

Hardly any thing in Hinduism is more pernicious than the system of caste. The Brahmans were formed from the mouth of the deity, to expand his will; the Kshetriyas from his arms, to defend the Brahmans, the Vaishyas and Sudras from his body and feet, to provide for and serve the Brahmans—the whole doctrine being so framed as to exalt the priestly class immeasurably above all the others. Accordingly, Brahmans are held in the highest honor, are employed in all the functions of religion, are entitled to exact large fees from the lower classes for their spiritual services, and according to native laws are in a great measure exempt from punishment for crimes. The four leading divisions of caste have become variously subdivided, so that now almost every occupation in life belongs to a separate class of people, who neither eat together nor intermarry. To violate any of the rules of caste, is to forfeit one's standing, and in most cases one's means of subsistence. This system interposes a formidable barrier, therefore, in the way of the spread of the gospel. A Brahman and a Sudra to meet together at a meal, according to Hindu notions of caste, is an impossibility. But no distinctions of this kind can be recognized at the Lord's table, nor are there any hereditary privileged orders in the Church of Christ; the rich and the poor meet together there as brethren. Moreover, caste is a serious hindrance to the temporal improvement of the natives, forbidding them to adopt superior methods of agriculture or mechanical employment. In this respect, the severity of the system will eventually hasten its overthrow; it will be found to conflict with the self-interest of men of all classes;

Our limits will not permit us to describe the temples, festival-days, pilgrimages to holy places, ascetic religious orders, and other peculiarities of the Hindu religious system. The infidelities, suffering, and frequent loss of life at the worship of some of the principal gods; the sacrifice of widows on the funeral-pile of their husbands, and the destruction of infant children in the Ganges, until those atrocities were prohibited by the British authorities—deeds recommended as highly meritorious by the priests; the continued existence, though now nearly suppressed by the same authorities, of a class of murderers, pursuing their horrible life under the sanction of a goddess;—these things must fill every Christian mind with the deepest pity for those who practise or suffer them in the name of religion. Hinduism may be characterized briefly as a religion which teaches the worship of idols, and which sanctions by its examples the greatest immorality; a religion imposing few restraints on vice or crime, oppressive to the poor, burdensome to the rich, degrading to woman, relentless to the widow, regardless of children, yielding no comfort to the afflicted, and to the dying imparting no hope to heaven.—Such a religion, though its age be reckoned by centuries, and its votaries by hundreds of millions, must yet surely fall. God is merciful. His gospel must be preached to every creature in India!

The greater part of India is now subjected to Great Britain. In this we are constrained to see the hand of a wonderful and wise Providence. To human view, nothing ever occurred in the affairs of men more unlikely to have taken place, than the present relations of these nations. Far apart, differing widely in language, social life, and religion, who could have predicted that the Hindus and the British would ever live under the same government? Looking back to their earlier history, our surprise at this result is increased. Less than two thousand years ago, the inhabitants of the British Isles were a rude, unenlightened, powerless, pagan race; the Hindus were then as now a people of vast numbers, far superior to the Angles and Saxons, the Picts and Celts, in the arts and occupations of civilized life, but equally destitute of divine knowledge. The gospel was introduced into Great Britain by missionaries, and became the means of civilizing and elevating its inhabitants; the virtue inherent in the religion of the Bible is the true secret of Anglo-Saxon progress. The Hindus without the gospel became only more corrupt in morals, less able to oppose foreign invasion, and increasingly prepared to be the subjects of any despotism native, Mogul, or European. See the influence of Christianity, by example and contrast.

Less than four hundred years ago, the Portuguese appeared to be more likely than any other Europeans to gain dominion in the East. They were the first to obtain a foothold in India; they acquired possession of the whole Malabar coast, with settlements on the Coromandel coast and the Bay of Bengal, and made Ceylon tributary to them. They were one of the chief maritime powers of Europe; but they were votaries of Romanism, a religion containing in itself the elements of decay. The connection of the English with India began a century later, and they were then feeling the new energy inspired by having the Bible open and free in their native islands. We have here an example of the power or weakness of nations, as the gospel has taken root amongst them, or has been supplanted by idolatry; Portugal, under the withering influence of the Roman Catholic Church, has steadily declined in political power and importance, until it is hardly reckoned among the nations. We see also God's gracious purpose. It was not his design to transfer the Government of India from Mohammedans to Romanists, equally shutting out the light of the gospel; but He wonderfully overruled the wickedness of man and made the wrath of man to praise him, and thereby opened the door for the missionary of the cross to nearly all parts of the country, from Cape Comorin to the Valley of Cashmere.

