are its leading thoughts: submission before God, charity before Man; both implying and demanding the conquest and humiliation of self. Let us contrast it with a Zarathustrian prayer:

²⁰ The bridge *Chinavat* by which the souls of the good crossed into Paradise; a fancy afterwards adopted by Muhâmad.

“In the name of God the Giver and Forgiver, Rich in Love, praise be to Ahura-Mazda, the God with the name ... ‘Who always was, always is, and always will be.’... Ahura-Mazda the Wise, the Creator, the Over-seeing God, pure, good, and just! With all strength bring I thank-offerings and praise to the Lord, the completer of good works, who made men greater than all earthly beings, and through the gift of speech created them to rule over the creatures and to war against the evil spirits. Praise to the omniscience of God who has sent through the holy Zarathustra power and knowledge of the law. All good do I accept at Thy command, O God, and think, speak, and do it. I believe in the pure law, and by every good work I seek forgiveness for sins. I keep pure the six powers – thought, speech, act, memory, reason, understanding. According to Thy will am I able to fulfil (these resolutions.) O Accomplisher of Good, to Thy honour are good thoughts, good words, and good works. I enter on the shining way to Paradise. May the terror of hell not overcome me! May I pass the bridge Chinavat and attain to Paradise, the bright and odoriferous, where are all joys. Praise to the Lord who awards those who accomplish good deeds according to His will, who purifies the obedient, and at last purifies the wicked in hell. All praise be to the Creator, Ahura-Mazda, the All-Wise, the Mighty, the Rich in Love.”

Prayer, according to Zarathustra, is not the humbling of the soul before its Creator, not the aspirations of the spirit towards the Source of all Love and Mercy, not the desire of the creature to be at peace with God, but the renunciation of will, – a noble and worthy aim in itself, but not fulfilling the Christian idea of prayer. To do good and to shun evil is, no doubt, the motive of the Christian life; but prayer is something more and something higher, the sacrifice of an humble and a contrite heart.

“Heaven is the magazine wherein God puts

Both good and evil; prayer’s the key that shuts
 And opens this great treasure; ’tis a key
 Whose wards are Faith, and Hope, and Charity.
 Wouldst thou prevent a judgment due to sin?
 Turn but the key and thou mayst lock it in.
 Or wouldst thou have a blessing fall upon thee!
 Open the door and it will shower on thee.”²¹

But no such conception as this is discernible throughout the length and breadth of the Parsee Scriptures, which here, as elsewhere, and in relation to other matters, attain a lofty, but not the loftiest, level; rise above earth, but do not soar to Heaven. They seem instinct with echoes of the original revelation vouchsafed to man, but those echoes are faint and imperfect; whereas, in the Hebrew creed, the voices of God are repeated with a fulness and a power which leaves the heart nothing to desire. In this vast superiority we cannot fail to see a strong and striking proof of its authenticity. If it be found difficult to account for the moral excellence and æsthetic beauty of Zarathustrianism without tracing it back in some indirect way to a Divine origin; how shall we explain the sublimity and grandeur of the Hebrew Theism, unless we admit that it is all it professes to be, – is, in very truth, the expression of the will of the everliving God?

We have spoken of Zarathustra’s religion as originally monotheistic; its purity, however, was not long preserved, and the cause of its corruption lay in itself. Zarathustra could not deny the existence of Evil, and to explain it was driven to concoct an extraordinary hypothesis. As in every electrified object there are two poles, a positive and a negative, so, according to the Prophet, in Ahura-Mazda, and in all rational beings, man included, are present a good and holy Will, and its shadow or negative, – a higher and a lower nature, – the Positive and the Negative Mind. How Zarathustra reconciled this idea with his conception of Ahura-Mazda, as Perfect Goodness, we are unable to comprehend. At all

²¹ Quarles.

events, it contained the germs of the future Dualism of the Persian religion. The Negative Mind soon came to be separated from the good and holy Will, and was quickly personified as an independent evil being, a Power of Night and Darkness, Ahriman (Angro-Manyus,) equal in might to Ahura-Mazda, and disputing with him the possession of the world. Thus arose the myth of the constant struggle between the two powers, as between Day and Night; the servants of Ahura-Mazda being sent forth to encounter, resist, and overcome the slaves and works of Ahriman, thereby bringing about the end of all things, when Ahriman himself should be vanquished and reconciled.

In course of time the difficulties of this dual theory were detected by acute intellects, and at the Sassanian Revival an attempt was made to dispose of them by introducing the doctrine of Monotheism under a new form, that of a Great Primal Cause (Zervana Akarana), the Boundless Time or Uncreated Whole, such as we trace in the later Greek poetry, and apparently rather a “metaphysical abstraction,” like the Greek Ἀνάγκη, or the Roman Nemesis, than “an active and presiding deity.” Thence proceeded both the Good and the Evil Principles; the two antagonist creators who balanced against each other in perpetual conflict a race of spiritual and material beings, light and darkness, good and evil. The wise benevolence of Ahura-Mazda formed men capable of virtuous impulses, and endowed each with everything that could contribute to his happiness. He preserved by his watchful providence the harmonious movements of the planets, and the temperate combination of the elements. But the malice of Ahriman has long since pierced Ahura-Mazda’s “egg;” in other words, violated the sweet accord and bounteous beauty of His works. Since that fatal irruption, the most minute articles of good and evil are alternately commingled and agitated together; the most poisonous herbs spring up among the most wholesome plants; the warfare of deluges, earthquakes, and conflagrations disturbs the serenity of nature; and humanity is subjected to all the blighting influences of sin, suffering, and sorrow. While the rest of mankind were led away captive in the chains of their terrible enemy, the faithful Persian alone remained constant in his faith in Ahura-Mazda, and fought under his banner of light, looking forward to a triumphant day when Good should prevail over all the world.

