

Müller is, of course, the principal, and most reliable authority, but there exist other, and more 'popular' works on the subject. First among these may be mentioned volume Forty-one in the admirable "Story of the Nations" series; "Vedic India," by Ragozin. Articles dealing with Brahmanism, Buddhism, with the Aryan race may be found in various volumes of the *Encyclopædia Britannica*; but, for our present purpose, it must suffice to give, briefly, some few of the principal and most interesting facts. It is to be hoped that, here and there, there may be found those who may thereby be induced to study this fascinating subject for themselves.

One further word may be added, by way of preface, namely, that the choice of "Great Poems" must, in many instances, be, of necessity, purely arbitrary, a matter, in short, of personal taste. Those chosen here, if I may say so, can hardly be objected to on such a score, least of all, that marvellous collection with which we are now to deal.

Asia, one may say, is, pre-eminently, the home of religion and philosophy. All the forms of religion which have influenced the history of man, Vedantic, Hebrew, Christian, Mahometan, have had their origin in the East. The *Rig Veda*, our special subject, is a collection of sacred texts, 1028 in number, "The oldest book of the Aryan family of nations," the date of which "cannot have been later than 1000 B. C., while it was probably much earlier."¹ According to a writer in the *Encyclopædia Britannica*,² "The earliest event in Hindu chronology which has any pretence to be called historical is the war of the Mâhâbhârat. The account of this is contained in a poem written about 500 B. C.; which is one of the Vedas," but events therein referred to are supposed to have occurred in 1400 B. C. "The Vedas," the same writer continues, "are a collection of hymns and sacred poems containing the religious doctrines of the Aryans at that remote period, and embodying the earliest system of philosophy which we possess."

This collection of texts, hymns, prayers, and ritual, known as *Veda*, "knowledge," or *Sruti*, "revelation," has come to be re-

¹ Vedic India, p. 114.

² Vol. 2, p. 698a.