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HISTORY OF INDIA.

PART I.

INTRODUCTION.

THE history of India is of universal interest from the light which it throws upon the annals of the human race; but it is of paramount importance to the people of Great Britain. It illustrates many phases of civilization which are at present but imperfectly apprehended, but which yet add largely to our knowledge of man. It refers to religions which express almost every aspiration in human nature, from the lowest animal instinct to the most elevated moral sentiment, and from the worship of the vilest images to the conception of One Being, spiritual and supreme. Above all, however, it indicates the past and present conditions of vast and varied populations, who may be regarded as a sacred trust confided to the British nation by what may be termed an irresistible destiny, or, in other words, a divinely ordered law.

The history of the British administration of India has frequently been written, but the history of the

HISTORY OF
INDIA.
PART I.

Importance of
the history of
India.

New phases of
civilization.

Significance of
the religions.

Indicates the
past and present
condition of a
people confided
to Great Britain
as a trust.

History of Brit-
ish administra-
tion distinct
from the history
of the Hindus.



HISTORY OF
INDIA.
PART I.

Difficulties in
apprehending
the history of
the Hindús.

Personal observ-
ation of com-
paratively small
value.

Imperfect know-
ledge of Oriental
scholars.

Knowledge of
the masses in
England of re-
cent growth.

Hindús themselves is almost a blank to the European. Indeed the subject is generally regarded as perplexing and wearisome. The religion appears complicated, unmeaning, and often repulsive. The caste system excites no sympathy. The whole framework of society is opposed to European ideas. The names of persons and places are strange, and remembered with difficulty. The result has been, that whilst the ruling powers have ever exhibited a genuine desire to promote the well-being of the governed, they have in many cases but imperfectly apprehended the ideas and aspirations of the masses. Englishmen who have passed the greater part of their lives in India, would yet find it difficult to draw up an imaginary dialogue between two Hindús which should approximate to truth. Even Oriental scholars, who have familiarized themselves with the stores of Brahmanical learning, are but partially acquainted with the thoughts and ways of the many millions who are living under British rule. Nor will this ignorance be surprising when it is considered how little Englishmen knew, until late years, of the middle and lower classes of their own countrymen, although bound to them by a common language, a common literature, a common faith, and a common nationality.¹

¹ The extent to which European residents in India are ignorant of the domestic life of the Hindús was thus indicated by Lord William Bentinck sixty years ago; and the conditions specified are at least as true in the present day. "The result of my own observation during my residence in India is, that the Europeans generally know little or nothing of the customs and manners of the Hindús. We are all acquainted with some prominent marks and facts, which all who run may read; but their manner of thinking, their domestic habits and ceremonies, in which circumstances a knowledge of the people consists, is, I fear, in great part wanting to us. We understand very imperfectly their language. They perhaps know more of ours; but their knowledge is by no means sufficiently extensive to give a description of subjects not easily represented by the insulated words in daily use.



The history of India, properly so called, is to be found in the two voluminous Epics known as the Mahá Bhárata, or "Great War of Bhárata," and the Rámáyana, or "Adventures of Ráma." These extraordinary poems comprise the whole of what remains of the political, social, and religious history of India, and may be regarded as the reflex of the Hindú world. But at the same time they are of such an interminable length, and exhibit such a complicated intertwining of traditions and fables, referring to widely different periods, races, and religions, that the student is frequently lost in a literary jungle. It is certain, however, that a familiarity with these two poems is as indispensable to a knowledge of the Hindús, as a familiarity with the Old Testament is indispensable to a knowledge of the Jews. They form the great national treasures out of which the bards have borrowed the stories of their ballads, the eulogists and genealogists have taken the materials for their so-called histories, and the later Bráhmans have drawn the subject-matter of their religious discourses and the groundwork of their moral teaching; whilst nearly every plot in a Hindú drama, or sculptured group in a Hindú pa-

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INDIA.
PART I.

History of India to be found in the Mahá Bhárata and Rámáyana. Comprehensive character of the two poems.

Interminable length and confusion of traditions and ideas.

Familiarity with the two poems indispensable to a knowledge of the Hindús.

We do not, we cannot, associate with the natives. We cannot see them in their houses, and with their families. We are necessarily very much confined to our houses by the heat. All our wants and business which would create a greater intercourse with the natives is done for us, and we are, in fact, strangers in the land."

