

OUR CONTRIBUTORS.

SEVEN YEARS IN THE INDIAN MISSION FIELD

(Continued.)

I have been asked again and again since my return home to state what our chief difficulties are which we meet in practical work upon the field. I shall endeavour to explain. The Brahmin platform is a wide one, and embraces nearly every shade of religious thought. This field must be grasped, catalogued, and mastered before we enter the lists with our keen-witted antagonists with any reasonable hope of success. We must strive to understand their outlook upon life and death, we must, as it were, lay aside, for the time, our own stereotyped western modes of thought and expression, and, entering the stream, fall in with the current of native mind, which flows at an angle to ours, and once there, use all the power, wisdom, and influence we possess to guide them into the way of peace, and lead them into the quiet haven of rest and calm at the feet of the Master. To be able to recognize this cross current, to understand it, and to bring our teaching, both of living and precept, to bear upon it, means success; but to work on western lines in an eastern land is failure, however earnestly the work may be carried on, or whatever may be the zeal of the labourer.

The Hindu will not suffer dogmatism in any shape, but he may be guided; in our teaching we must illustrate, but the illustrations must be gathered from the surroundings of their daily life in their homes before it tells. They are an intensely proud and conservative people, and we must not expect too much too soon. Here it is that we observe the beautiful adaptation of our Holy Bible to the Oriental mind, its simple, homely teachings are understood and appreciated, and when once this power of adaptation is acquired by the missionary teacher it proves a valuable lever for the pressing home of truth upon the Hindu mind. Of how great a value then is the period of enforced waiting before the language is acquired by the foreign teacher. It is, perhaps, the most thoroughly valuable period of time to an earnest, thoughtful missionary of any year in the field, because it shows him the bases upon which he must build laid bare for his inspection, and the nature of the material upon which he is to expend his best energies, and it gives him time to catch the prevailing drift of mind surrounding him.

I have frequently heard missionaries remark that they never for a moment doubted in their first year that they quite understood the Hindu. That poor, ignorant, heathen man seemed an easy problem. The second year they began to watch and doubt (especially his seeming simplicity), and by the end of the third year they were ready to conclude that he was not to be understood at all. And why? Because the data being given, and common sense, an Englishman argues he can calculate pretty correctly the result, but he finds his answer incorrect in India, although it would have been, most assuredly, the direct third term had the problem been issued for Toronto or London. He has to begin again to find out where his Hindu friend has been all the while, and ends up, most probably, by stamping him as a *perfect enigma*.

But, to return, let us look briefly at a few of the principal systems of religious thought prevailing in the immediate vicinity of our field at Indore, and with which we are obliged to make ourselves conversant as intelligent workers there. Foremost of all stands that most ancient record of religious thought the Indian Vedas. The word Veda signifying *knowledge*; "unwritten," it is said to have issued forth from the self-existent one as "breath from his nostrils" and is the essence and spirit of worship which permeates the intelligence of mankind. The Veda is composed of four books, I. Rig, II. Yagur, III. Sama, IV. Atharva. The Rig Veda is the oldest, and consists of a collection of 1017 hymns of prayer and praise; many of which were composed before the Aryans entered India. The earliest of these seem to have been written about the time of the Israelitish exodus from Egypt, and stretch downward over a period of about 500 years to the reign of King Solomon. I insert one, as a specimen of their style, taken from Samuel Johnson's "Oriental Religions." "My prayers fly to him who is seen of many, as herds to their pastures; fly upwards to win highest good as birds to their nests. Indra, preserver, refuge, leave us not subject to the evil disposed; let not the secret guilt of men harm us;

be with us when afar, be with us when nigh; so supported we shall not fear. We have no other friend but thee, no other happiness, no other father. There is none like thee in heaven or earth, O mighty one. Give us understanding as a father his sons; let not the wicked tread us down. Thine we are, we who go on our way upheld by thee. Thou whose ears hear all things, keep near thee this my hymn.

"Agni, guardian of the dwelling, observer of truth, remover of diseases, ever watchful, and provident for us, life-giver, as everlasting beams dwell in the sun so all treasures are in thee, their king. Men find thee who sing the words made in their hearts. Day after day we approach thee with reverence; take us into thy protection as a father his son; be ever present for good. Break not the covenant with our fathers. Decay threatens the body like a cloud; from this ill be my guardian. Thou art like a trough of water in the desert to the man who longs for thee. O, Agni, in thy friendship I am at home."

This Rig Veda is divided into three parts. (1) The Mantras or hymns; (2) the Brahmanas or priestly ritual; (3) the Repanishads or doctrines of faith and practice. This Veda has the gods only for its deities.

The second, or Yagur Veda, is divided into two parts, the Puranas and the Santras. This book was written at a time when discussion ran high as to which person of the Hindu triad was the greatest. At first they had been considered as one essence in three manifestations; when the doctrine of the incarnation was received the deified heroes were said to be incarnations of Vishnu. Jealousies arose, and Siva's followers claimed also incarnation for their chesodenty, and the eighteen Puranas were written, shewing the exaltation of first one god and then another with the supreme, and the Santras give prominence to the female essence of the godhead in the deified wives of the heroes. It is said that at first god existed alone, but in this state suffered greatly from ennui. He desired companionship, so fixed his mind firmly in meditation and fell in two. When he awoke to consciousness he found the other part, or the left half, of him had become a woman. She, Santra, is, therefore, termed left-hand worship, which is very licentious and degrading in its ceremonial. Mystical feasts were instituted and carried on in secret by this sect, and at their assemblies for worship, distinctions, both of sex and caste were laid aside, and mystical and superstitious rites were practised. Santra worship still exists, though in a somewhat modified form, in Central India.

