

ple that centuries before had attained the zenith and glory of their power, and who even when Elizabeth was sitting upon England's throne still revelled in a splendour, unparalleled by the West. Would the greeting have been different, had there passed in review before these European and Indian brothers a panorama of that life their fathers had lived together, thousands of years before, under the same sky, speaking the same tongue, now as much disguised in Bengali and English as the very persons of the fair and dark-skinned strangers? The object of this paper is to present briefly some interesting facts relative to the early literature of this people, their customs, religion and systems of philosophy.

#### I. THE VEDIC LITERATURE.

The Vedas are not only the earliest extant writings of the Indians, but are probably the most ancient literary records of our race. The word *veda* itself denotes "knowledge," from the root *vid*, "see," apparent in *εἶδος* (epic, *ἔ-Ἔιδ-ov*); *vid-vo*, *e-vid-ent*, etc. This meaning was specialized by the Indians, and to them it signified, *κατ' ἑξοχήν*, "divine knowledge," "the holy writings." Sāyana, the great native expositor of the Veda, explains its object thus:—"The Veda is that book which teaches one the way to obtain what he wishes, and to avoid that which he wishes not." Another says:—"The Veda consists of decrees of the highest authority, which do not proceed from men." According to the Indian views of later times the Veda in its entirety is a revelation of Brahma's; the orthodox view was and is that the whole Veda is an emanation standing in connection with the world's creation, and that it is free from all defects of human authorship. It was committed, they say, to four scholars for transmission and propagation. No doubt now

exists in the minds of their less prejudiced cousins of the West, that in the Veda we have a lyrical collection, made up of the store of song, "which the Hindus brought with them from their ancient homes on the banks of the Indus, and which they had there used for invoking prosperity on themselves and their flocks, in their adoration of the dawn, in celebration of the god who wields the lightning and the power of darkness, and in rendering thanks to the heavenly beings for preservation in battle."

#### 2. THE PEOPLE OF THE VEDIC PERIOD AND THEIR CULTURE.\*

Before proceeding to speak of the hymns of the Rigveda, some information respecting the people and customs of that primitive time ought first be added. We are mainly indebted to the Sanskrit for the indisputable proof of the fact that the forefathers of the Indians and Iranians and the Greeks, of Slaves and Lithuanians and Germans, of Italians and Kelts, in the distant ages of the past, spoke but one language, had as one people a common habitation, wherever that may have been, whether on the central plateau of Asia, as earlier writers thought, or in northern Europe, as later investigators have attempted to prove. We do not know the words of this original language from any extant records, but by comparisons these may in many instances be inferred. Nor do we know the date of the dispersion of this primal people; and the degrees of relationship that exists between the differ-

\* This subject is more fully treated in Kaegi's most interesting summary of Heinrich Zimmer's work, "Altindisches Leben," a brief review of which is given here. Students of theology, philology and history, as well as those entering upon the special study of Vedic literature, could not do better than read the admirable work of Adolf Keagi, entitled, "Der Rigveda, die älteste Literatur der Inder," Leipzig, 1881.