It seems to us impossible to doubt that, in this later development of the Zoroastrian faith, its priests and teachers were largely indebted to the Sacred Writings, though into what they borrowed they introduced much original and fanciful speculation.

A Parsee, with a firm faith in Ahura-Mazda, and conscious of having obeyed the law, offered up prayer and praise, and renounced, in intention at least, evil thoughts and deeds and words, lay down on his death bed in a certain hope and expectation of the Eternal life. We have seen that the Zendavesta appointed a variety of penances, by the performance of which the believer obtained immediate pardon for ordinary transgressions; and therefore, full of the self-righteousness which his creed was so well adapted to inculcate, he faced the passage of the Dark River without fear. He knew not of any need to implore the mercy of a Redeemer, to humble himself in sackcloth and ashes, to base his hope on the infinite love of God made man, on the glorious sacrifice of the Cross; his soul passed straight to Paradise, as an arrow flies towards its mark. In the Khordah Avesta we can follow the stages of its journey: – On the first night after death the soul dwelt near the head of the inanimate body it had just deserted, and sat there praying, rejoicing in as much joy as is vouchsafed to the whole living world. And so did it dwell on the second night, praying. And so did it dwell on the third night, praying. But when the third night verged upon dawn, the soul of the pure man went forward. A wind, sweeter than all other winds, blew to meet it from the south. And in that wind came to embrace the pilgrim *his own law*, under the figure of a maiden beautiful and shining, fair as the fairest of created beings. The pilgrim then took the first step in his celestial progress, and arrived in the paradise *Hamata*; he took the second, and reached the paradise *Hûkhta*; he took the third, and arrived at the paradise *Hvarsta*. The beatified wanderer made yet another step, and gained the presence of the Eternal Light. There was he addressed by an already beatified soul: “How art thou, O pure deceased, who hast come from the perishable world hither to the imperishable?” Ahura-Mazda here interrupted: “Ask him not, for he has come on the fearful trembling way, the separation of soul

and body. Bring him hither of the food of the full fatness, that is, of the filling food for those who think, speak, and do good, for the pure after death.”

A recent writer says of this notion of a progressive advance to the “Eternal Light,” of the welcome received from the blessed, and from the gentle words of Ahura-Mazda himself; and of the conducting angel who represents the man’s own earthly faith and life, (like Bunyan’s Mr. Good-Conscience meeting old Honest beside the River of Death,) “all these,” he says, “are beautiful thoughts.” Surely fanciful, rather than beautiful; and better adapted to amuse religious sentimentalists than to satisfy healthy and earnest believers. The obvious reference to the three days and nights spent by our Lord “in prison” appears to indicate that this is a comparatively modern portion of the Zendavesta, founded upon some vague knowledge of the mystery of the Resurrection.

While the pure soul proceeded, as we have seen, by three stages or gradations to the Paradise of Light and Sweetness, the evil and unclean soul, on the other hand, descended, also by three stages, to the terrors of Douzakh, the dark abode of Ahriman and the Devs. There it suffered according to its sinfulness until the general day of Resurrection. At that great epoch these nights of indescribable woe will be undergone by all who have not expiated their earthly offences; woe so terrible, that the Blessed, looking down upon it from their celestial battlements, will be moved to tears of pity. And then the massive mountains and the solid rocks shall be melted by the heat, and streams of liquid gold shall flow, in which both the pure and evil shall receive a regenerating bath. Ahriman and his devs shall share in the universal happiness, and all created life shall swell the song of praise sent up in honour of Ahura-Mazda.

While we are unable to doubt that in the Zendavesta, as it has come down to us, may be traced the direct influence of the Hebrew creed, and that ideas and principles of a still later date were borrowed more or less closely from Christianity, we can as little doubt that Zarathustrianism had no inconsiderable effect on the Jewish popular belief. The Jewish prophets, after the Captivity, would seem to have adopted much of what may be called their poetic language and machinery from the writings of the Magian teachers. The Talmud contains unmistakable evidence of its indebtedness to the same source. The Angelology of the Jewish doctors originated, probably during the captivity of the Tribes in Babylonia, in the Magian superstitions; and it was then that the complete angelic hierarchy was evolved, with its seven great archangels corresponding to the seven Amchaspands of the Zendavesta. It was then that for the first time the Jewish popular creed recognised the existence of two antagonistic hosts of spiritual beings, arrayed against each other in everlasting battle. Then was developed the fancy of a guardian angel attending every individual to shelter him from the malignant hostility of his Dev or demon. So that much of the mythology which Milton employs so effectively in “Paradise Lost,” having borrowed it from the traditions and legends of the Hebrew race, came originally from the far East, and was invented by the followers of Zarathustra. The Miltonic and popular conception of Satan, so unlike the Biblical representation of the great Destroyer, was largely coloured from the Magian sketch of Ahriman, the Power of Darkness.

