

BENARES AND ITS ANTIQUITIES.

A LECTURE

DELIVERED BY

THE REV. M. A. SHERRING, LL. B., M. A.,

BEFORE THE

BENARES DEBATING CLUB •

ON THE

25TH JULY, 1863.

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PRINTED AT THE MEDICAL HALL PRESS,

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THE BENARES DEBATING CLUB.

OBJECT.

SOCIAL, MORAL, AND INTELLECTUAL IMPROVEMENT.

PATRON.—His Highness the Mahārāja of Benares.

PRESIDENT.—The Hon'ble Rájá Deo Náráin Singh Bahádur
Member of the Legislative Council of India.

VICE PRESIDENT.—Bábú Futteh Náráin Singh.

MEMBERS.—72 in number have joined up to the 27th May 1863.

SECRETARY.—Bábú Aiswarya Náráyana Singh.

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BENARES AND ITS ANTIQUITIES.

THE early history of Benares is involved in much obscurity. It is indisputably a place of great antiquity and may even date from the time when the Aryan race first spread itself over Northern India ; but such a supposition is incapable of proof. It is certain that the city is regarded by all Hindus as coeval with the birth of Hinduism, a notion derived both from tradition and from their own writings. Allusions to Benares are exceedingly abundant in ancient Hindu literature, and perhaps there is no city in all Hindustan more frequently referred to. It is ever viewed of in one peculiar aspect, as a place of holiness and heavenly beauty, where the spiritual eye may be delighted and the heart may be purified ; and the imagination of the Hindu has been kept fervid from generation to generation by the continued presentation of this glowing picture. Believing all he has read and heard concerning this imaginary seat of blessedness, he has been possessed with the same longing to visit it as the Mohammedan is to visit Mecca, and having gratified his desire has left the memory of his pious enterprise to his children, for their example, to incite them to undertake the same pilgrimage, faithfully transmitting to them the high ambition which he himself received from his fathers.

Unfortunately Hindu writers have shown a singular contempt for chronology, and an utter incapacity for noting and recording historical facts in a simple and consecutive manner. This is the more remarkable, when it is

remembered, that many of them have been accustomed to close thought and have prided themselves on their intellectual acumen, that they have originated several entire systems of philosophy and made great pretensions to logical accuracy, and that the habit of the nation generally for thousands of years has been to reverence the past and to reflect upon and observe with punctilious nicety its religious ceremonies and social usages.

Were the Hindus proverbially incorrect in their statements and opinions, and had they never produced any great work exhibiting minuteness of detail together with clearness, consistency and truth, there might not be so much cause for wonder. But they have astonished the world by their achievements in a department of learning usually regarded as dry and uninteresting. I refer to the subject of Grammar. Carefully collecting the facts brought to light by a critical and painstaking observation, they have elaborated a system of Grammar of gigantic dimensions, far surpassing anything that has ever been effected in this branch of study in any country or age of the world. Their greatest and most brilliant champion in this science is Pānini, yet many other grammarians helped to rear the stupendous fabric which thus excites the admiration of mankind. Now while they lacked the genius of the Greeks in generalizing upon the results of their observations, they far outshone them in the correctness and extent of their investigations.

One would have imagined that they who are accurate in one subject would be accurate in another, and that having acquired the habit of calmly noting points of agreement and difference, and of rigidly adhering to them, it would be a moral impossibility for them to act in direct opposition to such a habit. Yet this does not hold good in

regard to the Hindū race. While excellent grammarians they are miserable historians. They possess no single record among the ten thousand separate manuscript works, of which their ancient literature is said to be composed, on the historical correctness of which reliance can be placed. Legendary stories are so intermingled with real events, and the web of the one is so intimately inwoven with the woof of the other, and the two form so homogeneous a whole, that the finest microscopic intellects of Europe, after patient and long-continued examination, have been baffled and fairly beaten in the attempt to discover which is fiction and which is fact. A few threads of truth have rewarded their pains, and perhaps a few others may occasionally be drawn forth, but that the gaudy-coloured fabric of Hindu history, manufactured by themselves, will ever be satisfactorily separated into its two component parts, is as hopeless as to expect that the waters of the Jumna will ever cease to mingle with the waters of the Ganges. Were only the epoch or epochs of the Mahābhārat satisfactorily settled, and were it really known what elements of that great work are pre-Buddhist and what post-Buddhist, the minds of men would be at least freed from the despair which has seized hold upon them in reference to this subject*.

The result is that this city of Benares, whose antiquity I believe to be very great, is robbed of much of the glory which is justly her due. Thanks to a rival creed, however, which sprang into existence in the sixth century before the Christian era, whose annals have been kept with some decent amount of trustworthiness, we derive certain specific information respecting this city in that early epoch, which although it will give her a venerable position among

* See Max Müller's History of Ancient Sanskrit Literature. p. 62.

the ancient cities of the world, will hardly be sufficient to make good her claim to a remote antiquity.

It is a fact admitting of no dispute that Sákya Muni, the last and only really historical Buddh, on attaining the mysterious condition of Buddhahood under the Bodh tree in the neighbourhood of Gya, travelled to Benares and proceeded to the Isipátanan Vihára or monastery now known as Sárnáth. This was in the month Asárh 588 B. C. Here he announced the change which had come upon him, and the transcendental and superhuman, not to say divine state, in which he imagined he found himself. The five Bhikshus who had formerly been associated with him, but had subsequently abandoned him, and who happened at that time to be at the Isipátanan monastery, together with the other devotees residing there at that time, seem to have embraced the new religion and become the disciples of Buddh. At Sárnáth, then, Sákya Muni first began to "turn the wheel of the Law;" in other words, to preach the famous doctrines of Dharmma and Nirvána, which were destined in later years to exert such an extraordinary influence over a large portion of the human family.

