



conquest, but down to the present day; and at the same time they took the place of the Rishis at the worship of the Vedic deities, and sacrificed at the great Yajnas, or flesh-feasts of the Kshatriyas. CHAPTER II.

The Bráhmans, however, assert that they are representatives of the ancient Rishis who composed the Vedic hymns, and that they have formed a dominant spiritual hierarchy from time immemorial. They have divided themselves into eight Gotrás, or families, corresponding to the eight famous Rishis from whom they claim to have descended. For ages they have been the sole conservators of the Vedic scriptures, which they regard as having been more or less inspired by their god Brahma. As a natural consequence their pretensions have been generally admitted; and the worship of the supreme spirit, as the creator of the universe, and the dogma of the transmigrations of the soul, have been regarded as an outgrowth of the old Vedic worship. But it has already been seen that the assumed origin of the distinctive religion of the Bráhman sages is open to question. Again, the Indian home of the Vedic Aryans was in the Punjab, to the westward of the river Saraswatí. The Indian home of the Bráhmans was apparently in Hindustan, and extended from the Saraswatí eastward to the banks of the Ganges, in the neighbourhood of the ancient city of Kanouj.¹⁶ Moreover, the Rishis were not formed into a caste, nor does any authentic allusion to caste distinctions occur in the earlier Vedic hymns. The Bráhmans, on the contrary, are represented from a very ancient period as forming

Pretensions of the Bráhmans.

¹⁶ See History, vol. ii., part v., Brahmanic Period, chap. ii.



CHAPTER II. an exclusive and hereditary priest caste; and much of their religious teaching turns upon their caste distinctions.

Bráhmans regarded by the Kshatriyas as an inferior caste.

These marks of difference between the Vedic Rishis and the Bráhmans are all the more worthy of notice, from the fact that in ancient times neither the Rishis nor the Kshatriyas entertained that respect for the Bráhmans which has been displayed in more modern times. The Bráhmans had undoubtedly made their way into the Punjab, whilst the Vedic Aryans were mere colonists in the land. But the Rishis composed satirical hymns against the Bráhmans, which have been preserved to the present day. They compared the penances of the Bráhmans to the torpid condition of frogs during the dry season; and they likened the utterances of the Bráhmans at their sacrifices to the croaking of the same animals. They, moreover, ridiculed the vows of celibacy which were occasionally taken by Bráhman sages, by humorous representations of the complaints of neglected wives.¹⁷ The Kshatriyas, also, who engaged the Bráhmans to officiate as priests, regarded them with a certain contempt as mere mercenary sacrificers, who were guilty of an unpardonable assumption if they attempted to establish themselves on an equality of position with the military community.¹⁸

as of Bráhmans.

In a subsequent age, when the primitive conception of Brahma became amplified into the dogmas of a supreme spirit, and the transmigrations of the soul,

¹⁷ See History, vol. ii., part v., Brahmanic Period, chap. iii.

¹⁸ This sentiment is fully expressed by the Kshatriyas who were present at the Swayamvara of Draupadi, when they saw that Arjuna wore the garb of a Bráhman. See *ante*, p. 35. In the Buddhist code of Manu, the Bráhmans rank below the Kshatriyas.



the bulk of the Bráhmans must have presented the same heterogeneous character which they still retain. Indeed it would only have been the more advanced sages of the caste, the intellectual literati, who could apprehend and expound the mysteries of the new philosophy. Such sages must have been very far removed above the illiterate priests of temple and domestic life. They appeared, in fact, as the pious few, who abstracted themselves from all worldly concerns, and dwelt under trees and groves in the outskirts of towns and villages. Here their ostensible object was to purge their souls from all earthly passions; to render themselves superior to all pleasure and pain, and indifferent to all sensations and emotions; so that after death their purified spirit might return to Brahma. With this view they entered upon a holy life of temperance and chastity, subsisted on a vegetable diet, practised severe austerities, performed a daily religious ceremonial and sacrifice, and mortified the flesh in every possible way. Such were the Bráhmans as they appeared at the advent of Gótama Buddha and Alexander the Great. They were each attended by disciples to whom they expounded all the mysteries of their religion, and taught the various ways by which the fervent worshipper could devote the whole energies of his body and soul to the contemplation of the supreme spirit. Many of them were founders of different schools of metaphysics, all tending to the same conclusion although pursued through different labyrinths of bewildering thought; namely, that the universe was contained in the supreme spirit; that all living beings were originally emanations from that spirit; and that all were subject to the law of transmigra-



CHAPTER II.

Character of
the revolution
which estab-
lished Brah-
manism.

tions until they were sufficiently purified to return to the supreme spirit from whom they had originally emanated.

It may now be possible to apprehend the nature of that religious revolution which was agitating the Hindú mind from a remote antiquity. The higher order of sages were becoming famous throughout the land for their transcendental wisdom, their severe austerities, their mystic sacrifices, and their profound contemplations. Many of them were perhaps little better than fanatics or madmen, who showed their indifference to pain by the practice of self-torture, and their indifference to shame by appearing in public without a shred of clothing. But sages and fanatics were alike regarded by the credulous multitude with superstitious awe. Some were worshipped as divine beings. Others, again, were supposed to have acquired such vast supernatural powers by the force of their penances and austerities, that they could compel even the gods to fulfil their behests. Meantime the bulk of the Bráhmans, the ordinary priests of every-day life, continued to worship the old gods as a means of livelihood; but at the same time they professed Brahmanical ideas and teachings as a means of acquiring respect, and exercising a more powerful influence over the masses. They appear to have encouraged the belief that no acts of merit were equal to sacrifices and almsgivings; but at the same time they were supposed to perform penances, to engage in the contemplation of the supreme spirit, and to exercise supernatural powers. Thus the idea of goodness and kindness became obscured by the darkness of superstition. The religion of the heart



was stifled under a ritualism, which was as devoid of moral meaning as the indulgences granted in the Middle Ages. Sacrifices ceased to be a festive offering of meat and wine to the gods. Almsgiving was no longer a spontaneous offering to the priests of deity. Both rites were converted into religious merits; in other words, into atonements for sin by which the conscience was silenced whilst the heart remained untouched. The wicked expected to escape from the just penalty of their crimes by the slaughter of hecatombs of victims to the deities, and the presentation of costly gifts to the Bráhmans. The doctrine of vicarious sacrifices and merits crowned the whole system. The most heinous offences were supposed to be wiped away by the sacrifices and penances which were performed by a priest or preceptor in behalf of a cruel or depraved offender. Under such circumstances it is not surprising that the Bráhmans eventually acquired an ascendancy which destroyed the political life of every Indian nationality, and rendered the introduction of a foreign power a necessity to the people at large.