A great deal of information may however be gathered from native students in the Government Schools, who will freely communicate their ideas and experiences to any masters or professor who may have obtained their confidence. During the three or four years that the present writer held the post of Professor of Moral Philosophy and Logic at the Madras Presidency College, he is conscious of having acquired many facts respecting Hindú life which are not generally known; as well as a respect for that better and brighter side of the native character which is not generally appreciated, such as the warm attachment which subsists between friends and relatives, and the chivalrous devotion of sons to the wishes of their parents.



HISTORY OF
INDIA.
PART I.

Vast influence
exercised by the
two poems upon
the masses.

Their extraor-
dinary popular-
ity.

Belief in bene-
ficial results of
reading them or
hearing them
read.

Long chrono-
logical interval
between the age
in which the
events took
place and the
age in which the
Mahá Bhárata
and Rámáyana
were composed.

goda, refers to some character or scene belonging to one or other of these famous poems. Few Hindús may perhaps be acquainted with the whole of these Epics, and none have ventured to subject them to a critical analysis and investigation; yet their influence upon the masses of the people is beyond calculation, and infinitely greater and more universal than the influence of the Bible upon modern Europe. The leading incidents and scenes are familiar to the Hindús from their childhood. They are frequently represented at village festivals, whilst the stories are chaunted aloud at almost every social gathering; and indeed form the leading topic of conversation amongst Hindús generally, and especially amongst those who have passed the meridian of life. In a word, these poems are to the Hindús all that the Library, the Newspaper, and the Bible are to the European; whilst the books themselves are regarded with a superstitious reverence, which far exceeds that which has ever been accorded to any other revelation, real or supposed. To this day it is the common belief that to peruse or merely to listen to the perusal of the Mahá Bhárata or Rámáyana, will ensure prosperity in this world, and eternal happiness hereafter; will give wealth to those who are poor, and children to the woman who is barren. At the same time they are cherished by the Hindús as national property, belonging to the national soil, and containing the records of the deeds of their forefathers in the days when the gods held frequent communion with the children of men.

Before, however, reproducing in a historical form the main traditions which are embodied in these ancient Epics, there is one point which may be



briefly indicated, especially as it will form a frequent subject of future discussion. The leading events belong to one age; the poems belong to another and a later period. In other words, the Mahá Bhárata and Rámáyana were not composed in their present form until a period long after that in which the heroes of the two poems lived and died. The result has been that the events of one age have been coloured by the ideas of another; and this chronological interval, which could scarcely have been less than one or two thousand years, is rendered more important from the fact that the religion which flourished in the age in which the events occurred, had more or less passed away, and a new one been established in the succeeding age, in which the poems were composed. The former may be called the Vedic period, the latter the Brahmanic period.

HISTORY OF
INDIA.
PART I.

Events coloured
by the ideas of
the subsequent
age.

Changes in re-
ligion during the
interval.

Distinction be-
tween the Vedic
and the Brah-
manic periods.

The term Vedic is here borrowed from the Rig-Veda, which is a very ancient collection of hymns, or mantras, addressed to different deities who will be presently described. These hymns are of considerable value, inasmuch as they did not originally form part of a laboured and artificial ritual, but are the genuine outpourings of simple minds, eagerly praying to the gods for material and temporal blessings.² Evidence will be furnished hereafter to show

The Vedic period
coeval with the
main events re-
corded in the
two Epics.

² The Vedas are four in number, but the first and oldest, known as the Rig-Veda, is the one which principally demands attention, as the other three belong to a subsequent and ritualistic age, and indeed are little more than recasts of the Rig-Veda. (See Wilson's Rig-Veda, Vol. I. Introduction; also Goldstücker's paper in the English Cyclopædia upon the Vedas.) The four Vedas are respectively termed the Rig-Veda, the Yajur-Veda, the Sama-Veda, and the Atharva-Veda.

Each Veda is divided into two parts, viz.—

1st, The Hymns, or Mantras, which express the wants and aspirations of the worshippers, and thereby throw some light upon the social condition of the people.

2nd, The Brahmanas, which belong to a ritualistic age, and refer to rites and

HISTORY OF
INDIA.
PART I.

The Brahmanic
age coeval with
the composition
of the two Epics.

Characteristics
of the Vedic pe-
riod.

Characteristics
of the Brah-
manic period.