It is certain that the grand and lofty Hebrew revelation of the One God was modified and debased by its contact with the Magian teaching. It has been well remarked that wherever any approximation had been made to this sublime truth of the existence of the one great First Cause, either “awful religious reverence” or “philosophic abstraction” had removed the Creative Power absolutely out of the range of human sense, and supposed that the intercourse of the Divinity with man, the moral government, and even the actual creative work, had been carried on by the intermediate agency of, in Oriental phrase, an Emanation, or, in Platonic language, of the “Wisdom,” “Reason,” or “Intelligence” of the Supreme. The Jews, under the influence of their intercourse with the Persians, adopted that conception, and, departing from the path laid down for them by Revelation, interposed one or more intermediate beings as the channels of communication between God and man. The Apostle seizes on the popular fancy, and endeavours to restore from it the original truth, when he tells his readers that the “Word” of which they spoke so vaguely and presumptuously was none other than God Himself, –

the Son of God, but equal with the Father, – the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person. He showed them that the mediation between the lofty spiritual nature of God and the intellectual and moral being of Man was not to be accomplished through any independent agency, but by the revelation of God Himself in the person and presence of His beloved Son. That this, the essential and central truth of Christianity, was one which the unassisted human intellect could never have developed we know, from the fact that it is found in no creed of admittedly human origin, and that it is never clearly set forth even in any religious system which has borrowed from Christianity.

We can imagine the ability of man to shape out for himself an idea of some awful Power, some mighty First Cause, which created and ordered the universe, and controlled and shaped its destinies. Looking around upon creation, he might, perhaps, without any severe intellectual effort, attain to the thought of a Creator. This conception once realised, he might in due time come to believe that the Creator could be pleased or angered by the doings of His creatures; and that the anger of One so powerful would be something to dread and avoid. But the idea of this grand and terrible Creator sending from Heaven His own Son to take upon Himself humanity, and thereby save the creature from the just wrath it had provoked, and the dread retribution it had deserved, – an idea, so glorious and consoling, could never, we believe, have been grasped by the loftiest human intellect, unless aided by a revelation from above.

The exact relation of Zarathustrianism to Christianity it is somewhat difficult to define, because a cloud of doubt and uncertainty hangs over the compilation of the later portions of the Zendavesta. While the great antiquity of the Gâthas cannot be disputed, while there is clear evidence that they contain much of the original teaching of Zarathustra, – teaching nobler and more exalted than that of his followers, – it seems not less certain that the doctrines of the Resurrection and the Future Life were borrowed from the Hebrews. What then is left to justify a comparison with Christianity? The keynote of its scheme is intellectual pride; that of the Christian religion, spiritual abasement. The former urges on its disciples the necessity of good thoughts, words, and deeds in order to please Ahura-Mazda; the latter, as a proof of faith in the mission of its Founder. The former teaches an excellent code of morals, so far as relates to the individual; the latter lays down one golden rule, “Do unto others as thou wouldest they should do unto thee.” The former enforces the law of self-control; the latter of self-renunciation. It is impossible to pretend that Magianism shows the same insight into man’s wants, failings, passions, temptations, as Christianity shows; or provides a system so capable of adaptation to every age, and rank, and character.

We see no reason to doubt the authenticity and antiquity of the Zendavesta; but it is somewhat surprising that scholars who make haste to accept *it* as genuine, should show so much scepticism in reference to the Christian Scriptures. Surely, as regards the latter, the evidence of genuineness is infinitely stronger than as regards the former. We know that they were implicitly accepted by men who lived almost in the very time of those who recorded them; on the other hand, of Zarathustra and his contemporaries or successors we know absolutely nothing. Some authorities represent him to have flourished as early as 2200 B.C.; others as late as 500 B.C. Some consider him to have been the founder of a dynasty; others invest him with a supernatural personality. But at the best he remains *nominis umbra*; as indistinct and shadowy, as in his teaching he is cold and clear. Of the authenticity of his writings the principal proofs are those derivable from the writings themselves. But if we allow that such proofs are admissible, what shall we say of those to be found in the Gospels and Epistles? As their morality is so much more elevated than that of the Zendavesta, so is the certainty of their Divine origin infinitely more assured. The class of testimony which asserts the authenticity of the one not less convincingly affirms the genuineness of the other. And if the Gospels are all that they purport to be, how can we avoid the conclusion that they are truthful also in the witness they bear to the life and character of Christ?

We may point to a remarkable contrast between Magianism and Christianity, – that the former has undergone an almost complete revolution of meaning and doctrine, while, in spite of sectarian

glosses, the latter remains virtually unaltered. The faith once for all delivered to the saints is held by believers to-day in all its original purity. We repeat the Creed just as it fell from the rapt lips of martyrs, saints and confessors. But the monotheism of Zarathustra has been broken up into a curious Dualism; and upon the religious system of the Gâthas has been accumulated such a burden of ritual, of novel teaching, of borrowed dogmas, and alien mysteries, that the acutest students are almost baffled in their endeavours to distinguish the false from the true, and the new from the old. It is almost impossible to determine what belongs to the Zarathustrian original, and what to perversions or adaptations from the Jewish Scriptures.