The part played by the Brahmanical community in the various revolutions of India,—religious, political, and social,—will abundantly appear in subsequent chapters. Before, however, opening up these new vistas in Indian history, it may be as well to glance at that ideal life, which had been prescribed by the Bráhman sages, and which has been recognized from an unknown antiquity, although it is rarely carried out except in theory. It may be summed up in a few words. The Bráhmans were a hereditary caste, appointed by the god Brahma for



CHAPTER II. the worship of deity. They dwelt in separate communities, sometimes in hermitages, and at other times in streets or villages of their own. They subsisted on such simple fare as grain, vegetables, and fruit; regarding milk, butter, and curds as their choicest delicacies. Their whole time was occupied as far as might be with religious worship, such as sacrifice, prayer, penance, contemplation, and sacred studies; and every secular action of their lives, from the cradle to the burning ground, from the moment of rising in the morning till the moment of retiring to rest at night, was governed by some precept of purity or worship. Thus cleaning the teeth and rinsing the mouth were performed every morning, equally with the worship of the gods, according to a strict and minute set of rules; and every meal was accompanied by an offering or sacrifice to deity. Such a life could only be faithfully carried out under conditions of the strictest celibacy. But the Bráhmans were a hereditary caste. It was consequently the duty of every Bráhman to become a husband and father, in order that he might leave representatives to carry on the work of religious worship.

Four stages in
the ideal life of
a Bráhman:
The student.
The house-
holder.
The hermit.
The devotee.

The whole existence of a Bráhman was thus mapped out into the four periods of youth, manhood, middle age, and old age; and the mode of life suitable to each period is elaborately laid down by the Bráhmanical lawgiver Manu.¹⁹ During the first period a young Bráhman lived in the house of a preceptor of his own caste, and was taught all the learning, ceremonial, and moral and religious duties of the Bráhmans; and in return for this instruction and maintenance he rendered menial services, such as

¹⁹ See History, vol. i., part v., Brahmanic Period, chap. x.



cutting wood, bringing water, or preparing the daily sacrifices. On reaching the second period the Bráhma-
man left his preceptor, and commenced life as a
householder. A wife was given to him, and he
was formally presented with a cow. He now, if
possible, drew his subsistence from endowed land,
and received alms and offerings; but he was to
avoid the habit of begging, lest by taking too many
gifts the divine light should fade away from his soul.
The Bráhma householder might also engage in
trade and money lending, but he was not to follow any
pursuit which was incompatible with his sacred call-
ing, or engage in any service which was beneath his
hereditary dignity. The most appropriate employ-
ment for a Bráhma householder was that of a priest
and preceptor, who devoted his whole time to daily
worship, and imparting sacred knowledge to his
pupils or disciples. The third period, or middle
age, was of an entirely different character. Hitherto
the Bráhma may be assumed to have lived like a good
man, doing his duty to his family, and setting a
righteous example to his neighbours. But he would
now think of preparing himself for a higher and
holier state of existence. For this end he would
throw off all family cares and anxieties; he would
seek some secluded hermitage in the jungle, and
there subsist on fruits and roots. Thus he would
lead a life of celibacy and self-mortification until he
had overcome all earthly appetites and desires.
Finally, when he was freed from all sensations or emo-
tions of joy or pain, he would enter the fourth period
of life, and devote his whole time as a Sannyási to
the contemplation of the divine spirit, so that after
death his soul might escape from the trammels of



CHAPTER II. material existence and become absorbed in Brahma.

Evils of a hereditary priesthood.

The religious life of the Bráhmans, notwithstanding its selfish isolation from other castes, is not without its attractions. But they formed a hereditary caste, and there is perhaps no institution more demoralizing to a religion than a hereditary priesthood. It excludes the men, who are otherwise fitted by character, tastes, and religious enthusiasm, from pursuing a sacred calling; and it admits a large number in whom the religious instinct is very weak, and the passion for wealth or power is very strong. The result of a hereditary priesthood in India is that there are but few Bráhmans who faithfully lead the ideal life prescribed by the ancient sages. They are generally pharisaically strict in the practice of all outward observances, through pride of caste, and fear of incurring disrespect; but otherwise they degenerate into mercenaries. In the social life of the Hindú drama, which belongs to a later period, they appear as parasites, jesters, men of the world, and political intriguers; and beyond their claims on the score of birth, they possess none of the virtues or attributes which are fondly ascribed to the ideal Bráhman of old.

Connection of Sati with the Bráhmans.

The organization of the Bráhmans into an ecclesiastical hierarchy belongs to a comparatively late period of their history, and will consequently be treated in a subsequent chapter. But there is one remarkable institution associated with their religion, which may be traced back to a very remote age, when the dogma of the transmigrations of the soul was as yet unknown. This was Sati, popularly known as Suttee, or the practice of burning the living widow with the body of her deceased husband.



CHAPTER II.

The slaughter of a wife or concubine at the obsequies of a deceased husband seems to have been a Scythian custom. It was an outgrowth of a belief in ghosts. The dead man was supposed to require the society of a favourite wife or concubine in the world of shades.²⁰ The Aryans appear to have had no such custom. After the great battle between the Pándavas and Kauravas, the dead bodies of the slain were burnt on funeral piles, but none of the widows were burnt with them. Again, none of the numerous women of Mahárāja Dasaratha were put to death at his funeral obsequies. If a man died childless, his widow was expected to bear a son to the nearest kinsman; but otherwise the widows of a Raja continued to live in the royal residence under the protection of his successor.

Origin of the rite of Sati, or Suttee.

The original distinction between the Scythic and Aryan usage is thus obvious. The Scythians buried their dead; the Aryans burned them. The Scythians slaughtered a living female to enable her to accompany the dead man; the Aryans placed the widows in charge of the new head of the family. Both usages found expression among the Rajpoots. The dead man was burnt according to the Aryan fashion; but the living widow was burnt with him in order that she might accompany her husband to the world of spirits.

The Scythic and the Aryan usage.

The rite of Satí, as practised by the Rajpoots, may thus be described as a Scythian usage modified by Aryan culture. The bodies, dead and living,

Scythian Satí modified by Aryan culture and worship.

²⁰ See Herodotus, iv. 71. The same idea finds expression in an episode of the Mahá Bhárata. See History, vol. i., part ii., Mahá Bhárata, chap. ix. The question of whether the Scythians were of Aryan origin need not be discussed here. See Rawlinson's Herodotus, Book IV., Appendix, Essay II., Ethnography of European Scyths.