Patriarchal sim-
plicity of the Ve-
dic period want-
ing in the later
age of Brahman-
ical ascendancy.

Necessity for
glancing at the
civilization and
religion of the
Vedic age, before
commencing the
Mahā Bhārata
and Rāmā-
yana.

that the Vedic age was the one in which the main traditions of the Mahā Bhārata and Rāmāyana seem to have taken place; whilst the Brahmanic age, which succeeded to the Vedic period, was the one in which the two poems were composed. The leading points of difference between the Vedic and Brahmanic periods may be thus indicated. In the Vedic period the Brāhmins were scarcely known as a separate community; the caste system had not been introduced, and gods were worshipped who were subsequently superseded by deities of other names and other forms. In the Brahmanic period the Brāhmins had formed themselves into an exclusive ecclesiastical hierarchy, endowed with vast spiritual powers, to which even the haughtiest Rajas were compelled to bow. The caste system had been introduced in all its fulness, whilst the old Vedic gods were fast passing away from the memory of man, and giving place to the three leading Brahmanical deities—Brahma, Vishnu, and Siva. Again, the Vedic period is characterized by a patriarchal simplicity, which is wanting in the Brahmanic age, when the luxury and splendour of the Hindū Rajas had reached a climax side by side with the increased power and influence exercised by the Brahmanical hierarchy. It will thus be seen that before entering upon the story of the two Epics, it will be advisable to glance more particularly at the civilization and religion of the Vedic age, and thereby establish a

ceremonies, of an unmeaning or artificial character, although of course a mystic significance is ascribed to each. The Aitareya Brahmanam is however of some value, as it illustrates the Brahmanical sacrifices of animals which were practised in that early age of Brahmanical ascendancy which partly preceded and partly overlapped the age of Buddhism. The Sanskrit text of the Aitareya Brahmanam, together with an English translation, has recently been published by Dr Hang of Bombay.



standard by which to clear the events which belong to that age from the Brahmanical husk which they subsequently seem to have received from the hands of the Brahmanical compilers of the Mahá Bhárata and Rámáyana.

HISTORY OF
INDIA.
PART I.

The Vedic people, whose wants and aspirations are expressed in the hymns of the Rig-Veda, are described as "fair-complexioned" Aryas, or Aryans, who had migrated at a remote period from some colder climate in central Asia, and subsequently settled in the Punjab, or "Land of the Five Rivers," in the north-western quarter of India, from whence, in the course of ages, they gradually pushed towards the east and south. They seem to have been called "fair-complexioned" in opposition to the darker complexioned tribes who had previously settled in India, and who are generally regarded as aborigines, and alluded to under a variety of names, such as Rákshasas, Asuras, Dánavas, Dasyus, and Daityas.³

The Vedic people.

The white-complexioned Aryans of the Punjab.

The black complexioned settlers who preceded the Aryans, and who are regarded as aborigines.

³ Whilst the term Aryan is applied to the Vedic invaders of India, the so-called aborigines are generally regarded as a Turanian race. These terms, Aryan and Turanian, are so frequently used that some explanation of their opposition seems necessary. In language the difference is one not only of roots but of grammars. In race the Aryan comprises the Greek, the Roman, and the modern European, whose tendencies have been to form themselves into national and political communities, to marry one wife, and to worship one supreme and spiritual deity. The Turanian, on the other hand, is represented by the modern Tartars, whose tendencies are apparently the reverse; they have little national or political cohesion, marry one or more wives without much sentiment, and worship gods and heroes without much idea of spiritual existence beyond that implied in the notion of ghosts and demons.

So far the opposition is intelligible, and the application of the terms Aryan and Turanian is convenient for the purpose of distinguishing one class of tendencies from another. But when the terms are broadly applied to families of mankind, and regarded as characteristics by which to distinguish the members of one great family from those of another, they are apt to mislead. Both the Aryan and the Turanian elements spring from a common human nature, and do not arise from a difference of instinct but from a difference of training, or rather a difference in the past and present conditions of national existence. Men speaking Aryan languages may abandon themselves to polygamous aspirations and to a superstitious reverence for material existences; and in like manner the Turanian may be



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INDIA.
PART I.

Similarity between the patriarchal life indicated in the Vedic hymns and that indicated in the Mahā Bhārata.

Prayers for rain, abundant harvests, prolific cattle, bodily vigour, long life, numerous progeny, etc.