It is plain that Benares must have been at this time a city of power and importance, the weight of whose opinions on religious topics was very considerable in the country generally, and therefore that it was of the utmost consequence to secure its countenance and support on any great subject affecting the religious belief of the entire nation. That this was the real reason why Gautam wished to commence his career from Benares, admits of no controversy. But if Benares was so celebrated in that era, we must look away from it to preceding ages for the date of its foundation.

The Buddhists themselves give us some glimpses of knowledge respecting the history of this city antecedent to the year of Sákya's visit, which although not possessing the same certitude, have nevertheless in all probability a basis in truth. The information which they incidentally furnish rests partly upon the statements of no other than Buddh himself, corroborated in some measure by their own observations. This wonderful personage, perceiving that some of the leading dogmas which he expounded were already known to the Hindus and had been advocated and set forth by various teachers previous to his time, cleverly availed himself of the assistance of these earlier instructors by pronouncing each in succession to have been an incarnation or manifestation of Buddh, thereby not only escaping from the charge of plagiarism and charlatanism but also coolly attaching to himself and his creed the sanction of their authority and the weight of their names.

Sákya Muni asserted that during the last twelve great Kappos or Kalpas, creations or regenerations of the world, twenty-four Buddhas exclusive of himself had made their appearance. Passing over eleven of these Kalpas, and all the Buddhas said to have manifested themselves in them, as pure myths or pious frauds, and contenting ourselves with an examination merely of the present Kalpa or creation of the earth, we find that three several Buddhas, in addition to Gautam, are spoken of as having completed their mortal career among other finite and transitory mortals here below within this period. Their names are Kakusandho, Konágamano, and Kássapo, the first being the most ancient, and the last the least so, being that immediately preceding the Buddh Sákya Muni. Divesting these persons of their divine claims, and regarding them in the

light of ordinary humanity, as simply learned men—pundits, moulvies, professors or teachers—men of knowledge and intelligence, of argumentative skill, and of considerable repute—we shall be able to learn something perhaps from their lives relating to the earlier period of the history of Benares, though I fear it will not be of so definite and satisfactory a character as we might desire.

In that portion of Mr. Turnour's "Examination of the Páli Buddhistical Annals" which concerns the four Buddhas of this *Kappo*,* we are informed that the native city of Kássapo was Báránasi, the reigning monarch of which was Kikí. "His father was the Brahman Brahmaddatto, and his mother Dhanawati. His chief disciples were Tisso and Bháráddwajo; his assistant disciple Sabbhāmitto; his chief female disciples were Amilá and Uruwelá." He chiefly resided in the city of Migadáyo, (now Sárnáth and its neighbourhood,) being a part of Báránasi, in the kingdom of Kási. He died "in the Sétawyáno garden in Sétawyánagaran" in the Kási country.

The next in order further removed was Konágamano, respecting whom it is said, that he proclaimed the supremacy of his faith at the Isipátanan near the city of Sudāsano, the name of Benares at that time. The first and most ancient of the three was Kakusandho, whose "father was the Brahman Aggidatto, and his mother the Brahman Wisakha. His chief disciples were Widhuro and Sanjino; his assistant disciple was Buddhigo; his two chief priestesses were Saina and Champacha." He was born in the city of Khémanagaran, the Rajah of which was Khemo, whose Guru or sacred teacher was his father Ag-

* Concerning the four Buddhas of this Kappo. Extracts from the *Atthakathá* called the *Maduratthawilásini* on the *Baddhawanso* which is the fourteenth book in the *Khudakanikáyo* of the *Suttapitako*. Prinsep's Journal, Vol. VII. Part 2.

gidatto. He also promulgated his doctrines first at the Isipátanan monastery, situated, the record says, "in the neighbourhood of Makhilanagara" or Benares.

On the supposition that these were real personages, it will still remain an open question, what dates should be assigned to them severally. The Buddhists, from their extravagance, altogether mislead us in our enquiries on this interesting point, so that we are left to our own judgment in settling it. While on the one hand we cannot for a moment imagine that they simply answer to three consecutive generations or considerably less than one hundred years, inasmuch as the name of Benares seems to have been twice changed during the period stretching over their three lives; on the other hand, in the absence of other and more precise testimony, it is impossible to say how far this period really did extend, and what amount of credit ought to be given to the assertion, that Benares formerly existed under these two successive appellations, neither of which was in use in the time of Sákyá Muni. Leaving the solution of this knotty problem as beyond our skill, we have still sufficient data, I think, fairly to warrant the belief in general terms, that Benares was a city of importance years before the sixth century, B. C., the era of Gautam, and that in all probability it had actually existed for some, perhaps for many, centuries previous to such era. But we must be careful however not to plunge too deeply into the unknown past, lest we countenance the idea of Hindus of the old school, that Benares existed before the deluge, and was saved from that catastrophe by Mahadeo, who dexterously balanced the city on his trident and raised it above the surrounding waters.