CHAPTER II. were no longer buried, but burned. The female was no longer slaughtered as an unwilling victim to the selfish sensuality of a barbarian. On the contrary, she was the widow of a high-souled Rajpoot; the reflex of his chivalrous devotion; prepared to perish with him in order that she might accompany her deceased lord to a heaven of felicity.²¹ The Scythian Satī was further modified by the Aryan worship of fire and the sun. Agni, or fire, was the purifying deity. She was not only the domestic goddess of the household, but the divine messenger that carried the sacrifice to the gods; the purifying flame that bore away the widow and her lord to the mansions of the sun. In this manner the horrible rite, so revolting to civilization and humanity, was imbued with an element of the religion of the affections. It elevated the helpless concubine into a self-sacrificing heroine; the distracted widow into a joyful and triumphant bride. The future of the bereaved woman was no longer a vista of shame and sorrow. She ascended the pile as the chariot of fire which was to carry her away to the arms of her glorified bridegroom in the realms of bliss.²²

Spread of the
rite over Raj-

Such was the rite which the Rajpoot and the

²¹ Amongst the Thracians, the widows of the deceased man were said to dispute amongst themselves as to who was the best beloved, and consequently the best entitled to accompany her husband (Herodotus, v. 3). The same idea finds expression in an imaginary conversation between the widows of Pandu, which is apparently a later addition. See History, vol. i., part ii., Mahā Bharata, chap. i.

²² The earliest notices of Satī amongst the Hindās are to be found in the Greek accounts of the expedition of Alexander in the fourth century before the Christian era. (See *infra*, chap. iv., Greek and Roman India.) The rite is there said to have been adopted as a check upon the women, who occasionally put a husband to death for the sake of a younger lover. (Strabo, India, sect. 30.) The Greek story may have been based upon authentic tradition. In the age of Aryan or Rajpoot conquest, a captive princess often became the unwilling wife of her conqueror; and under such circumstances might be tempted to revenge the affront by poison or the dagger.



Brahman carried to nearly every quarter of India. CHAPTER II.
 It was the expression of the highest conjugal affection, combined with the lowest state of female degradation. The unfortunate widow had no way of escape from a joyless life of servitude, excepting by the most horrible of sacrifices. The honour of the family depended upon the heroism of the woman; and the widow was too often condemned to the pain of martyrdom when the heroism was altogether wanting. The victim was stupified with drugs, and adorned as a burnt offering. She was led by the Bráhmans to the pile from which flight was impossible. The timber was set on fire by the nearest kinsman, and often by her own son, amidst the deafening noise of drums, and the cries of an excited throng. But in the present day humanity may draw a veil over the scene. Under British rule the Satí has become a thing of the past; and within another generation its memory will be blotted out for ever.²³

poet and Brahmanical India.

²³ It will be unnecessary in the present day to dwell upon the horrors of the Satí; further details respecting it will, however, appear hereafter in the progress of the history. But the following verses by a poet of Peninsula India are supposed to express the feelings of the son whilst firing the funeral pile of his living parent, and furnish a powerful illustration of the inhumanity of the practice. Strange to say, although the dogma of the metempsychosis finds no expression in the rite itself, it is yet introduced in the verses. The description of the funeral ceremony, apart from the Satí, corresponds with the burning of Mahárája Dasaratha. See *ante*, page 49.

"Extracts from the song of Pattanatta Pillei, as he performed the funeral rites for his mother.

"1. In what future birth shall I see HER, who for ten moons, burdened, bore me; and when she heard the word SON, lovingly took me up in her rosy hands and fed me from her golden breast?

"2. Shall I kindle the flame to consume HER, who for three hundred days of weariness and longing, morn and evening imploring Siva's grace, was borne down by me a burden?

"3. Shall I place HER on the pile and kindle it,—HER, who in the cradle, on her bosom, on her shoulder, caressed me, fanned me, singing soothing lullabies?



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"4. Shall I put the rice into that mouth, my mother's, with which she was wont to call me her honey, nectar, her only wealth, her boy?

"5. Shall I heap up rice on the head of HER, and place the firebrand with unflinching hand and steady eye; who softly raised me, pressed her face to mine, and called me oft her son?

"6. Sorrow for my mother kindles the fire, deep within, and I too have kindled the fire! See, it burns! it burns!

"7. It burns! It burns to ashes—Alas!—the hand which soothed me, and reared me, and led me so tenderly that its touch would not have frightened away the timid bird!

"8. Is she ashes now? Hath she come already to thy feet, O Siva? Hath she, evermore gazing on thee, rejoicing, forgotten me, her son?

"9. She was erewhile! She walked in the way! She was here but yesterday! To day burned, become ashes! Come all, unlamenting, sprinkle milk, ALL IS IN SIVA'S POWER!"

Translated by the Rev. G. U. Pope. See Dubois' description of the people of India, p. 221, foot-note. Madras, 1862.



CHAPTER III.

LIFE AND TEACHINGS OF GÓTAMA BUDDHA.

B.C. 623—543.

THE rise of Buddhism opens up an entirely new era in the history of religious development in India. The dogma of the transmigrations of the soul had spent its force in vain. It had not eradicated the worship of the gods, nor broken down the caste system, nor overthrown the spiritual domination of the Bráhmans. It had found some expression in the Brahmanism of the sages, but that also had proved a failure. Wherever such Brahmanism exercised any real influence it had tended to check the play of the affections by introducing a ritualism and asceticism which had no moral meaning for the masses. It had stripped the primitive religions of all the associations which endeared them to mortals, and reduced them to a creed, which, had it been universally accepted, would have ignored the old gods of man and the universe, and stifled all the yearnings and aspirations of common humanity. It was consequently doomed to stiffen into lifeless forms; to leave the vast populations of India hopelessly sunk in a childish superstition; and thus to await the inevitable revolution which was to restore the religion of humanity to the world.

CHAPTER III.
Failure of Brahmanism.



AFTER III.

Religious quiescence succeeded by revolt.