Vedic deities were personifications of the abstract powers of nature.

Confusion in the personifications.

Distinction between Indra, the sovereign god who sent the rain, and Varuna, the god of water, or the ocean.

The simple patriarchal life of the Aryans is indicated in the Vedic hymns precisely as it is depicted in the main tradition of the Mahā Bhārata. They were a people partly pastoral and partly agricultural; keeping cows for the sake of their milk, butter, and curds, and sowing the land with grain. They also seem to have had some acquaintance with the manufacture of weapons and coats of mail, and to have sometimes undertaken sea-voyages for the sake of gain. These people prayed to their gods, as such a people might be expected to pray, for plenty of rain, abundant harvests, and prolific cattle; for bodily vigour, long life, numerous progeny, and protection against all foes and robbers, such as the cattle-lifting aborigines. Their gods appear to have been mere abstractions; personifications of those powers of nature on whom they relied for good harvests. They wanted seasonable rain, warmth, and fresh breezes. Accordingly, they prayed to the god of rain, the god of fire and light, and the god of wind. But from the very first, there appears to have been some confusion in these personifications, which led both to a multiplicity of deities, and the confounding together of different deities. Thus the conception of the god of rain was Indra, and he was identified with the firmament as well as with the unseen power which smote the rain-cloud and brought down the waters; and so important was the acquisition of rain in due season, that Indra is regarded as the sovereign of the gods, and subsequently became a type of sovereignty. But rain

led to feel that his highest bliss on earth is derived from his marriage to one wife, and that the most elevated form of worship is that of one God,—the omniscient, the unseen, and the supreme.



and water are frequently different things, and thus there was another, and perchance an older, deity, named Varuna, who was particularly worshipped as the god of the waters, and deity of the ocean. Again, the conception of the god of fire was Agni, and Agni was not only the flame which burns upon the hearth or altar, but also the lightning which manifests itself in the clouds, and even the light of the sun, moon, and stars. Yet both the sun and moon appear as separate and individual deities, the former under the name of Surya, and the latter under the name of Soma or Chandra. Again, there seems to have been a striking difference as regards wind. The god of wind, or air, was Váyu; but the different breezes which bring on or accompany the rain, are called Maruts, and are represented as the attendants of Indra. Thus, whilst there is a Pantheon of separate and individual deities, the conception of one deity frequently overlapped the conceptions of other deities; and whilst the more prominent powers of nature, such as water, fire, and wind, were separately individualized, a monotheistic tendency was always at work, ascribing the attributes of every deity to each one in turn. Of these deities, the following appear to be the most important:—

HISTORY OF
INDIA.
PART I.

Conception of
Agni, as the god
of light as well
as of fire.

Separate deifica-
tion of the Sun
and Moon.

Distinction be-
tween Váyu, the
god of wind, and
the Maruts, or
breezes.

Leading Vedic
deities.

Rain.

Indra, god of the firmament.
Varuna, god of the waters.

Indra.
Varuna.

Fire.

Agni, god of fire.
Súrya, the sun.
Soma, or Chandra, the Moon.

Agni.
Súrya.
Soma, or Chan-
dra.



HISTORY OF
INDIA.
PART I.

Air.

Váyu.
Maruts.

Váyu, the god of wind.

Maruts, the breezes who attended upon Indra.

Yama, the god of
death, or judge
of the dead.

To these must be added a god of death, or judge of the dead, who was known as Yama. The characteristics of Yama as a Vedic deity would open up a large field of inquiry; but the subject at present is vague and speculative. In the Epics, Yama appears distinctly as a judge of the dead; and men who are about to die are frequently said to be about to go to the mansions of Yama.

Fanciful personifications which appear to have been regarded as minor deities.

The foregoing deities appear to have been the prominent gods in the Vedic Pantheon; but yet there are many fanciful personifications to whom hymns were addressed, such as Earth,⁴ Sky, Food, Wine, Months, Seasons, Day, Night, and Dawn. The religious ideas connected with these personifications are difficult of apprehension; and it can only be inferred that the abstractions were regarded as spiritual existences, and worshipped accordingly. Perchance a better acquaintance with Rig-Veda may serve to solve the problem, for at present philologists appear to be occasionally divided as regards the true meaning of passages; and, indeed, seem inclined to depend upon the interpretation of commentators who flourished thousands of years after the composition of the hymns, and when the national mind had been entirely recast in a Brahmanical mould.⁵

⁴ In a later and more mystic age, Earth became personified as the cow; but the conception of Earth in the Rig-Veda is more simple and primitive.

