

But we must not further curtail our space, for our subject is, at the best, sufficiently unmanageable within the narrow limits assigned us. We have to do not with a loose superstition floating in the traditions of a rude people, but with a complicated and cumbrous system contained in records, for a single perusal of which a lifetime would not suffice. A glance at the nature and extent of these records will throw light upon the subject itself.

The Sanscrit, in which the sacred books of the Brahmans are contained, was once the mother tongue of nations that dwell on the banks of the Ganges; but it is no longer a living language. In the exaggerated panegyrics of the east, it is styled "the language of the celestials;" and even the most prosaic of European critics acknowledged it to be one of the richest, most harmonious, and refined in the world. As already hinted, these scriptures are prodigiously voluminous. They contain not merely a revelation of gods who number hundreds of millions; an account of the production of the universe, stretching over millions of years; and a ritual of worship and rule of life, descending to a thousand trifles; but they present a pretended history, stretching over millions of years; and relating the adventures of heroes who flourished thousands of ages before the Mosaic chronology begins; a code of laws which prescribes with minuteness every act of every individual in every imaginable variety of circumstances; a body of literature in which are included poems a hundred-fold longer than the *Eneid* of Virgil; and not merely the elements of all sciences, but a revealed application of the principles of science and art, going down to details of infinitesimal minuteness. These writings, collectively styled, the "Great Shastres," are of various degrees of sacredness and authority. They are divided into four classes:—  
1. *The four Vedas*—the fountain-head of the whole system. They occupy eleven huge folio volumes; and are said to have come along with the first man from the mouth of Brahma. 2. *The Upa Vedas*, which were delivered to mankind by the gods, and which treat of medicine, music, architecture, and the mechanical arts. 3. *The Ved-Angus*, written by inspired saints, and which treat of astronomy, grammar, and religious rites and incantations. 4. *The Up-Angus*, containing the pauranas, a series of sacred poems, treatises on logic and metaphysics.

These scriptures cannot come directly into contact with the public mind to any great extent; yet indirectly they lay a constraining grasp upon every action, and almost every thought. The graver portions of them are recited in the discourses of the priests. Those which relate to the direction of life, and the ceremonies of religion, are taught practically to children, from their earliest years. And the monstrous fables which compose their litera-

ture, furnish to the grown children of Brahma an entertainment similar to that which the childhood of other lands derive from the "History of Jack-the-Giant-killer." Amongst the scenes which strike a stranger in India, are the groups of swarthy natives gathered of an evening around one of the most instructed of their number, as he reads or recites one of the sacred poems which account the lewd, cruel, or foolish, exploits of the gods they worship. Whatever of more elevated thought there may appear about the system to the masses of the people, it is only a soul and degrading idolatry.

The difficulty of conveying a correct impression of Hinduism within a brief compass will be perceived. All that can be attempted in this sketch is an outline of the theory of God and the universe, which forms the basis of it, and of the doctrines which give character to the whole. Those who are familiar with it only as a system of idolatry, in which objects of worship are multiplied without end, will be surprised to learn that at the foundation of the whole lies the belief in a universal self-existing spirit, the fountain of all other existences. Such is the fact—not that the Hindu recognises the one living and true God, as the object of love and worship—but the practical atheism of the human heart strengthens itself in the speculative acknowledgment of a First Cause which retains no continued oversight of the universe. This principle, known by the appellation BRAHM, (not Brahma, of whom we shall afterwards speak,) is revealed as the self-existent One, not only as excluding the idea of any other God; but also as excluding the possibility of any other existence. His, or rather, its primary state, is one of utter inaction and unconsciousness, with the absence of all qualities or attributes. After the lapse of ages upon ages, this one spirit is described as awaking to consciousness, and breaking the universal silence by the utterance, "Brahm is." He is now represented as endowed with some of the physical attributes of Deity; but even in that state of periodical energy, there is not found the slightest trace of any moral quality. It is merely a power which may serve as a First Cause to account for the existence of universe. Immediately on awaking to consciousness, this being was dissatisfied with solitude; and the desire of an external object of contemplation led him to imagine a model of the universe, which was ultimately realised by a process we shall describe. This process is not a creation; but a slow course of production which Brahm, by a volition, originated, and then sunk into the dreamless repose of his primary state. Such a being cannot be an object of love or fear. Such a belief can have no influence on the heart and life. It is not surprising therefore that while the Hindu acknowledges "one Brahm without a second," there is not, in a land where the monuments of superstition elbow one another, a single altar to his worship, or a temple to his honour.

It may be asked, "And is this the highest conception of God, which thousands of cultivated minds, laboriously applied for three thousand years, have been able to reach?" Such an enquiry, we apprehend, puts the case too favourably for human nature. It is not a conception to which they have inquiringly ascended. It is a darkening of truth,

to which they have impiously succeeded. They did not like to retain the knowledge of God in his holiness, as the heart-searching witness, the righteous ruler, the inflexible judge. They stripped their conception of Him of all moral attributes; but that was not enough—a guilty conscience could not rest till they had persuaded themselves that the eye, all-seeing, though unseen, was closed in the depths of an unperturbable slumber. That which in this system God-hating man has done, God-hating man every where is trying to do. Brahm is the proud speculation of modern rationalism full blown. Brahmanism exhibits throughout, the ripe fruits of our highest philosophy in this 19th century. A faithful examination of the tendencies of that philosophy, and of the results in that mythology, would leave a settled conviction, that if the obstacle of a despised faith were removed, this world's wisdom would at once be in full career towards that darkening of the foolish mind which changes the incorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man. Pantheism which now glorifies itself as rational, would soon erect its altars on all high places; and those who now complement themselves as priests of nature, would find successors in legitimate descent, who would dip their hands in the blood of slain beasts before the grim image of embodied lusts.

The universe is the ultimate result of a volition of Brahm, but the simple majesty of a creative fiat, is not to be looked for among the gross conceptions of the Vedas. In fact, according to the Brahmans, creation in the proper sense, is impossible. From nothing comes nothing, is an unvariable maxim of their system. There is but one real existence, and that is Brahm; the visible universe is composed of variations in the mode of the divine existence. Spirit is the sole existing essence, the evidence of our senses to the contrary notwithstanding. Upon this fundamental principle a number of theories of the universe as schemes of cosmogony are erected, the chief of which we shall endeavour to exhibit in brief. The first of them will suggest to our readers who are familiar with metaphysical studies, that it would almost seem as though philosophers of the ideal schools had sought surreptitiously to gain a reputation for profound and original speculation, by pilfering the conceits of Brahmanical lore. A wrong for which their followers have endeavoured to atone, by presenting to the Brahmans, "Hume's Essay on Miracles," wherewith to combat the missionaries of the cross. According to this theory the soul of man is a portion of Brahm, deluded into a consciousness of a distinct and individual existence. Its perception of external nature is entirely illusory; nothing material really exists, it only appears to exist in the impressions and ideas of the deluded soul. The expounders of this theory illustrate it by the reflection of the heavens and of surrounding scenery in the unruffled lake; the mirage of the desert, and the image in a camera obscura. These all convey to us the impression of a reality, but we know them to be shadows. Such, say they are the phenomena of an external universe. Mere illusive appearances produced by the operation of a certain divine energy which was separated from Brahm when he relapsed into the unconscious state. Our consci-