Such phases of quiescence are by no means unfrequent in the history of religious development. In reality the currents of spiritual thought are ever flowing and ever intermingling; but sometimes one or other may seem to stagnate for awhile, and harden into a material creed and formula which will last for generations. Finality, however, is impossible. The hardening is only on the surface. Beneath the upper strata of outward rites and observances, the elements of faith and worship, new and old, are seething like burning lava, until at last they assume a spiritual life, and burst through the crust of conventional belief, and create what the world calls a reformation or revolution. Sometimes the new movement is the revolt of humanity against an effete superstition, proclaimed by an earnest and self-denying apostle. But not unfrequently it is the re-action of the religious sentiment against a common-place humanity; the rehabilitation of the old gods and old worship in new and more spiritual forms, in order to arouse the world from a selfish and materialistic torpor. A type of either revolution is to be found in the history of ancient India. The advent of Gótama Buddha was the revolt of humanity against the superstition of the Bráhmaṇ priest and asceticism of the Bráhmaṇ sage. The Brahmanical revival was the rehabilitation of the old gods against the lifeless indifference of the Buddhist monk, and the general growth of luxury and ease.

The revolt of Buddhism against Brahmanism is only to be appreciated by those who are familiar with the results of both systems. The India of the present day presents many of the characteristics which must have distinguished ancient India prior



to the advent of Gótama Buddha. It is a land of deities, temples, and priests, which inspire a melancholy bordering on despair. The whole Indian continent is dotted with little sanctuaries, which appear like the sepulchres of defunct gods, whose grotesque and distorted effigies are to be seen within; and fathers and mothers bow down to these idols, praise them, propitiate them with gifts and offerings, and invoke them for help and prosperity. Again, there are temples of more colossal dimensions, with pyramidal towers or cone-shaped domes covered with sculptures, and surrounded by walls, court-yards, and roofed passages. But all are of the same sepulchral character. Some are the receptacles of archaic gods, who are arrayed in jewels and tinsel; but even these deities are little better than the gaudy mummies of a primeval age. The women alone seem to be fervent worshippers, for the men have begun to groan beneath the oppression of idolatry and Brahmanism. Indeed the rapacity of the temple priests is unbounded, whilst their culture is beneath contempt. They celebrate their temple festivals like children playing with dolls. They carry the gods in procession, or induce the gaping crowd to drag them along in huge idol cars; but they cannot evoke those joyous outpourings of adoration or thanksgiving, which indicate the presence of religious feeling in the hearts of the worshippers. The excited mob cry aloud "victory" and "glory," as though their gods had won great battles. The Bráhmans chant their mechanical laudations, amidst the deafening noise of drums and tom-toms. But beyond a passing effervescence there is rarely any real enthusiasm in such demonstrations. Yet the Hindús

CHAPTER III.

Results of Brahmanism on the people of India.



CHAPTER III. are essentially a religious people. They tell their beads and repeat their prayers. The poor are always ready with their simple offerings to the gods and their gifts to the priests. The rich will exhaust their means in constructing temples, tanks, wells, resting-places for travellers, and bathing steps on the banks of rivers; or in feasting a crowd of mendicant Bráhmans and presenting them with clothes and money. But their religious life, so far as it finds expression, is one of inflated ostentation, accompanied by settled gloom. Whether on pilgrimage to sacred shrines, or gathered together in hundreds of thousands at the great religious fairs, or sacrificing to the village gods with all the paraphernalia of flags and garlands, the people of India seem on most occasions to take their pleasures with sadness of heart. By the favour of the gods they may hope to obtain heaven; but by the anger of the gods they may be condemned to the torments of hell. They give apparent vent to great rejoicings on such occasions as a marriage ceremony or the birth of a son; but in their inmost hearts they are lamenting over a lavish expenditure forced upon them by the tyranny of custom, which reduces them to poverty for the rest of their days. They are virtuous and contented, but their aspirations are stifled by priestly repression, and their contentment is little better than a helpless resignation to their destiny. Their family affections are as strong as elsewhere, but from the cradle to the burning ground they are hemmed around with caste rules, religious observances, and Brahmanical exactions. The women are kept in seclusion and dependence. The son is married whilst yet a boy, and brings his wife to reside



in the family. The daughter is given away whilst yet a girl, and condemned to live under the eye of a mother-in-law; and if her husband dies, she is doomed to perpetual widowhood. Thus amidst much outward placidity, dissensions and jealousies are frequently burning in the household. Too often the mother will not eat, the daughter-in-law is in an agony of tears, one female will not speak, another will not move, and husbands and fathers are looking on in despair.

But Buddhism, as it once flourished in India, and as it still flourishes in Burma, has exercised a very different influence upon its millions of followers. It is a religion not of fear and sorrow, but of hope and joy. It is a creed which turns on the dogma of the metempsychosis in its simplest form; that goodness in the present life will ensure happiness in the next life.¹ It is thus a faith without gods, without priests, properly so-called, and without sacrifices, penances, or supplications to deity.² Yet its votaries are joyous and light-hearted, and generally good and benevolent. Their pagodas are airy structures

Results of
Buddhism on
the people of
Burma.

¹ This definition of modern Buddhism is only applicable to the masses of the laity and not to the monks. It will be seen hereafter that there was a broad distinction between the religion of the Buddhist monks and that of the Buddhist laity, as there was between the popular superstitions of the Hindú populations and the metaphysical speculations of the Bráhmaṇ sages.

² The statements in the text are sufficiently accurate, but yet open to question. In theory Buddhism does deny the existence of deity, and hence in the bitterness of controversy Buddhists are often denounced as atheists. Perhaps Buddhist monks deserve the epithet; but they live in an abstract world of their own, apart from all humanity. It is, however, impossible for the Buddhist laity, who live as husbands and fathers in the world of humanity, to deny deity; because all such men must be practically conscious of the existence of an unseen ruler, as God or providence, who presides over the concerns of life and carries on the government of the world; and the dogmas of merits and demerits, of destiny or inexorable law, cannot eradicate a belief which has become an instinct in humanity. Consequently Buddhism does recognize the existence of deity, and instinctively supplicates the assistance of divine beings, after a fashion that will be indicated hereafter.