⁵ The chronology of the Vedas is still a subject of discussion, but the data are vague and unsatisfactory. The Rig-Veda has been referred to about the twelfth or fifteenth century before Christ, and would thus synchronize with the Hebrew



The form of worship which prevailed amongst the Vedic Aryans, throws still further light upon the simplicity of ancient rites and ideas. Indeed, their whole religious system may be regarded as a child-like make-believe. They appear to have had no idols and no temples, but either performed their sacrifice in the open air, or else in a sacrificial chamber set apart in each dwelling. The so-called sacrifice was nothing more than the preparation of such simple viands as clarified butter, curds, wine, cakes, and parched grain; and the presentation of such articles to the different deities through the medium of fire. In other words, having deified certain abstractions, they personified such abstractions as beings with human wants and aspirations; and then invoked the gods with hymns to attend and partake of the food which had been prepared for them, and made believe that the gods accepted the invitation. Moreover, the offerings do not appear to have been always of a bloodless character, for Indra is described as rejoicing in roasted buffalo, and it is certain that a horse was occasionally sacrificed either to Indra or the Sun.

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INDIA.
PART I.

Child-like form
of worship.

No idols or tem-
ples.

Presentation of
simple articles
of food to the
different deities
through the me-
dium of fire.

The gods invest-
ed with human
wants and aspira-
tions, and in-
voked to partake
of food.

Flesh offerings.

These religious rites were thus intimately connected with eating and drinking, and appear to have been performed at dawn, noon, and sunset. Ac-

Religious rites
connected with
eating and
drinking, and
performed at
every meal.

conquest of Canaan; but still it cannot be denied that some of the hymns may be of far earlier date, whilst the composition of others may have belonged to a much later age. The popular appreciation however of the Vedic hymns and the Vedic deities seems to have died away in the subsequent ages of Brahmanism and Buddhism, and later commentators must have proceeded to the task of interpretation with their minds deeply imbued with the religious ideas of the Brahmanic period. The most famous commentator of the Rig-Veda was Sáyana Achárya, who flourished about the fourteenth century of the Christian era, or about three thousand years after the composition of the works upon which he commented; an interval corresponding to that which separates the books of Joshua and Judges from some of our early English divines.

HISTORY OF
INDIA.
PART I.Connection of
cooking with
sacrifice.Greatness of the
preparations varied with the im-
portance of the
occasion.
Daily meals.Grand enter-
tainments.

Accordingly, it is easy to conceive that they may have formed an accompaniment to every meal, and may have been regarded almost as a part of the cookery. Thus the hymns may have been the expression of the aspirations of a simple people whilst the food was being cooked; and the so-called sacrifice may have been nothing more than the propitiation of the gods by the presentation of a portion of the victuals and liquors. Indeed, the preparations for cooking and sacrifice would be much the same. A fire would be kindled upon the ground, or upon a raised altar; the food would be either baked, or toasted, or boiled in kettles; bundles of a common but sacred species of grass, known as Kusa grass, would be sprinkled all round the altar for the make-believe gods to sit upon, and upon which the worshippers also sat themselves; ghee and soma juice⁶ would be presented to the fire in ladles; and the god of fire would be invoked in a Vedic hymn, either to accept the offering, or to carry it away in flame to the other gods; after which the worshippers themselves partook of the meal which had been provided. Of course, such preparations would vary with the importance of the occasion. At the daily meal it may have been deemed sufficient to chaunt a few strains, and sprinkle a little ghee on the fire and grass; but on a set occasion, such as a marriage, an installation of a chieftain, or an assertion of sovereignty, the soma juice would be elaborately

⁶ Wilson's *Rig-Veda*, Vol. I. *Introduction*, p. xxiii. The Soma plant is the acid *Aselepias*, or *Sarcostema viminalis*, which yields to expression a copious milky juice of a mild nature and sub-acid taste. It does not appear to have been used in sacrifices until it had gone through the process of fermentation, and had become a strong spirituous beverage. *Ib.* p. 6, *note*.



