

in these hymns frequent references to the great Indian rivers, and to the sea, and to merchants who brave its perils for the sake of gain. Wedding and funeral rites are both described in an interesting manner, and incidentally much may be gathered with regard to the social customs of these early days. Gambling, especially with dice, was a favorite pastime. Nowhere are the praises of water more sweetly sung than in these hymns, though truth compels us to say that the intoxicating juice of the Soma or moon plant is also extolled in strains unsurpassed for fervor by the Bacchanalian poets of any age or country. A large number of the hymns of the Rig-Veda are devoted to the praises of Agni, fire; Indra, the mighty god of the firmament; and the Maruts or Storm Gods that are Indra's attendants. Others are in praise of Surya or Savitra—the sun, and to the sons of the boundless, the infinite, called Adityas, which Wilson thinks are manifestations of the sun in the different months of the year. One of these, Varuna, has many hymns in his favour, and so has Mitra, whose name is generally joined to that of some other deity. One poet affirms the existence of thirty-three gods, who rule over earth, air and water, eleven to each region; and in another hymn the poet in his ecstasy exclaims that the number is three thousand, three hundred and thirty-nine. Through this polytheistic darkness there are however gleams of light as of one superior being, the *Aditi*, the infinite, ruling over all; and a high native authority asserts "that all the gods of the Rig-Veda are but parts of one *atman* or soul, subservient to the diversification of his praises, through the immensity and variety of his attributes." The prayers and offerings to the Vedic gods are chiefly for temporal blessings. They are of the earth earthy. The burden of the suppliant's prayer is in most cases the same; that his crops and herds and children may prosper, and that all impending evils threatening him may be averted, and turned against his enemies to their destruction. In one or two places the poet makes a confession of wrong doing, and asks forgiveness. Some of the hymns are monotonous, and but for their antiquity would have little interest; but most of them are instructive, and not a few are full of poetic conceptions of the highest merit. The following hymn to *Ushas*, the Dawn, for both sentiment and poetic imagery, is a fair specimen of the best and oldest type of the hymns of the Rig-Veda.