CHAPTER III. without an element of melancholy or gloom. Their worship is an expression of reverential devotion towards their great apostle, whose career on earth was one of self-sacrifice for the deliverance of the human race from the miseries of existence. Their days of festival are characterized by open-handed hospitality and spontaneous expressions of real rejoicing. There are provisions for all who care to eat, sweet liquors for all who care to drink, and a profuse prodigality of flowers and perfumes. They have communities of holy men, who are distinguished from the laity by their yellow dress, and their closely-shaven and uncovered heads. They are sometimes called priests, but the term is a misnomer, for they have no duties to fulfil in connection with the pagoda, and no rites to perform at births, deaths, or marriages, or at any of the various incidents of family life, which bear the slightest correspondence to those which are performed by the Bráhmans. Indeed the holy men amongst the Buddhists are not priests, but monks, residing in the seclusion of their monasteries, and practically engaged in the education of the young. Many are also supposed to be pursuing sacred studies, or promulgating the religion of goodness and loving-kindness. Their maintenance is in no way felt as a burden upon the people. They are universally treated with a sincere respect and kindly consideration, which the Bráhman cannot always command. They may not beg, they may not even receive money; but they are abundantly supplied with all the necessaries of life by the voluntary contributions of the masses. Wherever there is a good work to be performed, whether in the name of



religion or of benevolence, the Buddhist laity are CHAPTER III: always ready to contribute to the utmost of their means, and even to make over their cherished jewels and ornaments, if needs be. They have no caste distinctions. They can mingle with the utmost freedom amongst Europeans, as well as their own countrymen of every degree, without the slightest fear of impurity or breach of rule. Their wives and daughters are not shut up as prisoners in the inner apartments, but are free as air to take their pleasure on all occasions of merry-making and festival; and often they assume an independent position in the family and household, and gain a livelihood for themselves or superintend the affairs of husbands or fathers. Their affections are not pent up in little hot-beds of despotism as in Hindú households, but are developed by social intercourse into free and healthy play. Courting time is an institution of the country. On any evening that a damsel is desirous of receiving company, she places her lamp in her window, and puts fresh flowers in her hair, and takes her seat upon a mat. Meantime the young men of the village array themselves in their best, and pay a round of visits to the houses where they see that a lamp is burning. In this manner attachments are formed; and instead of arbitrary unions between boys and girls, there are marriages of affection between young women and young men, in which neither parents nor priests have voice or concern.

The cradle of Buddhism, however, was not in Burma, but in India. It did not originate in the Punjab, or land of Vedic Rishis; nor in western Hindustan, or land of the Bráhmans; but in the region further to the eastward, corresponding to

Cradle of Buddhism in eastern Hindustan.



CHAPTER III. Oude and Behar, where, however, the Brahmanism of the sages had already penetrated, and was apparently taking deep root. The surrounding population may have included poetical Aryans worshipping the deified elements of the universe; but the masses seem to have adopted a religion which was based on the mysteries of death and reproduction; and they were largely influenced by a lower order of religious teachers known as Yogis, who combined a gloomy fanaticism with mystic rites and painful austerities. The higher phases of religious thought were becoming more and more abstract from humanity; and meantime luxury and sensuality were prevailing in all the cities. Such an anomaly is by no means rare in the progress of civilization. Brahmanism in its more spiritual form was doubtless only a reaction from the general corruption of the materialistic religion. Voluptuaries, surfeited with pleasure, turned to asceticism for relief. But such Brahmanism could only have imparted consolation to the few, and could never have satisfied the aspirations of common humanity; and thus a large portion of the community were prepared to accept the religion of Gótama Buddha, which was based upon the affections, and the affections alone.

Geography of
Buddhist India
during the life
of Gótama.

The teaching of Gótama Buddha was confined to eastern Hindustan, and chiefly to that region which lay between Prayága at the junction of the Ganges and Jumna, and Gour at the divergence of the Hooghly and Ganges.³ On the north, this area

³ Gótama is said to have penetrated to the Nága kingdom of the Dekhan, and even to have visited Ceylon and Burma, but these accounts appear to be all mythical. He, however, seems to have visited the Kosambi country, which General



was bounded by the Himalayas; and on the south by an extension of the line of the Nerbudda river in an easterly direction along the edge of the jungle of Gondwana. The scene of Gótama's life and labours was thus an irregular square, which was divided amongst four kingdoms. In the northern half were the kingdoms of Kosala or Oude, and Mithila or Tirhoot; in the southern half were the kingdoms of Varanasi or Benares, and Magadha or Behar.⁴ Lower Bengal, or the country eastward of Magadha, was wholly unknown, or only noticed by the name of Vanga. In the time of Buddha, neither of these four kingdoms exercised the authority of a lord-paramount or suzerain; but at a subsequent period it will be seen that the Rajas of Magadha established an imperial sway over the greater part of India.

The origin of Gótama is still somewhat obscure. According to the legend of his life he was descended from a long line of ancestors of the Súrya-vansa, or children of the sun, who reigned as Chakra-varrtas, or lords-paramount of India, from time immemorial. But a tradition has been preserved in the legend, which disposes of these high pretensions. The father of Gótama was Raja of Kapila; his mother was a princess of the house of Koli. Kapila was a mere off-shoot of the royal house of Kosala, or Oude; whilst Koli was a similar offshoot of the royal house

Descent of
Gótama from
the Sákya
Rajas of Kapila.

Cunningham refers to the lower Doab, immediately to the west of Prayága or Allahabad.

* The political geography of Hindustan can only be indicated in the most general terms. Wars and revolutions seem to have been the normal condition of the ancient governments, and to have continually led to large territorial changes, such as the subversion of old kingdoms and foundation of new states, which no geographer can follow with any degree of accuracy. In the time of Gótama, the great kingdom of Oude or Kosala certainly included that of Benares; whilst Mithila was probably included in that of Vaisali, which was situated immediately to the north of Magadha, and was ultimately conquered by Magadha.



CHAPTER III. of Varanasi, or Benares. These two little principalities were situated in the northern part of Oude, on opposite sides of the river Rohini; but every trace of their sites has passed away, and the names of Kapila, Koli, and the river Rohini are unknown to modern geography.⁵

The tradition of the origin of the two settlements may be related as follows :—

Tradition of the origin of Kapila and Koli.

“In days of old there was a famous Raja of Kosala, named Ikswáku; and he had four sons and five daughters. When he was old he married a young damsel, and she bore him a son; and he so loved her that he made her son the heir-apparent to the Raj, to the exclusion of all the elder brethren. Then the four elder brethren departed out of their father's house, and took their five sisters with them; and they journeyed towards the north until they came to the river Rohini. And they founded a settlement there, and named it Kapila; and they set aside their elder sister Priyá to be queen-mother, and took their other sisters to be their wives.⁶ And they had many sons and many daughters; and their sons were henceforth known as the Sákya princes.⁷

⁵ Fa-hian visited Kapila in the fifth century A.D. and found it a vast solitude. Travels, chap. xxii. Hiouen-Tsang's account is much the same.

⁶ Professor Weber of Berlin has already pointed out the connection between this legend and that of the exile of Ráma.—Weber on the Rámáyana, translated by Boyd. Bombay, 1873.