prepared in large quantities, and presented to the invisible gods with curds, cakes, ghee, and milk; and the so-called sacrifice would be followed by a great feast amongst the guests assembled. In the hymns recited on such festivals, the worshippers would exult in the joy and satisfaction which the gods would feel in quaffing the soma, or in consuming the choice viands which had been prepared. In one vigorous hymn it is said that the gods, filled with food, are as impatient to enjoy the soma as bridegrooms long for their brides.⁷ Sometimes a deity is supposed to be attracted by the grateful sound of the stone and mortar by which the soma juice was expressed from the plant; or by the musical noise of the churning-sticks by which the wine was apparently stirred up and mixed with curds; and the eager invokers implore the god not to turn aside to the dwelling of any other worshipper, but to come to them only, and drink the libation which they had prepared, and reserve for them all his favours and benefits. Indeed, the relations between the Vedic Aryans and their deities appear to have been of a child-like and filial character; the evils which they suffered they ascribed to some offence of omission or commission which had been given to a deity; whilst the good which they received was in like manner ascribed to his kindness and favour. In order, however, the more fully to apprehend the general scope and character of the religious ideas of the Vedic Aryans, it may be advisable to

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INDIA.
PART I.

Exultation of
the worshippers
in the gratifica-
tion of the gods.

The deities sup-
posed to be at-
tracted by the
noise of the mor-
tar and churn-
ing sticks.

Relations be-
tween the Vedic
Aryans and their
deities resem-
bling those be-
tween children
and a father.

Necessity for a
further develop-
ment of the cha-
racteristics of
the leading dei-
ties.

⁷ Rig-Veda, Mand. I. Hymn 83, v. 2. Wilson's Translation. It may here be noted that all references are made to Wilson's translation of the Rig-Veda, unless otherwise stated.



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INDIA.
PART I.

Characteristics
of Indra, or the
god of the firma-
ment.

Attributes of a
human hero su-
peradded to
those of the god
of the firma-
ment.

Frequently ad-
dressed in fami-
liar terms.

Partiality for
strong drink.

indicate, with a greater degree of detail, the leading characteristics of those deities who are prominent both in the Epics and the Rig-Veda.

The most prominent and popular deity in the Vedic ritual appears to be Indra, the giver of rain, and subsequently regarded as the sovereign of the gods. This deity, more than any of the others, is represented in the character of a human hero, rather than as a spiritual divinity, or, in other words, is more distinctly and intensely personified. It is true that he appears prominently as the god of the firmament, the hurler of the thunderbolt, who smote the rain-cloud and brought down the waters; and his worshippers implore him for blessings, such as robust health and plentiful harvests, long life and numerous progeny, and other good things of this world, which none but deity can bestow. But in many of the hymns he is represented as a warrior chief, endowed perhaps with supernatural strength and energy, but still with more of the human than of the miraculous type, and who especially shielded and protected those who were his friends, and smote and destroyed those who were his foes.⁸ Moreover, he is frequently addressed in familiar terms, and in tones of remonstrance, which are incompatible with the idea of an omniscient and invisible deity. He is supposed to take especial delight in quaffing the soma juice; and his capacity in drinking it is celebrated with all the sympathetic praise and exaggerated description with which the northern bards loved to celebrate the Bacchanalian exploits of their

⁸ Comp. Rig-Veda, Mand. I. Hymns 51 and 55, for the human character of Indra.



heroes of the olden time. Indeed, he is hymned as the discoverer of the soma plant, which was said to have been brought from heaven, and to have previously lain hidden in a rock like the nestling of a bird.⁹ In many passages however, as already stated, his existence seems to have been spiritualized until he becomes a mere personified idea of the god of the sky or the firmament, and the winds are declared to be his followers, with whom he battles against the clouds in order to release the rain. Even in this capacity the popular imagination still delighted in depicting him in a human form, driving furiously in a chariot drawn by championing and foaming steeds; as the hero and protector of the fair-complexioned Aryans, who worshipped him with acceptable hymns and large oblations, and the enemy and destroyer of the black-complexioned aborigines,—the Rákshasas, the Dasyus, the Asuras, the Krishuas, and the Pisachis,—who neither sung his praises nor offered him the delicious and inebriating soma. He was thus a national deity, showering gifts upon his worshippers, but trampling upon those who gave him no libations, as a strong man tramples upon a coiled-up snake. He slew his enemies by thousands, and destroyed their cities by hundreds; he brought back the spoil, and recovered the cows which they had carried away. His worshippers called upon him to hasten, assail, subdue; to destroy his enemies with his thunderbolt; to smite the rain-cloud Vritra and bring down the waters.¹⁰ “Slayer of Vritra, ascend thy chariot,

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INDIA.
PART I.