In any case, we are living in a city of no mean antiquity. Twenty five centuries ago, at the least, Benares

was famous. When Babylon was struggling with Nineveh for supremacy, when Tyre was planting her colonies, when Athens was growing in strength, before that Rome had become known, or Greece had contended with Persia, or Cyrus had added lustre to the Persian monarchy, or Nebuchadnezzar had captured Jerusalem and the inhabitants of Judea had been carried into captivity, she had already risen to greatness, if not to glory. Nay she may have heard of the fame of Solomon, and have sent her ivory, her apes, and her peacocks, to adorn his palaces, while with her gold he may have partly overlaid the temple of the Lord. Indeed it is to my mind more than probable, that at the time the Israelites were making bricks in Egypt, and those stupendous pyramids, which still excite the astonishment of the world, were being erected, this city was standing. Not only is Benares remarkable for the length of her existence but also for the vitality and vigour which, so far as we know, she has constantly exhibited. While many cities and nations have fallen into decay and perished, her sun has never gone down ; on the contrary, for long ages past it has shone with almost meridian splendour. Her illustrious name has descended from generation to generation, and has ever been a 'household word,' venerated and beloved, among the vast Hindu family. With the single exception of her destruction by fire applied by the hand of Krishna, which may or may not be true, no sign of feebleness, no symptom of impending dissolution, so far as I am aware, is apparent in any of the numberless references to her in native records. As a queen she has ever received the willing homage of her subjects scattered over all India—as a lover she has secured their affection and regard.

Hiwan Tshang, the celebrated Chinese traveller, who

as a Buddhist pilgrim visited India in the seventh century of the present era, describes Benares as "a large capital situated to the west and near the Ganges, being 18 or 19 li (about six miles) in length, and 5 or 6 (or two miles) in breadth. The dwellings of the lower orders are very numerous, the population very considerable, and the number of houses more than ten thousand. There is a great crowd of merchants. The manners of the people are gentle and polished. All study with zeal. The principal part put faith in the heterodox (Hindu) doctrines, and there are but few who honor the law of Buddha. The climate is temperate, and the soil produces grain and fruits; the trees have an extraordinary growth, as also grasses and plants. There are more than thirty *Kia lan* (or Buddhist monasteries), and about three thousand (Buddhist) priests and disciples, who all follow the doctrines of the less translation. There are about one hundred (Hindu) temples, in which ten thousand heretics (Hindus) worship the self-existent God (Ishwara). They cut their hair, or wear it knotted above the head. They go quite naked, and cover their bodies with ashes. The most pious live in continual austerities, and seek to abandon life for death."

And now after the lapse of so many ages, this magnificent city still maintains most of the freshness and all the beauty of her early youth. For picturesqueness and grandeur no sight in all the world surpasses that of Benares as seen from the river Ganges. Macaulay's graphic description of her appearance towards the close of the last century, is for the most part applicable to her present state. He speaks of her as "a city which in wealth, population, dignity and sanctity, was among the foremost of Asia. It was commonly believed that half a million of human beings was crowded into that labyrinth of lofty alleys, rich

with shrines, and minarets, and balconies, and, carved oriels, to which the sacred apes clung by hundreds.* The traveller could scarcely make his way through the press of holy mendicants and not less holy bulls. The broad and stately flights of steps which descended from these swarming haunts to the bathing-places along the Ganges, were worn every day by the footsteps of an innumerable multitude of worshippers. The schools and temples drew crowds of pious Hindus from every province where the Brahminical faith was known. Hundreds of devotees came thither every month to die : for it was believed that a peculiarly happy fate awaited the man who should pass from the sacred city into the sacred river. Nor was superstition the only motive which allured strangers to that great metropolis. Commerce had as many pilgrims as religion. All along the shores of the venerable stream lay great fleets of vessels laden with rich merchandize. From the looms of Benares went forth the most delicate silks that adorned the balls of St. James's and of Versailles ; and in the bazars, the muslins of Bengal and the sabres of Oude were mingled with the jewels of Golconda and the shawls of Cashmere.†

It is difficult to say which of the two names, Káshí or Benares, by which this city is now familiarly known, is the more ancient. The former is properly its Hindu appellation ; indeed Hindus rarely, if ever, speak of it by any other term. The meaning of Káshí is "splendid" or "illustrious," and it is by this name or title that the city is for the most part referred to in all Brahminical writings.

* This statement regarding the population of Benares is not true now, and could not have been true then. The city contains not more than three hundred thousand souls.

† Macaulay's Warren Hastings, p. 55.

The city is known by many other designations, but that least of all favoured by Hindu authors is "Benares." This latter term, however, is most in use, and has been so I believe for many years, among all persons not Hindus, as well as among a good portion of the less rigid of the Hindu population. The word is variously written in Sanscrit, as *Váranasí*, *Varánasí* and *Varanasí*,* and is also variously derived. Some regard it as a compound of *Vara*, the best, and *anas* water, and apply it to the river Ganges which flows by the side of the city. Others, more correctly I think, consider that the word is composed of the two elements *Varaná* and *Asi*, which refer, it is conjectured, to the two rivers bearing these names which severally flow into the Ganges to the north and south of the city, of which they thus constitute to some extent a natural boundary. The *Varaná* (or *Burna* as it is more commonly called) contains a considerable body of water in the rainy season, but the *Asi* continues a small stream all the year round. There is another derivation current among the natives worthy of mention, that a certain Rajah Banár formerly ruled over Benares, and that he gave his own name to the city.

It is indisputable that throughout the whole of the Buddhist period in India the popular name of the city was not *Káshí* but Benares, and on the other hand it seems equally certain that during this period, while the city commonly bore the name of Benares the circumjacent country was called *Káshí*. The Chinese pilgrim Fa Hian, who travelled in India in the commencement of the fifth century Anno Domini, remarks in the journal of his travels, that following the course of the river Heng (Ganges) towards the "west, he came to the city of *P'ho lo nai* (or Benares)

