

BRAHMANISM.

The following is part of an article written by a correspondent of the Philadelphia Presbyterian, who appears to be well acquainted with the subject.

Caste is the grand, all-dominating institution of India. It is the corner stone of Brahmanism, the sole prop of the aristocracy—the Brahmins; the grand engine of oppression; the bar to all social advancement among the lower classes; and the means by which the dominant race have maintained both their power and purity of blood for nearly three thousand years. Dr. Duff, at a recent meeting in Calcutta, spoke of this singular institution in these strong and eloquent terms:

"Caste has, like a cedar, struck its roots deep into every crevice of the soil of Hindu nature—wound itself, like the ivy, round every stem and branch of Hindu intellect—and tinged, as with a scarlet dye, every feeling and emotion of the Hindu heart. It reaches to the unborn child—it directs the nursing of the infant. It shapes the training of youth—it regulates the actions of manhood—it settles the attributes of old age—it enters into and modifies every relationship of life—it moulds and gives complexion to every department of society. Food, and raiment, and exercise, and the very functions of nature, must obey its sovereign voice. With every personal habit, every domestic usage, every social custom, it is inseparably interwoven. From the cradle to the funeral pile it sits like a presiding genius at the helm, guiding, directing, and determining every movement of the inner and outer man. Beyond the ashes of the funeral pile, it follows the disembodied spirit to 'the world of shades,' and fixes its destiny there."

And yet this all controlling law forms no part of the teachings of the Vedas. It grew by degrees out of the peculiar structure of Indian society, which, having been formed by the influx of one manner of people upon the top of another—the last come dominating over their predecessors, to be in turn subdued by others—the Khonds, the Koles, and the Sourahs, yielding to the sway of the Tamal, Telinga, and Karnatic nations, and they subsequently to the Aryan nations (the Brahmins of the present day); and the Aryans, after a rule of fifteen to eighteen hundred years, yielding political supremacy to the Moslems. Finally, they and all the rest were conquered and ruled by a British Company of Merchants, and now that Company has succumbed to the British Crown.

We have said that caste forms no part of the religious teachings of the Vedas, the first and most sacred of the Brahmanical scriptures. For many years it was but a social custom, as above stated, but during the long period through which the Aryan race ruled with undisputed sway over the vast population of inferior races, caste was enacted into a law, embodied in the code of Manu, and thus fixed, with inflexible rigidity, the Brahmins in their position as the aristocratic or ruling class, and all the inferior races in their relative social stations. There they have for ages remained, divided by horizontal lines which may not be passed, on pain of ruin in the present world and perdition in the future. Some writers have said that the caste forms no part of the religion of the people of India; but this is a mistake. The error is founded upon the fact that it is not to be found in the Vedas. In this respect it is like many of the dogmas and observances of the Roman Catholic Church, for which no warrant can be found in the Bible. It is, and for ages has been, a part and parcel of Brahmanism as a religious system, and is its main stay, its all-potent engine, its most distinguishing characteristic.

Brahmanism, in its long history of India, has undergone great changes, as one form after another of the ancient idolatries of India have been engrafted upon it. The Sanscrit, in which its original teachings are only found, is a dead language. The Brahmins of the present day pretend to understand it, but their knowledge is vague and uncertain. Let one man look into the Vedas for light upon the subject of this ancient form of religion, and another into the Shasters, and their reports will be so different as to have little or nothing in common. Mr. Statbam, in his Indian Recollections, says:—"The idea which the Shasters give of God is that there is one Supreme Being whom they style Bogshon, or Escher, sometimes Khodah. Proceeding from him are three powers or deities, namely, Brahman, the Creator of all; Vishnu, the preserver of all; and Seeb, or Seva, the destroyer of all." This, probably, is a correct statement of the teachings of the Shasters, those latter and more voluminous scriptures of Brahmanism. Subordinate, or at least inferior to those three gods, there are hundreds of millions of gods, of whose characters and attributes nothing definite is taught. We now go back nearly three thousand years.