Hymned as the discoverer of the soma plant.

Spiritualization of Indra into a personified idea of the firmament.

Indra the hero of the Aryans, and foe of the aborigines.

Character of the Vedic hymns addressed to Indra.

Invocations to Indra in his human capacity.

⁹ Rig-Veda, Mand. I. Hymn 130, v. 3.

¹⁰ Rig-Veda, Mand. I. Hymn 80, v. 3.



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INDIA.
PART I.

for thy horses have been yoked by prayer; may the sound of the stone that bruises the soma attract thy mind towards us.”¹¹ “Showerer of benefits, destroyer of cities, propitiated by our new songs, reward us with gratifying blessings.”¹² In one hymn the worshippers are naïvely represented as saying:—“Quaff the soma juices, satiate thy appetite, and then fix thy mind on the wealth that is to be given to us.”¹³ In another Indra is told that the minds of his worshippers adhere to him, as affectionate wives to a loving husband.¹⁴ Thus there are verses which describe him as a mere human chief, a strong man rejoicing in his strength, a warrior delighting in war, as well as in eating and drinking; and there are others in which his deeds and attributes are lauded with an Oriental exaggeration which renders his deification complete:—

Invocations to
Indra as the Supreme Being.

“He who as soon as born is the first of the deities, who has done honour to the gods by his exploits; he at whose might heaven and earth are alarmed, and who is known by the greatness of his strength; he, men, is Indra.

“He who fixed firm the moving earth; who tranquillized the incensed mountains; who spread the spacious firmament; who consolidated the heavens; he, men, is Indra.

“He who, having destroyed Ahi,¹⁵ set free the seven rivers; who recovered the cows detained by Bala; who generated fire in the clouds; who is invincible in battle; he, men, is Indra.

“He under whose control are horses and cattle, and villages, and all chariots; who gave birth to the sun and to

¹¹ Rig-Veda, Mand. I. Hymn 87, v. 3.

¹² Rig-Veda, Mand. I. Hymn 130, v. 10.

¹³ Rig-Veda, Mand. I. Hymn 54, v. 9.

¹⁴ Rig-Veda, Mand. I. Hymn 62, v. 11.

¹⁵ Ahi is another name for Vritra, or the rain-cloud. Sometimes Vritra, or Ahi, is represented as a heavy cloud charged with water, and sometimes as a chief among the aboriginal tribes with whom the Aryas are at war.



the dawn; and who is the leader of the waters; he, men, is Indra. HISTORY OF INDIA. PART I.

“He to whom heaven and earth bow down; he at whose might the mountains are appalled; he who is the drinker of the soma juice, the firm of frame, the adamant armed, the wielder of the thunderbolt; he, men, is Indra.”¹⁶

“May we envelope thee with acceptable praises, as youthful husbands are embraced by their wives.”¹⁷

Another famous Vedic deity, and one perhaps who is superior to Indra, although he never acquired the sovereignty of the gods, is Agni, or Fire. Even to the eye of the man of science there is something spiritual in the varied manifestations of fire, and something divine in its powers of destruction and purification. To this must be added the fact that in colder climates, like that from which the Vedic Aryans appear to have emigrated, the presence of fire is associated with home pleasures and family ties, and the domestic hearth becomes a vivid conception embodying pleasant memories and warm affections. But to man in a primitive state of existence, the presence of fire excites feelings of reverence. Its powers raise it to the rank of a deity whose operations are felt and seen. It burns and it consumes. It dispels the darkness, and with it drives away, not only the imaginary horrors which the mind associates with darkness, but also the real horrors, such as beasts of prey. In its lower manifestations as mere heat, it cooks the food and warms the dwelling, and it enables the artisan to forge weapons for the warrior, or to fashion jewelled ornaments to enliven the

Characteristics of Agni or Fire.

Mysterious attributes of fire.

Family associations connected with fire in cold climates.

Reverence excited amongst a primitive people by the presence of fire.

General utility of fire.

¹⁶ Rig-Veda, Mand. II. Hymn 12, v. 1, 2, 3, 7, 13.

¹⁷ Rig-Veda, Mand. II. Hymn 16, v. 8.