The political relations of the British to the Hindus are often the subject of remark and discussion. I shall not enter into this, farther than to state my belief that most of the Hindus themselves greatly prefer their present rulers to any that have preceded them. The native princes and their retainers, who have lost the power of enriching themselves, would no doubt like to see the former state of things restored. Some other

classes may prefer the old régime, but generally the Hindus possess discernment enough to appreciate the advantages of a government in which law reigns, and not the despotic will of the ruler. But what ever opinions may be entertained about the relations of Great Britain and India, the reflecting Christian cannot fail to recognize the hand of the Great Ruler of nations, who is also the adorable head of the Church, in so disposing the events of his providence as to bring this heathen people within reach of the gospel of his grace.

Powerful causes are now at work, which will eventually overturn the huge fabric of idolatry in India. Amongst these, the influence of the government as administered by the British, may be reckoned as of great weight. There has indeed been much to censure in the connection of the government with some of the idol temples, although the origin and nature of this support has been often misunderstood. In some cases, it grew out of the change of rulers,—the British succeeding native rulers, who had set apart public lands or funds for the endowment of certain holy places. They seem to have considered themselves bound to perpetuate these endowments, overlooking the obvious fact, that the State support of any religion must fall or change with the State itself. There is too much reason to fear, however, that the chief motive for continuing to support the native temples was the desire of conciliating the natives, thus doing evil that good might come. But now all this connection of the government with idolatry has ceased, or is about to terminate; and the Brahmans can no longer appeal to the presence of British officials at their religious festivals as the attestation of the government to their divine character. On the other hand, the administration of the government on those common principles of right and equity which prevail in Great Britain and our own country, tends silently but most powerfully to break down some of the earliest points of Hinduism. Brahmans are tried, condemned and punished for crime just as if they were Sudras, the code of Manu to the contrary notwithstanding; the Thugs, are executed for murder, though they have prayed to the goddess Bhavnani for protection, and devoted to her apart of their blood-stained spoils; widows are not permitted to burn themselves to death with the dead bodies of their husbands, and if their sons or other friends are accessory to their cremation, they are punished for their unnatural crime, notwithstanding the glowing praises of the Shastras, so lavishly bestowed on those who on the funeral-pile purchase happiness for themselves and their friends. The Hindus see that the government of the country, a power which they consider to be little less than divine, is arrayed against their religion. Gods and priests and holy devotees all alike give way before this dynasty.

The progress of correct knowledge among the natives of India is also gradually but greatly changing their religious belief. It is only a small number of the Hindus who receive any kind of education. The female sex are excluded by universal usage from learning to read or to write; and most of the laboring classes of men are equally ignorant. Some of the Brahmans, and a few others, have been at school, but have learned little more than the simplest rudiments; while those who desire to become learned men must devote themselves to works full of the idle legends of their gods, or containing metaphysical speculations not less unprofitable, or teaching errors long since exploded in the western world, including many most absurd "causes of things." These writings appear all to possess a sacred character; and works which teach that the earth rests on the back of a tortoise, or which ascribe an eclipse of the sun to an immense monster, who endeavors to devour the orb of day, are held in equal veneration with the histories of the gods or the precepts of the sages. A lesson in a common school geography will prove hostile to many of these sacred dogmas. Indeed, all knowledge that is adapted to emancipate the mind from superstition, will, among the Hindus, tend to overthrow their religion. The youth who are taught correct methods of reasoning, or of weighing evidence, will soon discard the greater part of their sacred writings. The effects of correct knowledge, however, if unaccompanied by Christian truth, is only destructive so far as religion is concerned. Hinduism is perceived to be false, pernicious, and every way oppressive, and may be altogether discarded, while yet the partially enlightened mind fails to perceive the truth of Christianity, may even reject the claims of all revealed and supernatural religion. Precisely this is the state of mind of large numbers of the Hindus who have come under the influence of European knowledge. They deny their own faith, but they equally disown religion itself, and foolishly boast of reason as their sole guide. This is a most serious state of things; and yet the first part of this process must be undergone by the Hindu mind, before the Christian religion can be embraced. The government schools, from which Christianity is excluded,—as indeed every kind of religion must be in a country where the people are not of one mind; the newspaper press; the intercourse of Europeans with the natives; the progress of commerce, steam-boats, railways, and telegraph wires;—all tend directly to undermine the faith of the Hindus in their own system. They do not impart, however, any knowledge of Christian truth. It would not be surprising if these causes should lead to an entire abandonment of Hinduism—nay, such a result is inevitable; and to this extent, these agencies are doing an important work for the Church and the missionary. They prepare the way for the Bible and the Christian teacher. But at the same time, the Bible and the missionary are indispensable, in order to save the Hindus from infidelity. They are indispensable also to direct them unto the Lamb of God that taketh away the sins of the world.

The main cause of the overthrow of Hinduism as a religion is, no