It is an indisputable testimony to the living force and divine genius of Christianity, that it occupies a void which no one of the primitive religions has ever been able to fill. We find it difficult to conceive that any man who has once been a Christian could voluntarily embrace Zarathustrianism or Buddhism, and attempt to satisfy his soul with it, any more than with the philosophy of the Stoics. We are tempted to ask, indeed, whether either could at any time have satisfied the cravings of humanity. We know that all their ethical schemes could not lift the sages of Greece and Rome out of the deep, the intense sadness which possessed them, nor respond to their yearnings after a something they could neither describe nor define. Their state of thought and feeling has been expressed by a modern poet, Matthew Arnold, with what seems to us a wonderful fidelity: —

“Nor only in the intent

To attach blame elsewhere,
Do we at will invent
Stern powers who make their care
To embitter human life, malignant deities.

“But next, we would reverse
The scheme ourselves have spun,
And what we made to curse
We now would lean upon,
And feign kind gods who perfect what man vainly tries...

“We pause, we hush our heart,
And then address the gods:
‘The world hath failed to impart
The joy our youth forebodes,
Failed to fill up the void which in our breasts we bear!’”

Their principles of thought were pure, but they felt that there existed a purity which was beyond their reach; their standard of conduct was high, but they were inwardly conscious that it ought to be higher. On that golden “ladder of sunbeams” which rises from earth to the angel-guarded battlements of heaven, they had ascended a few timid steps, but above and beyond they could see a glory to which it was not given them to rise. Hence it has often been said, and justly, that the men were greater than their system; and such, so far as Magianism was concerned, may well have been the case with the loftier minds of Bactria and Persia. But it can never be pretended that the Christian is greater than Christianity. Let him be ever so holy in his living, ever so exalted in his aspirations, he will not seek for something *beyond* and *out of* Christianity, because he feels and knows that he cannot exhaust all its capabilities; that it soars far higher than he can ever soar. It has truths which the profoundest psychologist cannot fathom; it opens up visions which the boldest imagination cannot comprehend; it contains a wealth of emotion and sympathy which the most passionate soul can never exhaust. After we have said and done all we can, after we have mastered all that has been said and done by other

men, we still find in the life and character of Christ that which may well engage, and yet never weary our attention. And here we touch upon a feature which no human system of religion or morality has ever matched. Strip the Zendavesta, if you will, of all its later and less worthy adjuncts, and yet it cannot, any more than the Rig-Veda, present us with the divine beauty of the Man of Sorrows. But this it is which fills, soothes, blesses, inspires the aching, restless, craving human heart. When it can no longer satisfy itself with the cold moralities of philosophy, when it pines for a deeper and a warmer life, when it is weary with problems which it cannot solve, and disappointed in hopes which it has seen fade away like dreams of the night, it turns to the Cross and is comforted. The mysteries which perplexed it vanish in the light that emanates from the Divine history of the Son of God. The awe with which it regards the passionless abstraction of a great First Cause, a supreme entity of Power and Wisdom without Love, passes into reverent admiration and joyous thanksgiving when it looks up into the face of the Good Shepherd, and reposes in the shadow of the Vine, and learns how that He Who was with the Father before the beginning, has suffered even as we suffer, has borne the heavy burden of the flesh even as we have borne it, and now sits on the right hand of God, – not an idea, not a principle, not a Spirit, but a Person, bidding all who believe to come unto Him and be at rest.

This, indeed, is the cardinal merit of Christianity, – it has given us Christ.

God forbid that we should deny a certain value even to the “unconscious prophecies of heathendom,” or refuse to see something of the spirit of Christ in the teaching of the ancient sages and philosophers; but when an attempt is made to raise Magianism to an equal rank with Christianity, and the cold intellectual utterances of the Zendavesta to rank with the living voices of Holy Writ, it is essential to point out how vast, how impassable is the gulf between them; how little Magianism did or could do to elevate man’s spiritual nature; and how largely Christianity surpasses it, in and through the manifestation of the Divine love in the mystery of God made Man.

CHAPTER III. *JEWISH SUPERSTITIONS*

The Talmud

The Talmud, (from the Hebrew *lamad*, to learn,) is the name given to the great code of the Jewish civil and canonical law. It is divided, like the Zendavesta, into two parts, the Mishna and the Gemara; the former being, as it were, the text, and the latter the commentary and supplement. Of late years public attention has been exceptionally drawn to it by the writings of the late Emanuel Deutsch, and it has obtained, as we think, a wholly undeserved amount of panegyric.

Deutsch, an enthusiast in his attachment to the land and religion of his forefathers, put it forward as a wondrous treasure, the real value of which had been wholly overlooked. It contained, he seemed to say, a complete *corpus juris*; and, as an encyclopædia of law, should be compared with the corresponding collections of Roman or of English law, with the Pandects of Justinian and the Commentaries of Blackstone. Herein lies the excuse for rules that have been considered unduly subtle, or in other ways offensive to modern taste. But it contains something more than a body of law; it is also a collection of Jewish poetry and legend, of Jewish science, and Jewish metaphysical speculation. The Mishna is a development of the laws contained in the Pentateuch. The members of the Sanhedrim, who were chiefly concerned in the formation of this law, were obliged (so argues Deutsch) to be accomplished men. It was necessary that they should possess some knowledge of physical science, or at least of zoology, botany, and geography in their then condition. It was necessary also that they should be good linguists, having some acquaintance with Latin and Greek, as well as with Aramaic, Syriac, and Hebrew. Disreputable men were kept out, and all were compelled to be married men and fathers of families. “The origin of the Talmud,” he says, “is coeval with the return from the Babylonish captivity.” And though it is the glory of Christianity to have carried into the heart of humanity at large the golden germs of thought previously hidden in the schools of the learned, yet numerous precepts, supposed to be purely Christian, lie enshrined in the pages of the Talmud. It would be difficult to find a penal legislation more distinctly humane. As for its myths, its allegories, its apparent absurdities, they should be read in the spirit in which Christians read Bunyan’s “Pilgrim’s Progress.” The Talmud insists upon the pre-existence of the soul, on the dogmas of Immortality and the Resurrection, it denies the doctrine of everlasting damnation; it excludes no human being from the world to come. And as the Talmud, continues Deutsch, although redacted at a later period, is, in point of time, prior to the New Testament, the beautiful maxims of the former cannot have been borrowed from the latter. In a word, it is a collection which took nearly a thousand years to form, and has been commented upon for a thousand years since. It breathes charity to all men. If we except a few items of coarseness, such as must occur in every legal code, it is all good; at least, it is never bad; it deserves all possible respect and even reverence. Such, in a condensed form, is the account of the Talmud which Deutsch asks us to accept.

But it cannot be admitted that the defects of the Talmud are trivial, any more than that the spirit of the Rabbins towards Christianity was tolerant. Nor can it be admitted that the Talmud owes nothing to the Christian Scriptures.

On the first point hear what Professor Hurwitz says: – “The Talmud contains many things which every enlightened, nay, every pious Jew, must sincerely wish had never appeared there, or should at least long ago have been expunged from its pages. Some of these Agadatha are objectionable *per se*; others, indeed, are susceptible of explanations, but without them are calculated to produce false and erroneous impressions.” So much may be said, we think, of the legends in the Talmud; such as the

size of Leviathan and the way in which he is to be killed and cooked for the chosen people, and the marriage of Adam with Lilith before the creation of Eve, with the diabolic progeny which sprang from them.

Another point to be considered is the influence of the Alexandrian books, commonly known by us as the Apocrypha. Of these the Books of Wisdom and Ecclesiasticus at any rate exhibit the reflections of singularly devout and thoughtful minds, which had exercised themselves in the contemplation of the writings of Moses and the prophets in combination with no inconsiderable tincture of Greek philosophy. It would be a question of great interest to see how far ideas suggested in those very remarkable compositions have found their way into the Talmud.

As regards the sentiments of the Rabbins towards Christianity: in the reign of Domitian, (that is, about A.D. 90,) the Sanhedrim took measures against the Minim, that is to say, the degenerated; for so they called the Jews who had been converted to Christianity. The Rabbi Tarphon said: – “The Gospels and all the books of the Minim deserve to be burnt, for Paganism is less dangerous: the Pagans misunderstand the truths of Judaism from ignorance, the Minim deny them with full knowledge of the case. Better to seek an asylum in a Pagan temple than in the synagogues of the Minim.” The Sanhedrim of Jamnia and other similar bodies adopted the like tone. And it was men like these who helped to form the Talmud.

Not the less it remains true, that every powerful movement which has occurred in the world’s history has shown a part of its power in the way it has influenced opponents. The Reformation, as the Ultramontane De Maistre is compelled to admit, wrought a very perceptible change even among Roman Catholics. The French Revolution of 1793 did not leave Legitimists in the position they had occupied before its outbreak. Now Christianity is the greatest movement the world has ever seen. Dean Merivale in his excellent “History of the Romans under the Empire,” states with no less eloquence than truth the immense indirect influence which it had begun to exercise on heathen thought by the end even of the first century. We can trace it in Pagan literature. But Deutsch and similar Talmudophilists would have us believe that it had no influence whatever upon the Talmud, and that whenever we find kindred thoughts in the teaching of Christianity, and in the teaching of their favourite work, it is the Gospel which is indebted to the Talmud and not the Talmud to the Gospel.

But for our part we wholly dissent from this extraordinary theory, which, indeed, cannot be supported by any chronological evidence. There are occasions, of course, in which dates become of comparatively trifling importance. A man feels troubled, for example, with the enigmas of life, and finds light and consolation in reading the book of Job; that most beautiful book —*quel bellissimo libro*, as the Italian poet Giusti called it. Some friend, finding him thus engaged, begins to argue in favour of Bishop Warburton’s view, that it is a composition of comparatively late date, perhaps of the age of Jeremiah, and not (as used to be generally supposed) as early as the time of Moses. In such a case a man may well reply, that without any wish to discourage critical inquiry in its proper place, he is content for the present to go on reading for his soul’s health, to accept the words before him as a message from above, and to feel sure that whenever God gave it, it was given at the time when it was most needed. But in the case of the Talmud dates are of real and living importance, though we own that it is difficult to fix them with accuracy. We believe, however, with one of Deutsch’s critics, that Christian elements *have* found their way into the Talmud, though doubtless, pre-Christian ideas, similar to those which are met with in the Books of Wisdom and Ecclesiasticus, are also to be found there. Is it not true that the Mishna was brought into its present form by Rabbi Jehudah, surnamed the Holy, about A.D. 200, and that the Gemara was not completed until A.D. 500? Deutsch, indeed, appeals to the article in the “*Novellæ Constitutiones*” (or *Novels*, as they are commonly called) of Justinian against the Talmud. The reference is correct enough, but the *Novels* belong to the later parts of Justinian’s reign, and were not promulgated before the year 534.

It is well known that at the present time there are three parties among the Jews who differ widely as to the amount of respect which ought to be paid to the legislation contained within the

pages of the Talmud. Two out of these parties would greatly modify it, or actually sweep it away. We believe that its influence upon practice is not destined to endure; and that though there *is* a book which will continue so to influence life, that book is not the Talmud, but the Bible. The Talmud has its curiosities and even beauties, as well as its gross absurdities and defects; but, after all, it will be found, we believe, that it often reflects but too truly the mind of those of whom it was said, “Ye have made the commandment of God of none effect by your traditions.”

With these preliminary observations, we pass on to a more particular description of the Talmud.

There are two Talmuds, the one called the Talmud of the Occidentals, or the “Jerusalem” Talmud, and the other the “Babylonian” Talmud. The former of these originally included the whole of the first five *Sedarim* (or portions,) but now consists of only thirty-nine treatises. Its final redaction is supposed to have taken place towards the close of the fourth Christian century, but the authorities engaged in the work cannot now be determined. But it is certainly distinguished by more accuracy of expression and precision of statement than the second or Babylonian, or “our” Talmud, which makes use of its predecessor, and was not completed for a century later. Its editor is generally considered to be Rabbi Ashi, president of the Academy of Syro in Babylon (A.D. 365-427.) Both the Mishna, though revised in A.D. 219, and the “Palestine” Gemara, had become greatly corrupted through the interpolation of gross traditions and the critical judgments of different schools, when Rabbi Ashi, with the assistance of his friend and disciple, Abina, undertook the labour of sifting the old from the new, and introducing order into chaos.

Ashi was appointed to the headship of the school of Sora at the age of twenty-three, and under his rule Sora became the head-quarters of Rabbinism in the East. When he entered on the redaction of the Mishna and Gemara, he began by assembling yearly at the great feasts the most learned Hebrews, and examining them with respect to their traditional practices and expositions. He then called together his disciples every spring, and gave out to them a particular treatise of the Mishna; in the autumn they again came before him with all the information relative to it they had collected in the interval. This he personally investigated, and reduced into shape. The Mishna being composed of sixty-three treatises, he was thus engaged for upwards of thirty years. The final revision occupied him twenty-two years. At the time of his death (in his seventy-fifth year) the work was all but completed; the last touches were given by his friend, Rabbi Abina.

The Mosaic is the written law of the Jews; the Mishna, the oral. The latter is the very basis of Judaism, is its civil, religious, and juridico-political code, – an explanation and amplification of the Mosaic. It was developed out of the authoritative decisions of the schools and of certain distinct and well-authenticated traditions which were traced back to Sinai itself. Thus there were two chief sections, or parts: *Halacoth*, the rabbinical decisions, and *Haggadah*, the traditional narratives and popular illustrations. Of the great bulk of the former the reputed author is Hillel, the head of the Sanhedrim in the early part of Herod the Great’s reign, but, probably, he only collected them. Maimonides arranges them under five heads: —

- a.* Mosaic and Scriptural;
- b.* Mosaic and traditional;
- c.* Dicta and decisions generally received, but doubtful;
- d.* Decisions of the wise, given by them as “hedges of the law;” and *e.* Counsels of prudence, which it was well to follow, though they had no legal authority.

The Haggadic narratives are generally of a light and amusing character, though occasionally a deep significance underlies them, converting them into allegories and fables and parables well worthy the attention of the student, though he may not think so highly of them as Frankel, who exclaims: “They are as vivid flashes: or as those spirits of light in Jewish myth, that flow forth in daily myriads from God’s throne, and then vanish to make way for others.”

The Halacoth and Haggadoth accumulated rapidly after the Captivity, representing in due time “a body of traditional exposition of high authority, which increased rapidly, and required the life-long study of a numerous body of Sopherim, or Scribes, to digest and hand on without loss to succeeding generations.” Soon it outgrew the grasp of even the strongest memory and the profoundest application, and it became evident that, unless put upon record, all that was valuable would perish, and only that be preserved which chanced to be in accordance with popular sentiment. To the digest made by Hillel, Simon ben Gamaliel added the worthiest of the later material; and his son, Jehudah the Holy, entered on a complete redaction and revision, which he published in A.D. 219. Hillel, grandfather of the Gamaliel at whose feet S. Paul sat, had arranged the traditional Halacoth under eighteen heads; Jehudah re-arranged them into six Sedarim, or sections: —

1. *Zeraïm* (Seeds,) on Agriculture;
2. *Moed* (Feast,) on the Sabbath, Festivals, and Fasts;
3. *Nashim* (Women,) on Marriage, Divorce, &c., including the laws on Vows and the Nazirship;
4. *Nizikin* (Damages,) chiefly civil and penal law, including the ethical treatise Aboth;
5. *Kadashim* (Sacred things,) Sacrifices, &c., a description of the Temple at Jerusalem, &c.;
6. *Tehoroth* (Purifications,) on pure and impure persons and things.

We now see that, about A.D. 221 Jehudah the Holy created the Mishna, we have already seen that three centuries later, the same exhaustive work of redaction and revision was done for the Gemara, – the two forming what is now known as the Talmud. The two “editors” received each his peculiar title of honour; Jehudah was styled Rabbina, Ashi Rabban.

Of the language of the Babylon Talmud it is said that it is debased with foreign and barbarous terms and grammatical solecisms to a much greater extent than the “Jerusalem Talmud.” Mr. Blunt asserts that “the Haggadic narratives resemble more closely the vernacular Aramaic, showing their origin in ordinary folk lore. The Halacoth are in Mishnic Hebrew, carrying evidence of higher date. The style is so exceedingly concise as to make the sense that it contains a microscopic study. The difficulties indeed of the Gemara are so great, that no one need think to master them thoroughly who has not drawn in Gemara with his mother’s milk. The study of the Talmud presumes a thorough knowledge also of the Hebrew Bible, a single word often indicating an entire passage. The wonderful moral confusion of the Talmud, the mixed character of which may be detected in every page, is nowhere more strikingly exemplified than in the prayer put by the Gemarist into the mouth of Rabbi Nechoniah ben Hakakana, on entering the school, or Beth Midrash, and quitting it again in the evening.”

The morning prayer was as follows: —

“I beseech Thee that no scandal may occur through fault of mine, and that I err not in matters of Halacah, so as to cause my colleagues to exult. May I not call impurity pure, or purity impure; and may my colleagues not blunder in matters of Halacah, that I may have no cause to triumph over them.”

The spirit of this prayer, in its meekness and modesty, is truly commendable, and presents a striking contrast to that of the evening prayer: —

“I thank Thee that Thou hast given me my portion among those who have a seat in the Beth Midrash, and that Thou hast not cast my lot among those who sit in the corner. I early rise, and they early rise; but I rise to the service of the law, they to vanity. I labour, and they also labour, but I labour and receive a recompense; they labour, but receive nothing. I hasten, and they also hasten; but I hasten in the direction of the world to come, they hasten towards the pit of destruction.”

It is impossible to believe that both these prayers come from the same source; “sweet waters and bitter” do not alike flow from the fountain of Marah.

With respect to the general character of the Talmud, with all its weakness and strength, its beauty and deformity, its poetry and commonplace, its tender wisdom and glaring absurdity, we cannot do better than quote the moderate opinion of the writer already cited, as infinitely more trustworthy than the dithyrambic utterances of Deutsch and his imitators. He says: —

“In its origin it was the result of an almost necessary development. Starting with the axiom that the law of Moses is binding on the children of Abraham in every generation, its precepts have been applied to the changing habits and customs of the Jews in different ages and under various climates, by a literal interpretation when possible, otherwise on the *ci-près* principle, rarely by giving a new direction to its enactments, as instanced under the Hillel *régime*. It is this application of the Law to the needs of Jewish Society, by a process slow and gradual, that has made each successive stage of development, in Jewish opinion, more valuable than its predecessors. Thus if the Law has been likened to water, the Mishna, which gives a later direction to its precepts, is as wine; and the Gemara, declaring as it does the sense in which the Mishnic Hilkoth are to be taken, is as hippocras. It is not that the Law is less, or that the traditional decisions and expository matter are more sacred, but the latest phase of judicial interpretation is the most binding; and where the rule of action is clear and decisive, no antecedent utterance need trouble the inquirer. Yet the Talmud has always been antiquated. It has never known the sunshine of youth. It has still been the mouldering, moss-grown ruin. In its origin it presupposed vital action where there was nothing but death; Temple service with the Temple hopelessly in ruins, ‘not one stone upon another;’ sacrificial rites that were impossible without an altar, and for which certain prayers were substituted, carefully numbered out, and made binding on the individual in lieu of public offering... Nothing can be more completely out of place than strict Talmudism amid the complications of modern society; it is impossible to make its precepts consist with the social and political duties of the highly educated Jew. Our Lord, Who came not to destroy the Law, but to fulfil it, has pointed out those modes of dealing with the Law in its higher and more spiritual bearings, that in the end must be accepted by Israel as his truest wisdom.”

Mr. Deutsch gives the following account of the six sections of the Mishna: —

“Section I. *Seeds*: of Agrarian laws, commencing with a chapter on Prayers. In this section the various tithes and donations due to the Priests, the Levites, and the poor, from the products of the lands, and further the Sabbatical year, and the prohibited mixtures in plants, animals, and garments, are treated of.