* वारणसी, वराणसी, वरणसी

in the kingdom of *Kia shi*.”* I have already drawn your attention to the testimony of the *Atthakathá* or Commentary on the Buddhawanso, respecting the probably historical reality of Kássapo, who is spoken of as the Buddh preceding Gautam, but the circumstance demanding our attention now is, that he is said to have chiefly resided in Migadaya, the Sárnáth portion of Benares, “in the kingdom of Káshí.” He is also spoken of as having expired in Setawyánagaran, “in the Káshí country.” If during the prevalence of the Buddhist religion in India the territory surrounding Benares was called the Káshí kingdom or country, it seems hardly likely that on its downfall the Hindu designation of Káshí should have been exchanged for what at that time was undoubtedly regarded as a Buddhist appellation. Yet I find from a recent number of the Bengal Asiatic Journal, that Dr. Hall concludes that in the eleventh century A. D. “at a period when Káshí was, presumably, the more popular name of the city of Benares, the circumjacent territory was known as Váránasí.”†

There is reason to believe that the modern city of Benares has somewhat shifted from the ancient site. If any one will take the trouble to ride through the present city from north to south, and then all along its extensive suburbs, from the ancient fort at the junction of the Burna and the Ganges down the road leading towards the cantonments, thence making a detour as far as Durgakund until he reaches the river, he will at once be convinced that the city does not stand where it once stood. He will be especially struck at the apparent newness and freshness of the houses on the southern side of the city as compared with those on its northern side ; and his attention will be, or

* “The Pilgrimage of Fa Hian,” p. 311—M. Klaproth’s note.

† Bengal Asiatic Journal for 1862. No. 1, page 5, Note.

ought to be, powerfully arrested by the venerable appearance of many of the buildings on the cantonment or Ráj Ghaut road, just alluded to, and in its neighbourhood. The city proper has retreated fully two-thirds of a mile from the Burna river, which flows into the Ganges nearly at right angles to that stream, but I believe that formerly the city was close upon its banks, although it is difficult to say how far it extended upon them. It is strange that Benares should be spoken of as lying between the Burna and the Asi, when in fact it lies at a considerable distance from the Burna in one direction, and in the other has passed over to the opposite bank of the Asi and stretched out for a mile beyond, enclosing this rivulet within itself. But in a work as old as the Upanishad Jábála, which contains a long description of the glory of Káshí under the name or designation of Avimukt, this city is described as bounded on the one side by the Burna and on the other by the Asi.

There is still a scattered population on the southern bank of the Burna living in small villages or hamlets ; and to the north of the present city, between it and the Burna, mausoleums, dargahs, mosques, and even Hindu buildings, most of which are in ruins, are found in abundance, showing that as late as the Mohammedan period this portion of the city now removed to its suburbs was possessed of considerable magnificence and indeed was the favourite place of resort of its Mohammedan rulers. The tendency of Benares to shift its boundary trending continually in a southerly direction, is well illustrated by the position of the three fortresses which the Rájahs of Benares have occupied at various periods of their history. The oldest fort was situated at Burna Sangam or the confluence of the Burna and the Ganges, a few remains of which are still

standing. In its day it no doubt formed a part of the city and was its chief defence, but now it is only a remote suburb with a mere handful of people in its immediate neighbourhood. The second in point of time is the fort at Shivála Ghaut, some four miles further south, in the midst of a dense population, which was the residence of Cheit Singh in the time of Warren Hastings, but is no longer inhabited by the Rájahs of Benares. The third fort is that in which the present Rájah dwells, and is situated at Ramnuggur upwards of a mile to the south of Shivála Ghaut on the opposite side of the river, where a considerable population has sprung up.

It has been a question of some interest of late years, whether the city ever extended to the north of the Burna, and if so whether the village of Sárnáth, in which vast Buddhist edifices once stood, and where extensive ruins are still visible, was included within it. I am not in possession of sufficient data to form a precise judgment on this matter. If the city ever spread out in this direction, the period of its having done so is of very remote antiquity. Fa Hian says, that in his time Sárnáth was at a distance of ten *li* or a little over three miles to the north-west of Benares.* This although written more than fourteen hundred years ago is sufficient proof that in his day the city was altogether to the south of the Burna, as it now is, which is certainly not more than three miles from Sárnáth. On the other hand it shows that the city had not retreated so far to the south of that stream as it has subsequently. But it seems evident, however, that the Buddhist annalists of Ceylon, writing about Benares as it existed in an age a thousand years and upwards anterior to that of Fa Hian, regarded the Isipátanan monastery

* Fa Hian's Pilgrimage, p. 305.

at Sárnáth as being in Benares. Indeed they speak of the entire district which now surrounds Sárnáth as forming the site of a city which they call, as before observed, Migadáyo, which has been stated to have formed a part of the city of Benares.

Hitherto the excavations which have been carried on at Sárnáth have been confined to a very limited tract. It would be interesting, and it is exceedingly important, for the settlement of the question now under consideration, to examine carefully the entire country adjacent to the existing ruins for the space of at least a mile distant from them, and especially the whole of the district lying between them and the river Burna. Such an examination need not be attended with great expense, if wisely conducted, and there is every probability that it would yield ample results not only in elucidation of the history of Benares, and thereby of India, but also in verification of ancient records concerning the birth and early history of the Buddhist faith.

It should be remembered that the oldest buildings in this entire neighbourhood inclusive of the present city of Benares itself, so far as is yet known, are the Buddhist ruins at Sárnáth. Some of these date from a period certainly as far back as the seventh century of the Christian era. They consist mainly of two towers separated at a distance of about half a mile from each other, and of the walls, pillars, and foundations of buildings, which for ages remained covered over with earth but have been lately exhumed. Many statues, amounting to some hundreds, and other objects of interest, have been dug out of the ruins, but nearly all have been removed. The larger tower or tope is 130 feet high above the plain and 110 feet above the remains of the ancient monastery near by.

Hwan Thsang, before alluded to, describes the surpassing grandeur of an edifice at Sárnáth, which is generally supposed to be the tower which we now see. Respecting its original magnificence, he observes as follows. "To the north of the town (Benares) is the river *Pho lo na* (Burna). On its bank, about ten *li* from the town, is the *Kia lan* (monastery) of the Deer-park (or Sárnáth)—(this probably refers to an affluent from the Burna which unites itself with the waters of the small lake at Sárnáth)—there are about fifteen hundred priests and disciples, who all pursue the doctrines of the less translation. In the midst of the great enclosure is a temple more than two hundred feet high—it is surmounted by a golden arrow. The foundations are built with the stone *An mou lo ko*; and the walls are of brick. This temple is surrounded by a hundred chapels; all have arrows, and the divine images are all gilt. In the midst of the temple are the statues of Buddha and of a great number of other Tathágotas, sculptured in the stone *Theou shy*. The images of all are in the attitude of turning the wheel of the Law (preaching.)"*

To the west of the great tower, approaching very near to it, are the remains of an old Buddhist monastery of vast dimensions. The excavations which have been carried on here, have established the singular fact that this monastery was partly built upon the foundations of an earlier edifice. Now it is upon this more ancient building that our interest naturally concentrates itself. Throughout the whole of the Buddhist historical period the fame of the Isipátanan Hall at Sárnáth, where Sákya Muni commenced his wonderful career as the expounder of Buddhism and the head of that religion, was immense among

all the countries to which Buddhism had spread. We cannot but suppose therefore that this original building was preserved by the Buddhists with the greatest care. I believe there is no record showing how long it continued standing, but as the period of their dominancy in India extended over many centuries I cannot resist the thought that either the original monastery or its representative was in existence during this entire period. It is possible indeed that the ruins of the more modern structure may belong to the later Isipátanan Hall, and the more ancient walls on a lower platform to the primitive building.

It has been already remarked, that these excavations have brought to light a large number of statues and bas-reliefs. These figures were for the most part discovered in two places, one of which, now that the mound containing them has been removed, is almost even with the surface of the ground, and exhibits circular bases of brick, on which probably stone pillars formerly stood, and in their centre one much larger and more elevated than the rest, which, it is conjectured, constituted the foundations of the Singhásan or throne of a gigantic statue of Buddh. The other place has been designated the Image Chamber, and is so curious in its construction that I am tempted to give you a few particulars respecting it.

The Image Chamber is circular in form, and is subterranean, being depressed about twelve feet below the surrounding soil. It is upwards of 57 feet in diameter, measured three feet from the floor, and its enclosing wall is 15 feet thick. This wall is composed throughout, with a single exception, which will be immediately explained, of large bricks known as Buddhist bricks, from 15 to 18 inches in length, from 12 to 13 inches in width, and from $2\frac{1}{2}$ to 3 inches in thickness, which are placed flat one upon an-

other and in no single instance placed vertically, the outermost layer coalescing with the adjacent soil. For about two thirds of the distance from the summit to the base the wall is concave. Beneath the lowest stratum of bricks in the concave portion is an indurated deposit of small nodular limestones, six inches in depth, and below it again a thin band of powdered brick one inch and a half in thickness. From this point to the floor the wall is perpendicular, the upper portion being ornamented with a cornice and moulding.

The lower division of the wall when compared with the upper has a very striking appearance. Its bricks are better burnt and are larger, and it has altogether an aspect of higher antiquity. If the supposition be true that it belongs to a prior era, it not unlikely formed part of an earlier building, and possibly was connected with the very ancient edifice already alluded to which formerly existed near by. It would be to my mind most interesting to institute a search for further remains of the older monastery, by clearing away all the superincumbent earth throughout a considerable area as far down as the level of the most ancient ruins.

On the extinction of Buddhism in India in the eleventh or twelfth century, and on the expulsion of the last of the Buddhists from the country, the monasteries at Sárnáth were destroyed by fire. "Heaps of ashes still lie scattered amidst the ruins," to attest this fact, writes General Cunningham in his "Bhilsa Topes," an opinion confirmed by Major Kittoe, the Government Archæologist, who made extensive excavations at Sárnáth about twelve years ago. In a letter to General Cunningham in 1851, he says, "all has been sacked and burned—priests, temples, idols, all together; for in some places, bones, iron, wood, and stone,

are found in huge masses, and this has happened more than once."

Coming now to the city proper we still find that the oldest known buildings, even here, are not of Hindu but of Buddhist origin. Hwan Thsang states, if you remember, that in his day Benares contained more than thirty Buddhist monasteries. This was in the seventh century, when Hinduism had to a great extent regained its ancient prestige and influence in Benares and the country generally. Now without troubling ourselves concerning others which doubtless existed in previous ages, but by that time had fallen into decay, it is impossible to believe that these thirty and more monasteries have been utterly destroyed and have left no trace or stone behind them. The peculiar habits of the Buddhists likewise strengthen the conviction of the existence of some portions of these edifices. They were essentially a race of architects, and had grand ideas of massiveness and durability, and no mean conception of beauty. They built temples, towers, and pillars, with no notion of their crumbling to pieces. Great bricks of a size unknown to modern architecture, and stones, some of enormous dimensions, were their favourite materials. And the ruins of their buildings, which are scattered so plentifully over Northern and Central India, are demonstrative proofs of their wonderful strength when first erected.

Not long ago I made the discovery of some ancient ruins covering a large extent of ground on the banks of Bakariya Kund in the Alaipore Mahalla, which with the valuable assistance of Mr. Horne, the Judge of Benares, I have ascertained to be remains of a monastery and of numerous temples and shrines attached to it. There are many beautifully carved stones scattered about the place,

* Bhilsa Topes, pp. 162, 167.

some of which exhibit figures in bas-relief. Many of the stones bear letters or symbols inscribed upon them. I have made a collection of upwards of sixty, and have compared them with the ancient form of the Devanagiri alphabet, to which not a few of them are strikingly allied. On the strength of this similarity I have conjectured that some of these buildings were erected in the era of the Guptadynasty, which flourished it is supposed between the years 319 and 600 A. D.*

Since the discovery of these ruins I have fallen upon other Buddhist remains in various parts of the city, and there is no doubt that a strict search would disclose many others.

Respecting the ancient Hindu buildings in Benares, if there be any such, no definite and trustworthy information whatever can be gathered either from the lips of Hindus or from the writings which have come down to them from past ages. That remains of such buildings actually exist, admits of no question, but we are left utterly in the dark concerning those possessing a high antiquity. One would have supposed that works written upon Benares and in its praise, such as *Káshí Rahas*, which numbers 30 chapters, *Káshí Mahátam*, which contains 5, and *Káshí Khand* taken from the *Skand Puránā* and consisting of 100 chapters, would have shed some light on this interesting subject, but their writers have contented themselves with bare generalities, and have not troubled themselves about the exact epoch of any one temple, or tank, or ghaut, or well, or other structure to which they may have referred. It is not known with certainty when the above works were written, but this however is well ascertained that not one of them was written till several hundred years after the date of the

* *Bhíṣa Topes*, pp. 41.

Buddhist buildings already noticed.

Some of the natives of the city divide Benares into three great portions, namely Benares, Káshí, and Kidár, to which they assign three distinct epochs. The most ancient is Benares, the northern division of the present city. To the south of this is Káshí, of less antiquity, and to the south of Káshí, Kidár, which is comparatively of modern date. From what source this notion has been derived, it is impossible to say, nevertheless it is I believe for the most part singularly correct. We have already seen that the ancient Buddhist remains at Bakariya Kund are situated on the northern side of the city, or in Benares proper. In addition, there are certainly two or three other spots in this quarter with which I am acquainted, and probably many more which no one has yet discovered, where Buddhist ruins are to be found.

There are six temples in the division of Benares proper, and perhaps a few others, which lay more or less claim to antiquity, and that on good grounds. It is necessary to make this qualifying remark, because, as you all know, there are thousands of temples in this city in regard to which the priests connected with them and the ignorant classes of the people generally, state that they have existed from all eternity, and that the idols now worshipped in them have been worshipped throughout the same period. But inasmuch as these temples are constantly renewed or extensively repaired, and as even their sites are occasionally changed, and the idols which were once worshipped in them are also sometimes removed to other places, it is plain that such extravagant notions however eagerly cherished by a rude and unlettered community or by a hierarchy who have an object to serve, must be abandoned by persons of intelligence and education as unworthy of credence.

The six temples, however, in Benares proper to which I have specially called your attention, have some right to be regarded as ancient either in respect of the temples themselves or of the sites on which they stand. Their names are Trilochan, Nirbadeshwar, Admahádeo, Kám-eshwar, Umkaleshwar, and Bridhkál. Some of these buildings or some portions of them are evidently old, while on the other hand other portions are plainly of recent date, but none, so far as my observation has gone, can boast of the antiquity of the Buddhist remains.

Of these temples, that of Bridhkál is the most extensive, and perhaps the most ancient. Formerly it possessed twelve separate courts or quadrangles, but now only seven are in existence, and several of these are fast falling into ruin. The aspect of the entire building is that of great decay. The site of the other five courts and of the gardens formerly attached to the temple, is occupied by dwelling houses. The hoary appearance of the pile of buildings now standing, is greatly increased by their dilapidated condition. It is remarkable that carved stones, evidently of Buddhist or of early Hindu origin, are found in various parts of the temple, and some of them are set up as objects of worship. It is not unlikely that if this shrine and the grounds at one time connected with it were thoroughly examined, some interesting discoveries would be made. Not long ago several sculptured stones were dug up in one of the courts, one or more of which are still standing near the spot where they were found.

In the same division of the city on its western side, is the Nág Kuán or Serpent's well, situated in a Mahalla or ward called after the same name. The ward is in the north-western part of the city at some distance from the Ganges. If our conjectures respecting the superior anti-

quity of that portion of the city which I have called Benares proper be true, and also that it once extended as far as the banks of the river Burna to the north, it is not improbable that the Nág Kuan Mahalla was at that time in the suburbs of the city. Possibly the well alone first stood there, and the quarter itself was called that in which the well was, which in course of time became inhabited, and assumed the name of the well, the most conspicuous and best known object it contained. The well in its present form is rather a tank surrounded on its four sides with steep stone ghauts. These ghauts have been occasionally extensively repaired, but several of the blocks of stones of which they are composed bear ancient carvings upon their face, showing that they either belonged to the well in much earlier times or to ancient buildings in the neighbourhood which had fallen into decay. At the junction of the ghauts below is a square space of ground of very limited extent, in the centre of which is the well properly so called. Descending twelve stone steps you reach the water, at the bottom of which is a sheet of iron which constitutes the door to a lower chamber. This no doubt is the primitive well, but I have not been able to gather much information respecting the singular chamber below, which would doubtless repay a careful examination. The author of the Káshí Khand makes allusion to the Nág Kuan, but does not pretend to offer any opinion either in elucidation of its history or its antiquity.

Not far from Nág Kuan and near the temples of Jarhareshwar and Sidheshwar, is a number of mutilated figures, which, it is said, have been dug up in the neighbourhood. These figures are not worshipped by the people, the reason being because they are so unlike the orthodox and fashionable idols now to be seen in Hindu

temples. They are more delicately sculptured and are more chaste in their design than the productions of modern Hindu art. To what epoch they ought to be assigned, it is not easy to say, but it is very plain that they are not at all of modern manufacture, and that they belong to early Hindu or perhaps to Buddhist times.

While I regard the central portion of the city, or that which especially bears the name of Káshí, as less ancient than the division to the north of it which we have just been contemplating, I would not have it supposed that I doubt the considerable antiquity of some parts of it. Indeed the foundations of many of the buildings in the streets adjacent to the river bear upon them decided marks of age, and it is very possible that even in those early periods when the city on its northern sides stretched along the banks of the Burna, its eastern side which lay upon the banks of the Ganges extended in a thin band up the river taking in all that portion of Káshí proper lying in this direction as far as the Dassasumedh Ghaut.

To this division of the city I feel strongly impelled to apply the term Puránic, because of the evident association which it has with the latest developement and manifestation of Hinduism in the Puránas. The temples which throng its streets, the idols worshipped in them, the religious observances practised by the people, in short the materialistic and sensuous characteristics of the Hindu faith as exhibited there, are to a very great extent Puránic in their origin or have sprung from the same cause as the Puránas themselves. It is needless to add, therefore, that in all probability most of this quarter of the city is not of great antiquity.

The Bisheshwar temple situated in this district, the most popular shrine in all Benares, is, as you well know,

of recent erection. Its predecessor stood a short distance to the west of it, and was demolished by the Emperor Aurungzebe nearly two centuries ago. Extensive remains of this edifice are still visible, and form a considerable portion of the Mohammedan mosque built by that monarch on its site. Judging from the proportions of these ruins, it is manifest that this earlier temple of Bisheshwar must have been both loftier and more capacious than the existing structure. The court-yard is perhaps four or five times more spacious than the entire area occupied by the modern temple, and is begirt by the old wall.

This temple however although destroyed so long ago, and although it must have existed for a long period previous to its destruction, is nevertheless not regarded by the natives living in the neighbourhood as the original Bisheshwar temple. They point you to a building still standing which they call Ad-Bisheshwar, that is, first or primitive Bisheshwar. This temple is about sixty feet in height, and is visible from Aurungzebe's mosque, above referred to. It is surmounted by a large dome in a state of decay; which undoubtedly has a venerable appearance. The temple itself is faced with slabs of stone as far up as the base of the dome, and has been lately repaired, so that it has a fresh, not to say, modern appearance. I think it doubtful whether any portion of the present building is of ancient date. Formerly a communication was open between the enclosure of Ad-Bisheshwar and the court-yard of the Bisheshwar of the mosque, but it is now closed.

On the eastern side of this enclosure the soil takes a sudden rise, and is probably composed of the debris of former buildings. Upon the elevated ground is a mosque, which, strange to say, is constructed out of a building of

great massiveness and strength, and not at all Moham-
medan in its origin. This building is of stone, and is
sustained by ponderous stone pillars. I have not suffi-
ciently examined it to be able to pronounce with certainty
upon its date, but I believe it to be one of the oldest edi-
fices in this part of the city. Indeed I have been told by
a Pundit of Benares that this is a veritable portion of the
original Ad-Bisheshwar, and that the temple which goes
by this name near by, is a subsequent erection.

The famous Mán Mandil Observatory is also situated
in the Káshí quarter. This Observatory was erected by
Rajah Jey Singh, who "succeeded to the inheritance of
the ancient Rajahs of Ambhesi in the year Vicramaditya
1750, corresponding to 1693 of the Christian era. His
mind had been early stored with the knowledge contained
in the Hindu writings, but he appears to have especially
attached himself to the mathematical sciences, and his re-
putation for skill in them stood so high, that he was cho-
sen by the Emperor Mahommed Shah to reform the calen-
dar, which from the inaccuracy of the existing tables had
ceased to correspond with the actual appearance of the
heavens. Jayasinha (Jey Singh) undertook the task, and
constructed a new set of tables, which in honor of the
reigning prince he named Teg Mahommed Shahy. By
these, almanacks are constructed at Delhi, and all astrono-
mical computations made at the present time."* For
the accomplishment of this undertaking and the promo-
tion of astronomical investigations, Jey Singh erected five
Observatories, namely at Delhi, Benares, Muttra, Oujein
and Jeypore, remains of which are still in existence. But
he himself has described the object he had in view in their
erection in his preface to the Teid Mahommed Shahy,

* Asiatic Researches, Vol. v., p p. 177, 178.

which is given entire in the fifth volume of the Asiatic Researches.

The southern boundary of this division I take to be the Dassasumedh temple and ghaut. Beyond this spot the Kidár portion of the city begins, and its best known object among natives is the modern temple of Kidárnáth situated upon the banks of the Ganges, the temple frequented by the Bengalee population, who, as you are aware, reside chiefly in that quarter. I have before remarked on the modern character of this division of the city, and there can be no question that for the most part it must be regarded as comparatively of recent date. It is however quite consistent with this view that it should contain a few isolated buildings which in part make pretensions to antiquity, inasmuch as it could never have been distant from the city itself but must always have been a suburb more or less inhabited.

The tank known as Mán Sarwar, which has a large collection of shrines all round it, was erected by the same Rajah that built the observatory just noticed. But I suspect that some of the shrines or portions of them are of a far older date. To the south-west of Mán Sarwar is the temple of Tilubhandeshwar, some of the idols of which, judging from their very worn appearance, more especially those on a lower story, cannot possibly date from a modern epoch. There is also here by the side of a Peepul tree a remarkable statue, mutilated, it is said, by Aurungzebe. Its head is two feet in height and a foot in breadth, and its body is in the same proportion. The hair is plaited and bound round the head, so as to have the appearance of a high head-dress. The face is round, and is not in the slightest degree of a Hindu cast. Hindu sculptors of the present day are utterly incapable of

producing a figure so symmetrically proportioned, and therefore one is curious to know how it came here and from what place it was brought. The temple of Tilubhandeshwar does not seem old, but it is possible that parts of it may have been erected several hundred years ago. The priest of the temple told me that at the back of one of the small shrines at the entrance was an inscription, which stated that the temple was erected by a Rajah 460 years ago. He rubbed off the whitewash in order that I might see it, but the horizontal lines of the inscription were intercepted by the idol in the shrine, so that it was impossible to interpret what was written.