⁷ A myth has been introduced into the original legend to soften the horror with which such incestuous marriages were subsequently regarded. A sage, named Kapila, is said to have been dwelling in the neighbourhood, and to have directed the brethren to marry their sisters, on the condition that they took half-sisters only, that is, daughters of their father, but not of their respective mothers. The Singhalese version of the legend betrays the fact that they were all children of one mother, named Hatthá. (Mahawanso Tiká, quoted by Turnour, Introd. p. xxxv.; Hardy's Manual of Buddhism, p. 130.) Professor Wilson was of opinion that the city of Kapila, which was destined to be the birthplace of Gótama, was only called so in after-years because Buddhism was borrowed from the Sankhya system of philo-



“After this Priyá was afflicted with leprosy, and her brothers took her to the other side of the river Rohini; and she dwelt there and took up her abode in a cave. CHAPTER III.

“Meantime a Raja of Benares, named Ráma, was in like manner afflicted with leprosy; and he abandoned his throne to his son, and went into the jungle where Priyá was dwelling, and took up his abode in the hollow of a koli tree; and the leaves and bark of that tree cured him of his leprosy. One day he heard the roaring of a tiger, and the screaming of a woman; and he went to the spot, and saw that the tiger had fled, and that Priyá was half dead with terror. So he brought Priyá to his hiding-place in the Koli tree, and cured her of her leprosy; and she became his wife and bore many sons, and they were henceforth known as the Koli princes.

“When the Koli princes were grown they desired to marry the daughters of the Sákya princes of Kapila; but the Sákya princes refused them.⁸ Now the custom was for the damsels of Kapila to go down to the river Rohini to bathe; and the Koli princes met them there, and led them away, and made them their wives.⁹ Then the princes of Kapila became reconciled to the princes of Koli; and

sophy which was taught by Kapila. But Buddhism is the natural development of Indian culture generally. See Professor Max Müller's remarks on this subject. *Chips from a German Workshop*, vol. i. Art. Buddhism.

⁸ According to the legend the Sákya princes refused to give their daughters in marriage to the Koli princes, because the latter had been born in the hollow of a tree. Here, again, a mythic interpretation has been inserted to conceal a disagreeable truth. The real reason for the refusal probably lay in the leprosy of the parents of the princes.

⁹ This tradition resembles the story told by Herodotus of the establishment of marriage relations between the young men of Scythia and the Amazonian damsel. Herod. iv. 110—117.



CHAPTER III. from that day the family of Koli intermarried with the Sákya family of Kapila."

Incestuous marriages of the Sákya princes.

This tradition is a valuable relic of antiquity. The marriages of the Sákya to their sisters cannot be accepted as an isolated fact, but was an established usage like the polyandry of the old Vedic Aryan colonists. To this day it is practised by the Kshatriya kings and princes of upper Burma. It was, however, regarded with the utmost detestation by Brahmanical law; and it may be inferred that during the later antagonisms between Brahmanism and Buddhism the reproach was not forgotten. In the present day the insinuation of such a crime has been converted into one of the foulest terms of abuse in all Bengal.¹⁰

Birth of Gótama, B.C. 623.

Gótama, of the family of Sákya, is commonly supposed to have been born B.C. 623.¹¹ His father Suddhodana was Raja of Kapila, and had married two sisters of the house of Koli. Mayá, the elder, gave birth to Gótama, and died seven days afterwards. Prajapati, the younger, gave birth to a son

¹⁰ The sons of the king of Burma marry their half-sisters. The first wife of the king is generally either a sister or a half-sister. The eldest sister is compelled to lead a life of celibacy so long as her parents are alive, in order that she may be treated as queen-mother. A similar practice prevailed amongst the ancient kings of Persia, who were probably descended from a cognate stock. See Bigandet's *Life of Gaudama*, p. 11, *note*. The practice of marriages between such close relations is said to have been followed to insure purity of blood. The line of inheritance in the Malabar country is not to a son, whose paternity might be doubtful, but to the son of a sister. Strange to say, a similar incestuous union appears in the legend of Krishna. See *History*, vol. i., part ii., *Máha Bhárata*, chap. v.

¹¹ The date of the birth of Gótama is very uncertain. The question is fully discussed in Max Müller's *History of Sanskrit Literature*, pages 263—273. According to the Singhalese era his death took place in the year 543 B.C., after a mortal career of eighty years. This date is accepted by Professor Lassen; but it will be shown hereafter that it may be easily shifted to an earlier or later period.



named Nanda, who occupies an important place in CHAPTER III.
later Buddhist history.¹²

Gótama was of a serious turn of mind from his childhood. Like most men who are destined to become religious teachers, he appears to have been at once thoughtful, melancholy, and imbued with deep sympathies for suffering humanity. Indeed the pain and affliction to which all mankind are more or less subject, seems to have been one of the earliest ideas that dawned upon man. Herodotus has described a Thracian tribe, who mourned when a child was born, and rejoiced when an individual died; and this idea seems to have been early impressed upon the mind of Gótama, but further developed by the dogma of the endless transmigrations of the soul, which he learnt from the Bráhmans. Thus elements of religious thought were possibly working in his soul respecting the hard and inexorable destiny of humanity, that were calculated to fill him with religious despair. As the boy grew older he became so sad and serious that his father grew alarmed lest he should abandon his high

Religious
melancholy of
Gótama.

¹² There is no difficulty in dealing with the main incidents in the life of Gótama. There is a general conformity in all the traditions that have been preserved that possess any claim to authenticity; whether in Thibet to the northward of the Himalayan mountains; or in the island of Ceylon to the south of Peninsular India; or in Burma to the east of the Bay of Bengal. There are, however, considerable differences in the quality and quantity of the supernatural details, which have been introduced by pious monks and miracle-mongers of a later date; but they have been mostly passed over in the present work as devoid of all historical value. Their general character will be found indicated at the conclusion of the present chapter. They are narrated in Bishop Bigandet's *Life or Legend of Gaudama*, based on Burmese authorities, Rangoon, 1866; and in Hardy's *Manual of Buddhism*, based on Singhalese authorities. See also the works of Burnouf and St Hilaire.

It has been remarked by some writers, and by Christian missionaries amongst the number, that many details in the life of Gótama-Buddha coincide with incidents in the life of Christ. This point will be noticed hereafter in dealing with the life of Gótama as a whole.



CHAPTER III. position, and become a religious recluse, like the Bráhmaṇ sages who sat and dreamed away their lives under the trees.

Marriage of
Gótama.

