

Karma, or the power in the acts of one birth to determine the condition of future births, was coming to be looked on as the supreme power in life ; and deliverance from these repeated births was coming to be looked on as the great aim of human effort. How to attain this was the problem that was exercising the religious thought of the time. The Brāhmanas taught that it was to be attained by sacrifice, and by worshipping them and the gods ; but others taught that it was to be attained by right life, and specially by renouncing the world and living lives of the severest abstinence and self-denial.

Among those who helped to give practical definiteness to this teaching was Pārswanāth, king of Aswasena. According to tradition, he had lived about two hundred years before the time of which we are writing. He gave up his kingdom, lived a hermit life in the desert or in mountain caves, and took the name of Jina, or conqueror—i.e., conqueror of worldly lusts and ambitions. Large numbers followed him, and were hence called Jainas or Jains.* Much is not known of his teaching. It was from Mahāvīra, who lived two hundred years later, in the seventh century B.C., that the religion took its definite form. He was of the same royal house as Pārswanāth, and became a follower of his ; but in one respect he went beyond his master. Pārswanāth had carried his asceticism so far as to have no covering but a piece of white cloth ; Mahāvīra carried his to the point of dispensing with all covering whatever. He did not, however, carry all his coreligionists with him in this new departure. Hence two sects sprang up among them, the Svetambaras, or “ clothed in white,” and the Digambaras, or “ clothed in space.”†

In the form which Jainism finally assumed these two are considered the last of a series of twenty-four saints, or Jinas, who have at various times appeared on earth. The name usually given to them is Tirthankara. With the exception of the two last they seem to be mythical, though in the myths regarding the first of them, Rikhal Deva, there seem some traces of historical truth.

We shall understand the teaching of Jainism better if we compare it with that of Buddhism, which arose about the same time. According to the dates now generally received, Gautama, from whom Buddhism sprang, was a younger contemporary of Mahāvīra. The Jains claim that he received his teaching from their sage, but of that there is no evidence. It is much more likely that they both worked independently on the thoughts that were then exercising men's minds. What they have in common is the ideas of the age and the instincts of human conscience. In working these out they are wide as the poles asunder. At the same time it is not

* In Sanskrit the modification of the original vowel in a holy being's name by “a” indicates a follower or worshipper. Thus we have *Vaiṣṇava*, a worshipper of *Viṣṇu*; *Saiva*, a worshipper of *Śiva*; *Bauddha*, a follower of *Buddha*; and *Jaina*, a follower of *Jina*.

† This theoretical asceticism is not now, as far as I have been able to observe, carried out by even the religious men of the sect.