“Section II. *Feasts*: of Sabbaths, Feast and Fast days, the work prohibited, the ceremonies ordained, the sacrifices to be offered, on them. Special chapters are devoted to the Feast of the Exodus from Egypt, to the New Year’s Day, to the Day of Atonement (one of the most impressive portions of the whole book,) to the Feast of Tabernacles, and to that of Haman.

“Section III. *Women*: of betrothal, marriage, divorce, &c.; also of vows.

“Section IV. *Damages*: including a great part of the civil and criminal law. It treats of a law of trades, of buying and selling, and the ordinary monetary transactions. Further, of the greatest crime known to the law, viz., idolatry. Next of witnesses, of oaths, of legal punishments, and of the Sanhedrim itself. This section concludes with the so-called ‘Sentences of the Fathers,’ containing some of the sublimest ethical dicta known in the history of religious philosophy.

“Section V. *Sacred Things*: of sacrifices, the first-born, &c.; also of the measurements of the Temple (Middoth).

“Section VI. *Purifications*: of the various Levitical and other Hygienic laws, of impure things and persons, their purification, &c.”²²

In defence of the Haggadah, with all its incongruities, puerilities, and absurdities, it is only just to hear what Deutsch, its enthusiastic apostle, has to say. And first he applies to it the rhyming

²² Emanuel Deutsch, “Literary Remains,” (edit. 1874, pp. 32, 33.)

apology which Bunyan put forward on behalf of his great allegory, – which, by the way, Mr. Deutsch surely misrepresents and misunderstands when he speaks of it as Haggadistic: —

“... Wouldst thou divert thyself from melancholy?
Wouldst thou be pleasant, yet be far from folly?
Wouldst thou read riddles and their explanation?
Or else be drownèd in thy contemplation?
Dost thou love picking meat? Or wouldst thou see
A man in the clouds, and hear him speak to thee?
Wouldst thou be in a dream, and yet not sleep?
Or wouldst thou in a moment laugh and weep?
Wouldst lose thyself, and catch no harm?
And find thyself again without a charm?
Wouldst read thyself, and read thou know’st not what
And yet know whether thou art blest or not
By reading the same lines? O then come hither,
And lay this book, thy head and heart together.”

Mr. Deutsch thus seeks to disarm antagonists by a skilful concession. He does not wonder – not he – that the so-called “Rabbinical stories,” submitted at intervals to the English public, should have met with an unflattering reception. The Talmud, which has always at hand a drastic word, says of their collectors: – “They dived into an ocean, and brought up a potsherd.” But then, he says, these follies form only a small item in the vast mass of allegories, parables, and the like, that compose the Haggadah. And, besides, they are partly ill-chosen, partly ill-translated, and partly did not even belong to the Talmud, but to some recent Jewish story books. Herder – to name the most famous critic of the “Poetry of Peoples” – has spoken most eulogistically of what he saw of the genuine specimens. And, indeed, “not only is the entire world of pious biblical legend which Islam has said and sung in its many tongues to the delight of the wise and simple for twelve centuries, now to be found either in embryo or fully developed in the Haggadah, but much that is familiar among ourselves in the circles of mediæval sagas, in Dante, in Boccaccio, in Cervantes, in Milton, in Bunyan, has consciously or unconsciously flowed out of this wondrous realm, the Haggadah. That much of it is overstrained, even according to Eastern notions, we do not deny. But,” argues Mr. Deutsch, “there are feeble passages even in Homer and Shakespeare.” To this it may be replied, that in Homer and Shakespeare such passages are rare, and do not form the bulk of their writings; and, moreover, that for the Iliad or for Hamlet we do not claim the position of authority which is claimed for the Talmud.

Let us glance briefly at the cosmogony of the Talmud. It assumes that the universe has been developed by means of a series of cataclysms; that world was destroyed after world, until God made “this world, and saw that it was very good.” It assumes also that the kosmos was wrought out of some original substance, itself created by God. “One or three things were before this world, – Water, Fire, and Wind; Water begat the darkness, Fire begat light, and Wind begat the spirit of Wisdom.”

“The *how* of the creation was not mere matter of speculation. The co-operation of angels, whose existence was warranted by Scripture, and a whole hierarchy of whom had been built up under Persian influences, was distinctly denied. In a discussion about the day of their creation, it is agreed on all hands that there were no angels at first, lest men might say, ‘Michael spanned out the firmament on the south, and Gabriel to the north.’” There is a distinct foreshadowing of the Gnostic Demiurgos – that antique link between the Divine Spirit and the world of matter – to be found in the Talmud. What with Plato were the Ideas, with Philo the Logos, with the Kabbalists the “World of Aziluth,” what the Gnostics called more emphatically the wisdom (σοφία), or power (δύναμις), and Plotinus the νοῦς, that the Talmudical authors call Metation. There is a good deal, in the post-captivity Talmud, about

the Angels, borrowed from the Persian. The Archangels or Angelic princes are seven in number, and their Hebrew names and functions correspond almost exactly to those of their Persian prototypes. There are also hosts of ministering angels, the Persian *Yazatas*

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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