In the great elevated regions of Central Asia there existed a nation, or a confederation of cognate nations or tribes, known by the general appellation of Aryans. Of their history prior to their migration to India, through the passes of the Himalayan range, nothing is known. They were an energetic race, and had a literature resembling that of Greece in the days of Homer. Their language—the Sanscrit—was rich and expressive, and their higher thoughts were invariably expressed in poetry. Their teachers seem to have been philosophers and poets, rather than priests; and the Vedas, the sacred books of Brahmanism, are made up of poems or hymns, composed from time to time by priests, holy men, or pines. I cannot discover that any of these men claimed inspiration, or that they were the mediums of revelation direct from heaven; but on the other hand, they appear to have given the rein to a bold imagination, and indulged in purely abstract speculations as to the nature of the creation and the first cause. Take, for example, this translation by Colebrook of one of the earliest of a Vedic bard, on that profound past before anything was created.

"Then there was no entity, nor non-entity;  
No world, nor sky, nor nothing above it;  
Nothing any where....  
Death was not.  
Nor then was immortality;  
Nor distinction of day or night;  
But THAT breathed without afflation....  
Who knows, and shall declare whence and why  
this creation took place?  
The gods are subsequent to the production of  
this world;  
Who then can know whence it proceeded,  
Or whence this varied world arose?  
He who in the highest heaven is Ruler knows  
indeed;  
But not another can possess that knowledge."

Another translation gives the concluding words differently—thus:

"He from whom all this great creation came,  
Whether his will created or was mute,  
The Most High Seer, that is in highest heaven,  
He knows it—or perchance even He knows not."

How vividly does this passage set before us a strong mind groping in absolute darkness! Yet upon such blind guesses at truth has a great system of faith been founded; and these wild speculations were at length received and imposed upon the consciences of unnumbered millions as unerring verity.

We sometimes hear atheists talk of an "all pervading principle"—an impersonal something, which they choose to substitute for that great Being whose existence they would gladly ignore, and to which imaginary "principle" they attribute phenomena of order and life. The authors of the Vedas taught similar doctrine. Their impersonal deity, or principle, was to them a thing, or rather a being. They called it *Brahm*, or Thought. To apply to it the personal pronoun *he* they deemed to be wrong.—They called it *That*. Colebrooke in his translation of the Vedic hymns, gives one in the following words:

"Fire is that; the sun is that;  
The air, the moon, such too, is that pure *Brahm*  
He, prior to whom nothing was born,  
And who became all beings....  
To what God should we offer oblations,  
But to him who made the fluid sky and solid  
earth;  
Who fixed the solar orb....and framed the  
drops of rain?  
To what God should we offer oblations,  
But to him whom heaven and earth mutually  
contemplate?  
The wise man views that mysterious Being  
In whom the universe perpetually exists,  
Resting upon that sole support.  
In him is this world absorbed;  
From him it is—nes;  
In creatures is he twined and wove, in various  
forms of being.  
Let the wise man, conversant with holy writ,  
Promptly celebrate that immortal Being,  
The mysteriously existing and various abode."

Here the translator has used the personal pronoun, because in the English language he could not avoid doing so; but the two first lines give the key to all that follows. As these dreamy, philosophical abstractions became in time the basis of a creed, it became necessary to expand it, and give to it more definiteness and substance. Subsequent teachers, therefore, held that from this impersonal *Brahm* sprang a personal Creator, whom they called *Bramha*, by whom all things were created; and subsequently *Vishnu* and *Seva*, or *Siva*; and thus a few vague dreams of Aryan philosophers and poets became the grand-work of one of the most vast and enduring forms of idolatry that ever was known. Six hundred years before Christ, Brahmanism had grown from the philosophic transcendentalism which we find embodied in the Vedic hymns, into an overshadowing hierarchy of the grossest idolatry, but still intertwined with its original mysticism and poetic lore. Then it was that the great schism, which resulted in the establishment of Buddhism, took place. Two hundred and seventy years later Alexander the Great penetrated to the Indus, and found all the features of Brahmanism as they exist at this day. About A. D. 1000 the Mohammedan invasion and conquest took place; but that made little impression upon this hoary system, entrenched as it was, and still is, behind the iron law of caste. Seven hundred years later the East India Company conquered the country, and put an end to the Moslem sway; but within the last two years Brahmanism and caste have conquered them.

The overthrow of that mighty system of darkness can only be effected by the power of him who is seated "upon the white horse," who is "called Faithful and True;" whose "eyes are as a flame of fire, and on his head many crowns."

"He will not fail nor be discouraged until he set judgment in the earth, and in his name shall the Gentiles trust" It is his commission "to proclaim deliverance to the captive, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound."