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The Religions of India.

BRAHMANISM and BUDDHISM are the oldest and by far the most prevalent forms of religion in the world—including more than one-third of the whole human race. The creed of Brahmanism, if it has a creed, is bound up in the *Vedas* and other sacred writings which have been traced back, to at least a thousand years before the Christian era. This literature is vastly more voluminous than the Bible; so much so, it is said, that the most learned Brahman can hardly have read more than a fiftieth part of it. From earliest times the Hindoos have been divided into four “castes” or classes, the distinction between which, is still rigidly preserved, and presents one of the most formidable barriers to national enlightenment. (1) The *Brahmins*, or hishest class, who claim to have sprung from the mouth of Brahm—the reputed creator of all things. (2) The *Kshatriyas*, or soldiers, who came from his breast. (3) The *Vaisyas*, or merchant caste, from his loins. (4) The *Sudras*, or labouring caste, from his feet. The Brahmins are the priests, who are held in special reverence and are alone entitled to read the sacred books, and who are themselves worshipped as gods. There is no getting rid of the tyranny of caste. Every individual must remain in

the caste in which he was born—if that of a soldier, a soldier he must be—if that of a sudra, he and his posterity must be, forever, employed in the most mental occupations. There is neither scope for ambition nor possibility of promotion.

The Theology of Brahmanism is complex vague, and indefinite, resolving itself into a hazy abstraction, a dim belief in a Supreme Being—*Brahm*, who is conceived if as a divinity asleep, and too distant to be worshipped. “The souls of men are emanations of Brahm, and are as sparks from his central fire, separated for a time, to be absorbed at last in Brahm.” As Brahm can neither be seen nor moved by worship, homage is paid to the works of his hands—trees, rivers, mountains, wild beasts, cattle, and creeping things; any piece of rock daubed with red paint will do. In this way there are said to be 350 millions of divinities, all representatives of the one Brahm. The Brahman believes in the transmigration of souls, that when he dies he will be born again in the body of some other man or beast or a succession of them. “He who steals the gold of a priest, will be born a thousand times in the form of a spider or of some disgusting reptile. If a man steal meat, he will in the next life become a vulture; if he steal grain, he will become a rat. He who kills a Brahman may, after many years of torture, be born a dog, a boar, or other low animal. A priest who has drunk spirituous liquor will become a worm or insect feeding on filth, and so on.” Prayer is a repetition of portions of the *Vedas*. The more that is retained in memory, the fuller the absolution. “Salvation” is to lose all sense of personality.