When Gótama was sixteen years of age, Raja Suddhodana thought that marriage might divert the young man's thoughts into a new channel. Accordingly a negotiation was opened with the Raja of Koli for the hand of his daughter Yasodhará. But the Raja of Koli objected to give his daughter to such a degenerate Kshatriya. Gótama, however, soon proved that he had by no means neglected the accomplishments of his race, for he distanced every competitor in the use of weapons, and thus obtained the fair prize. The marriage was duly celebrated, and for some time Gótama was happy in the love of his beautiful bride. Meantime the kinsmen and retainers of the two royal houses of Kapila and Koli sent their daughters to the palace to amuse the young prince with their various accomplishments; and it may be inferred that at this period of his life he plunged into every kind of pleasure, until at last he was oppressed with satiety, and his old melancholy began to return.¹³

It is difficult to say how long Gótama pursued a

¹³ The sensuality indicated in the text is almost incredible. It is, however, quite in accordance with Kshatriya usages. A custom somewhat similar has always prevailed amongst the Kshatriya sovereigns of Burma, varying of course with the character or temperament of the reigning king. Bhodau-pa, who reigned A.D. 1781—1819 over the whole Burman empire, from the Bay of Bengal to the Chinese frontier, was unbounded in his zenana indulgences. Every governor and feudatory was expected to send his fairest daughter or sister to serve in the palace as an attendant, or Royal Virgin. If any such damsel obtained the favour of the king, she was elevated to the position of an inferior queen, and provided with a separate apartment and slaves for her own use. On the one hand, she was expected to promote the interests of her family at court; on the other, she was supposed to keep the king informed of all that was going on in the family of her father or brother.



career of pleasure.¹⁴ During the latter part of it he is said to have successively beheld three different objects, which inspired him with a deep sense of the miseries of existence. These objects were an aged man, a diseased man, and a dead man. This legend need not be interpreted literally. Probably it is a parable intended to convey by three striking figures a conception of the evils which are the common lot of humanity,—old age, disease, and death. The sight of each of these objects awoke a fresh train of thought in the mind of the young prince; and when he had seen them all, he exclaimed in the anguish of his soul:—"Youth, health, and life itself are but transitory dreams; they lead to age and disease, and they terminate in death and corruption." Reflections such as these have driven some men into a melancholy madness, which has ended in suicide; but suicide to a believer in endless transmigrations is merely a change from one existence to another. At this juncture Gótama saw a religious mendicant; a man who had renounced all pleasures, all desires, and all affections; who walked along with dignified tranquillity, and looked only upon the ground. The sight of this mendicant enabled Gótama to perceive a way of escape from the world, and all its delusions and sorrows. He too would abstract his mind from all passion and desire, until he should be finally delivered from the prison of endless transmigrations.¹⁵

CHAPTER III.

The three terrors—old age, disease, and death.

¹⁴ According to the legend Gótama was married at the age of sixteen, and did not abandon his home and family until he was twenty-nine. This would give him thirteen years of domestic happiness. But, as will be seen hereafter, Gótama abandoned his family the very day his only child was born; and it may therefore be inferred that practically his married life was brought to a close after a year or two.

¹⁵ This episode, as regards the appearance of a religious mendicant, requires some explanation. It evidently applies to the ordinary mendicant monk of Bud-



CHAPTER III.

The way of deliverance.

This idea, that by adopting the life of a mendicant, he could finally escape from the miseries of existence, is said to have gladdened the heart of the young prince. According to the legend, each of the three preceding objects had struck him with sadness, and on each occasion he had turned back gloomily to his own apartments. But the sight of the calm and subdued mendicant seemed to lift a weight from his soul. He saw a way of deliverance from all his cares, and instead of returning to the palace, he drove on to the royal gardens without the city, and passed the day in pleasure. In the evening the musicians prepared to accompany him in procession to the palace, and he had just taken his seat in the chariot, when a messenger from his father brought the joyful tidings that his wife Yasodhará had given birth to a son. The multitude filled the air with acclamations, but he himself began to ponder upon the new tie which seemed to bind him to the world. He reached the palace weary with the events of the day, and lay upon his couch. A bevy of damsels danced and played before him according to their wont, but he was

dhism, who, as will be described hereafter, was seeking to escape from the miseries of successive existences or transmigrations into the state of annihilation known as Nirvána. It would thus seem to imply that Buddhist mendicant monks existed in India long before the advent of Gótama Buddha. This conclusion is highly probable; although religious mendicancy is common to other oriental religions, to Brahmanism and Islam, as well as to Buddhism.

But the reputation of Gótama Buddha, as the great apostle of humanity, does not rest so much upon his being the founder of a monastic order; for that order may have existed in some form or other for ages before he was born; but upon his being the teacher of the religion of the heart, which springs from the affections, in which the happiness of mankind, both in this life and in the life hereafter, is made to depend upon his goodness or benevolence. This fact has been ignored by monastic writers, who sought only to abstract themselves from the affections in order to attain Nirvána. A familiarity with the Buddhist laity will correct any non-apprehension on this point, especially when the edicts of Priyadarsi are taken into consideration. See *infra*, chap. 5.



steeled against all their attractions, and soon fell CHAPTER III.
into a heavy slumber.

At midnight Gótama awoke. The lamps were still burning. The damsels were sleeping about in ungainly attitudes, open-mouthed, or gnashing their teeth. He rose up in utter disgust, and ordered his horse to be made ready. He peeped into his wife's chamber, and saw his infant son resting upon her bosom. He turned away lest his resolution should fail him, and descended the palace stairs, mounted his horse, and rode off with only a single attendant until he reached a small stream. Here he made over his horse to his attendant, together with his royal robes and ornaments, and sent them back to Kapila; whilst he himself put on the yellow garb of a religious mendicant, and prepared for the new life which he was about to enter.

The flight from the palace.

The religious culture of Gótama thus presents a marked contrast to that of Mohammed. One was intellectual and spiritual; the other was sentimental and intensely human. The benevolence of Gótama took the form of a passionate yearning to deliver mankind from its hopeless imprisonment in an eternity of transmigrations;¹⁶ and according to the Brahmanical teaching of the time, a life of celibacy and mortification was the first and all-essential step in this direction. The pleasures of female society were supposed to be the most powerful obstacles to religious progress; the deadliest of all the sins that enthralled the soul in the universe of the passions.

Contrast between Gótama and Mohammed.

¹⁶ There is some obscurity about this early yearning of Gótama to deliver mankind from the miseries of existence. It is undoubtedly the belief of modern Buddhism, and finds expression in every part of the legend of the life of Gótama. But it is plain from the sequel that for some years Gótama only sought to work out his own deliverance.



CHAPTER III. The culture of Mohammed was altogether different. His conception of God was that of deified humanity; merciful and compassionate to all who worshipped him, but wrathful and revengeful towards all those who disobeyed his laws or followed after other gods. The idea that the love of women was injurious to the soul never crossed the mind of the old Arab prophet. On the contrary, the sympathy and companionship of women were the mainstay of his religion, and thus the Koran and polygamy went on hand in hand.