The third, or Sama Veda, contains the ritual with select hymns from the Rig Veda arranged for worship. It deals with the spirits of departed ancestors and is, therefore, considered impure from its association with death, and the period of mourning when it is constantly quoted and referred to. The ceremonial at the funeral pile is somewhat curious. A burning ghât was close by my house at Indore, so I had ample opportunity to observe. A long narrow heap of wood and manure is arranged together and the body is borne to the spot by paid bearers upon a rude litter. The body, after the removal of most of the garments, is laid upon the heap and the fire is lighted by the nearest of kin. After the body has been consumed the charred bones are gathered together and thrown into a stream of running water. The ashes are then collected in a circle and covered with a flat cake of dried manure. Next a drain is made round the outside of the ashes and filled with the urine of the sacred bull. Upon this cake of manure is then piled five balls of sweetmeats, composed of sugar mixed with seeds (very like our canary seed); upon these five balls is piled a heap of boiled rice, in the shape of a pyramid, and on the very summit is perched a little ball of butter mixed with brown sugar. Water from one of the sacred rivers is then sprinkled over it all. The nearest relative then takes upon his shoulder an earthen water jar (of the material of our own common flower-pots) full of water, and starting from the north side makes a circuit of the ashes. The next near relative then, with a sharp piece of stone or a knife, makes an incision, and the water spouts out. Three times he rushes round the circle, then dashes down the jar so that the remaining water sprinkles the pyramid. Milk is next carried round in a brass vessel; at the end of the first circuit a libation is poured out upon a banana leaf; three times round, and the rest is poured out upon the pyramid. This pile of rice, etc., is then given as a feast to the crows, and the ceremony of cremation is ended. Offerings are now made to the spirit of the departed relative for a period of ten days after death. None but kindred

can perform funeral rites, hence the great aversion of Hindus to leaving their villages or the place where they were born, lest they should die among strangers. They believe the soul goes out of the "gross body" into an intermediate state, with an intermediate body, capable of suffering pain or enjoying pleasure. This is the *ghost*, and it is in size equal to the thumb of the deceased. The food, with the libations of milk and water, supplied it at the time of cremation furnishes it with the bases of its new body, whatever that may be. First its limbs begin to grow, next hands and feet, and so on until the tenth day's offering gives the head; and the ghost, which, during the process of growth, was a devil, now completed, becomes a deva or god. It is much dreaded during the time of its development, being apt to bring ill-luck to those who are careless, or disregard its necessities. It reposes in trees during the night and will not brook interference with the place of its retreat. Natives always sing very loudly in going along roads where there are trees, when it is dark, to keep themselves from being frightened, and to this the ghost does not object, but it is said to be exceedingly perilous to *strike* a tree after nightfall as it will assuredly be swiftly avenged. On the eleventh day, or the one on which it becomes a deva, they again offer balls of rice, holy water, etc., with marigold flowers and scented grass. Texts selected from the Veda are repeated, the ceremony being conducted by a Brahmin, not necessarily at the place of cremation, but in some sacred spot chosen by the friends of the deceased.

Time passed on and the Veda began to be subjected to free criticism, and its power questioned by prominent Hindu free-thinkers, who, while expressing great veneration for the Veda, yet ventured to dispute its authenticity, and three grand religio-philosophic schools were formed, the Sankhya, Nyaya and Vedanta. Each of these split into two, thus making six, and it is interesting to notice the curious anticipations of modern metaphysics which they disclose, such as the belief in the eternity of matter, the atomic and development theories, etc., etc. Such is the fourth or Atharva Veda.

On this period of the history of religious thought (viz., about 500 B.C.) on all its confusion and struggling, arose the great reform of Buddha, the Protestantism of India, as it has been called, which after becoming the State religion, wielded a tremendous influence down to the days of the Arab invasion.

Buddha was the son of a petty prince, whose kingdom lay beneath the shadow of the Himalayas, near the present state of Nepaul. He grew tired of the adulation and chicanery of court life and hence retired from it that he might devote himself to religion. He sat at the feet of the most saintly of the priesthood, but he soon noticed the corruption of the Brahminical system, and the oppression of caste, and the utter down-treading of the humbler ranks of the people. He then forsook his spiritual guides and retired for meditation to Gâyâ, in Berar, where, sitting under a peepal tree, he is said to have arrived at *knowledge*, or Buddhahood. This tree has ever since been considered sacred. He now took his way to the holy city of Benares, whence he made his advent. Preaching amidst much opposition and often great personal danger, *not religion*, but duty, morality, and benevolence, without the necessity of a personal deity, priest, or prayer. He preached that every one suffers in his own body the consequences of his own sins, therefore an atonement is unnecessary, as what is not endured in this life must be in some other, and in the one hundred and thirty-six hells designed for man's purification and final annihilation. Transmigration is emphasized, therefore no animal must suffer, but receive medical treatment if diseased or infirm. All action leads to repeated existence, so that the great object of a true Buddhist is to attain by penance, austerities, and suppression of action, the state of non-existence. They acknowledge no god, have no prayer and no creed. Their confession of faith may be said to be, "I place my trust in enlightenment, the law, and the teacher." These three constitute the Buddhist triad.

They have periodical synods or conferences of the teachers; these were frequent during the life of Buddha, but the three greatest occurred after his death. These were especially called to settle the canon of scripture called the Tripitka, or the three baskets. The first basket contained the sermons of Buddha, as remembered and collected by his disciples after his death; the second shews forth the duties of the laity; the