

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 Bible over modern Europe. The leading incidents and scenes are familiar to the Hindoos from childhood. They are frequently represented at village festivals, whilst the stories are chanted about at almost every social gathering, and indeed form the leading topic of conversation amongst Hindoos generally, and especially amongst those who have passed the meridian of life. In a word, these poems are to the Hindoos 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 *Mahā Bhārata* or *Rāmāyana*, will insure prosperity in this world and eternal happiness hereafter. Now, making every allowance for (what appears to me to be) the exaggerated terms in which Mr. Wheeler describes the comparative influence of the Bible and these 'Scriptures,' there can be no doubt that, as far as India is concerned, he is correct.

"This religion, as embodied in its Sacred Books, affords the widest scope for the indulgence of every phase of human thought, sentiment, and passion ; furnishing as it does in the Vedic hymns and poetry an atmosphere so rare, and presenting such shadowy heights of speculation, as to tempt the most ambitious wing to put forth its powers to gain their summits ; and furnishing in the *Puranas* the vilest mire, where the filthiest and most obscene may wallow. Among its disciples, the dreamy ascetic, labouring to emancipate his spirit by pure meditation and the destruction of the material flesh, and the profound scholar, rare though he be, nourishing his intellectual life by the abstract themes and endless speculative questions suggested by his creed, may meet with the disgusting faqeer or yogi, with the ignorant millions who care for nothing but a round of dead superstitious observances, or with the cunning or depraved crew who indulge in the vilest practices as the natural results of their heathen principles.

"Lastly, it is in its social aspects, as already hinted, that Brahmanism manifests its intense, comprehensive, and tyrannous power. Its system of caste presents to us a feature in the organization of human beings unparalleled in history. It must not be mistaken for a mere aristocratic arrangement, as accidental to or lying outside of Brahmanism, but it is an essential element of its very being. It is quite true, as I have said, and the fact is of importance, that the Vedas know nothing of it ; but then the people know not the Vedas, and those who do conceal or pervert their teaching. According to the existing and, as long as Brahmanism lives, unalterable belief of the people, the streams of caste, flowing side by side but never mingling, are traced up to the very fountain of Deity ; or, to change the simile, each great caste is believed to be a development of the very body of Brahma the Creator, and is mystically united to him as parts of his very flesh and bones. Hence no one can become a Hindoo in religion who is not one by birth ; nor can any member belonging to this divine body break his caste without therefore becoming dead, as a limb amputated from living communion with the source of life, and therefor be thrown away as a carcase, a reproach—a polluted, horrible thing, to be hated and disowned. Marvellous, indeed, are the power and endurance of such an organization as this, that can dominate over all those political and social changes which, in other respects alter the relative position of its possessors as to wealth or rank, whether in the army or in the civil service.

"But Brahmanism does more than make each man a member of this compact mass. Having fixed him there, it holds him fast, and governs him as a mere thing in which no personality, and consequently no will, is recognised, save that measure which is required to consent to the destruction of his being, or its subordination, at least, to a system of mechanical rules that fashion his whole inward and outward life. As far almost as it is possible to conceive, that life is in everything and every day the obedient slave of 'religion ;' not, of course, in the sense which we attach to the expression—that of all things being done, endured, or enjoyed in a right spirit, or according to the rule of eternal righteousness towards God and man—but according to fixed authoritative rules, professing to embrace the whole life, obedience to which is as mechanical as can be yielded by a human being. For to the religious Hindoo all that is to be believed and done on earth is revealed, and as such is obligatory. All the arts and sciences ; the methods of every trade ; the manifold duties incumbent on the architect, the mason, the carpenter, or the musician, and on the member of the family or community—what ought to be done upon ordinary days and on holy days ; in youth, in manhood, and in old age ; in health and sickness, and in the hour of