There are other places in this quarter of the city which possess much interest to the archæologist. Among these is the Lolárik Kuan or well, which has two spacious shafts made of strong masonry communicating with the reservoir below.

But it is time I should bring this essay to a close. My endeavour has been to furnish you with some information respecting ancient Benares and the remains and footprints of past ages still found in the city. No one is more sensible than myself of the incompleteness of my labors and of the inadequacy with which the subject has been treated. But lest any should be inclined to scrutinize minutely what has been advanced, while not objecting to such a course, I would nevertheless state in my own defence, that the ground I have traversed has been to a large extent entirely new, and that in my investigations I have derived little or no help from other explorers excepting the aid which I have received from the Sárnáth excavators. The city of Benares would well repay a thorough examination, but in order to be profitable in interesting results, that examination must be conducted in a systematic

and intelligent manner, not by persons who may or may not be concerned in what they are doing, but by persons who will cherish a hearty love for the enterprise, and will place it on a higher level in the history of humanity than the manufacture of the Benares' roads or the cleansing of the Benares' sewers, useful and all-important as those operations indisputably are. I feel certain that some parts of the city teem with ruins and relics of the distant past, which need only to be carefully sought after to be discovered.

These ancient buildings in Benares and its neighbourhood, about which I have been discoursing to you, were constructed by a living, earnest people, who have passed away but have left these remains behind them illustrative of their power and skill, of their greatness and glory. By examining these buildings we gain some knowledge of the people who erected them—and this is the main object we have in view. Undoubtedly there is a mysterious pleasure awakened in the breast arising from the contemplation of an old ruin, but it owes all its force to the fact that the old ruin is associated with human existence in a by-gone age—with the forefathers of the present race inhabiting the earth. These sentiments again are modified in proportion to the extent of our knowledge of the past. For instance, if we are able to accumulate data sufficient to compare one epoch with another, we are conscious of experiencing pleasure or pain in proportion as we find humanity progressing or degenerating. I know of no joy more complete and soul-elevating than that which springs from the study of a nation which has carried on a long and desperate struggle with great systems of error and moral corruption, and has come out of the conflict triumphant, with clearer perceptions of truth and purer notions of

virtue. On the other hand, I know of no mental distress keener and deeper than that which is produced by the study of a people who have gone on from bad to worse, from one abomination to another, from one system of evil to others more and more opposed to truth, to reason, and to God.

Now in regard to the history of Benares I cannot say that any very pleasurable feelings have been originated in my mind as I have pondered over it. Its history is to a great extent the history of India, and therefore it is hardly fair to isolate the city from the country and to pass judgment on it alone. Speaking then of this great city as representative of an immense empire, I am bound to say that while its career has been of long duration it has not been of a character to awaken either enthusiasm or admiration. I cannot say that either the moral, or the social, or even the intellectual condition of the people residing here, is a whit better than it was upwards of two thousand years ago. I fail to trace throughout this vast period any advance in those higher principles of human action, the practice of which alone makes a nation truly illustrious and great. On the contrary, the revelations of the past, brief and scattered though they be, nevertheless establish the fact beyond all dispute, that at least in one distant epoch of Hindu history more respect was paid to truth, honesty and virtue, than is generally shown by the present inhabitants of India. Now just as we do not admire a man who happens to be a hundred years old unless we know that he has lived a life of integrity and uprightness, and has increased in wisdom and probity with his years, so we must withhold our admiration from a city or nation which from a combination of certain peculiar circumstances has drawn out an existence of wondrous length, but which

in respect of its virtues and moral excellences, in respect of those higher qualities which mainly distinguish man from brute, and by the possession of which he becomes in a measure assimilated to his Creator, has for many ages been in an unprogressive and stagnant condition. Such a nation or city may possess fine buildings, fine temples, fine ghauts and fine tanks, as Benares has done for thousands of years, but its material splendour will only augment the pervading gloom, just as the stars of heaven give intensity to the darkness of night.

My apology for these remarks is, that they are intimately connected with the subject of this essay, which has not only a physical and external but also a moral aspect. While I look with profound regret on much of the past history of India, I look forward to its coming history with strong hope and confidence. The principles of progress which have raised the western nations of the world to that high position of civilization and greatness which they at present occupy, have already reached this land and begun to operate upon its inhabitants. Those principles are both moral and intellectual, tending to the purification as well as to the enlargement and strengthening of the mind, and aiming at the extinction of error, the annihilation of evil, and the universal establishment of purity and love, as well as at the extension of commerce and science, and the promotion of whatever contributes to a nation's prosperity. These principles moreover have a right basis and a divine origin, and therefore if properly applied never fail to improve those who receive them and to lift them up to Him from whom they proceed.

Under the influence of the high civilization, of the arts and sciences, and of the virtues and holy principles of western nations, which are at many points being introduced

into the country, I venture to predict a Future for India of unparalleled glory and lustre. And why should not Benares still hold a foremost place in her history? Why should she not take the lead of all other Indian cities, as she ever has done, and show them by her own example, and for their imitation, how she can abolish useless social burdens, can abandon exploded errors, and can accept the truth in all its forms; how she can strive after and attain to the highest and purest happiness; and how she can bring herself, with God's help, to hate all evil with eternal hatred and to love all goodness with eternal love?