Gótama commences his career as a mendicant.

The legend of the life of Gótama is not very clear or connected, but there is little difficulty in tracing the several stages of his religious development. At first he abandoned himself to a kind of pious ecstasy, which may have been little more than a sense of freedom. He then made his way to Rajagriha, the old metropolis of Magadha, which was situated to the south of the Ganges, not far from the modern town of Behar, and about two hundred miles from the supposed site of Kapila. He thus placed a distance of several days' journey between his father's Raj and his new career; probably from a natural reluctance to commence the life of a religious mendicant in a country where he would be at once recognized. At Rajagriha, some rumours of his royal birth may have accompanied him; and henceforth he seems to have lost his name of Gótama, and was chiefly known as Sákya Muni, or the sage of the family of Sákya. His life of mendicancy met with a check at the commencement. At Rajagriha he carried his alms bowl from house to house for the first time, and collected in this manner a quantity of broken victuals; but



when he sat down to his meal the food appeared CHAP. so coarse that he loathed the sight of it. It was a moment of hard trial to the religious enthusiast, but at length he overcame his disgust, and finished his meal with cheerfulness of soul. According to the legend, he was encouraged by the reflection that the food was at least clean and pure; and it is not impossible that the pangs of hunger contributed to this pious frame of mind.¹⁷

Sákya Muni had thus escaped from the bondage of the flesh; but the first exultations of freedom were doubtless followed by a reaction. The mere fact that he had ceased to be a prince, and had assumed the life of a beggar, could not have satisfied his religious aspirations; and he would feel the necessity for acquiring knowledge from some one more advanced in spiritual experience. At that time the only religious teachers in Hindustan were apparently Bráhmaṇ sages, or preceptors; and Sákya Muni was destined to undergo a severe course of Brahmanical training, before he finally appeared before the world as a "Buddha," or enlightener of men. The conditions of such a religious life in India have been characterized by extreme simplicity from time immemorial. A would-be disciple waited upon some distinguished sage, served him in every way, collected food and alms for him, and in return received a course of religious instruction which continued day by day. It will be seen hereafter that the foundations of Brahmanism and Buddhism are almos

Brahmanical
culture of Gó
tama.

¹⁷ There is one difficulty about this period of Gótama's career. He had apparently no means by which to support himself during the lengthy journey from Kapila to Rajagriha. It appears, however, from a later incident in his life, that he carried away four golden cups or vases, which belonged to him as crown prince, and which were ultimately demanded by his son Rahula.



E III. the same. As regards faith, both were reactions from the primitive religions, which were more or less associated with feasting. As regards practice, both were reactions from the unbounded sensual indulgences, which form such a prominent feature in ancient civilization. Again, both had accepted the dogma of the transmigrations of the soul; and both expressed the consciousness of pain and misery, the weariness of existence, the impatience of humanity, which culminated in a longing to escape from the sphere of animal being. But the Brahmanism of the sages and the Buddhism of the monks represented two different stages of development. The Brahmanism of the sages, as already seen, retained the worship of deity although in an abstract form. It resolved all the gods of the universe into the supreme spirit. It taught that escape from the chain of transmigrations consisted in the return of the individual soul to Bráhma; there to be absorbed in the supreme spirit, or to enter upon an individual existence in the heaven of the supreme spirit; and in either case to enjoy ineffable but indefinable felicity. Finally, it declared that this deliverance of the soul could only be effected by worship and austerities, and by contemplation of the supreme spirit in its varied manifestations, until the soul was prepared as it were to form a part of the supreme spirit. The Buddhism of the monks had advanced much further. It was a far more emphatic expression of the revolt against the old theology; so much so as to amount to a revolt against even the higher forms of Brahmanism. It rejected all conception of supreme deity. It taught that worship and austerities, prayers and sacrifices, were



utterly without avail; that they were powerless to CHAPTER III. modify the inexorable laws of the universe as expressed in the dogma of transmigrations. It laid down that broad distinction between the general mass of the community and the monastic order, between the so-called ignorant and the so-called wise, which is the essence of Buddhism. The ignorant, who still clung to the world, and its pleasures, and who had no aspiration beyond being born again in a happier birth, were assured that they could attain that object by the practice of goodness and benevolence in thought, word, and deed. But the wise, who had been imbued with a sense of the evils and unrealities of life, and who were supposed to aspire to a deliverance from the bonds of the flesh, were taught that there was no way of escape from the hopeless prison of existence except by a life of celibacy and mendicancy, in which they could contemplate all the conditions of animal life, all the instincts and necessities of nature, until they loathed and abominated the whole. By this course of discipline the Buddhist monk might sever every tie which bound the soul to the universe of being, so that after death it would sink into that everlasting quiescence or annihilation which is known as Nirvána.

But these distinctions between Brahmanism and Buddhism were chiefly of a metaphysical character. Had they continued to be confined within the narrow area of philosophical speculation, they would perhaps have never found expression in actual antagonism; and indeed, as far as can be gathered from authentic evidence, there was no violent antagonism between Brahmanism and Buddhism until some



CHAPTER III.

Antagonism on
the question of
caste.

centuries after the advent of Gótama. The question of deity or no deity, worship or no worship, austerities or no austerities, would have proved of little moment, excepting so far as either side might win over the popular support by appealing to the prevailing sentiment. But there was one point mooted by Buddhism, which was calculated to revolutionize the whole social system of the Hindús; and which in fact did ultimately succeed in dividing the Hindú world into two hostile camps. This question was the righteousness or otherwise of caste; a question which is quite as important in the present day as it was two thousand years ago.

Characteristics
of the caste
system in India.

The caste system of India is not based upon an exclusive descent as involving a difference of rank and culture, but upon an exclusive descent as involving purity of blood. In the old materialistic religion which prevailed so largely in the ancient world, and was closely associated with sexual ideas, the maintenance of purity of blood was regarded as a sacred duty. The individual had no existence independent of the family. Male or female, the individual was but a link in the life of the family; and any intermixture of blood would be followed by the separation of the impure branch from the parent stem. In a word, caste was the religion of the sexes, and as such exists in India to this day. The dogma of the transmigrations of the soul was, however, calculated to cut at the very root of the caste system. If a man could be born a Bráhma in this life and a Súdra in the next, the maintenance of caste purity was practically of small importance. But the Bráhmans never accepted the dogma of the metempsychosis in its entirety. Their position,