ALBERUNI'S INDIA

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CHAPTER I.
ON THE HINDUS IN GENERAL, AS AN INTRODUCTION TO OUR ACCOUNT OF THEM.

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Before entering on our exposition, we must form an adequate idea of that which renders it so particularly difficult to penetrate to the essential nature of any Indian subject. The knowledge of these difficulties will either facilitate the progress of our work, or serve as an apology for any shortcomings of ours. For the reader must always bear in mind that the Hindus entirely differ from us in every respect, many a subject appearing intricate and obscure which would be perfectly clear if there were more connection between us. The barriers which separate Muslims and Hindus rest on different causes.

First, they differ from us in everything which other nations have in common. And here we first mention the language, although the difference of language also exists between other nations. If you want to conquer this difficulty (i.e. to learn Sanskrit), you will not find it easy, because the language is of an enormous range, both in words and inflections, something like the Arabic, calling one and the same thing by various names, both original and derived, and using one and the same word for a variety of subjects, which, in order to be properly understood, must be distinguished from each other by various qualifying epithets. For nobody could distinguish between the various meanings of a word unless he understands the context in which it
occurs, and its relation both to the following and the preceding parts of the sentence. The Hindus, like other people, boast of this enormous range of their language, whilst in reality it is a defect.

Further, the language is divided into a neglected vernacular one, only in use among the common people, and a classical one, only in use among the upper and educated classes, which is much cultivated, and subject to the rules of grammatical inflection and etymology, and to all the niceties of grammar and rhetoric.

Besides, some of the sounds (consonants) of which the language is composed are neither identical with the sounds of Arabic and Persian, nor resemble them in any way. Our tongue and uvula could scarcely manage to correctly pronounce them, nor our ears in hearing to distinguish them from similar sounds, nor could we transiterate them with our characters. It is very difficult, therefore, to express an Indian word in writing, for in order to fix the pronunciation we must change our orthographical points and signs, and must pronounce the case-endings either according to the common Arabic rules or according to special rules adapted for the purpose.

Add to this that the Indian scribes are careless, and do not take pains to produce correct and well-collated copies. In consequence, the highest results of the author's mental development are lost by their negligence, and his book becomes already in the first or second copy so full of faults, that the text appears as something entirely new, which neither a scholar nor one familiar with the subject, whether Hindu or Muslim, could any longer understand. It will sufficiently illustrate the matter if we tell the reader that we have sometimes written down a word from the mouth of Hindus, taking the greatest pains to fix its pronunciation, and that afterwards when we repeated it to them, they had great difficulty in recognising it.

As in other foreign tongues, so also in Sanskrit, two or three consonants may follow each other without an intervening vowel—consonants which in our Persian grammatical system are considered as having a *hidden* vowel. Since most Sanskrit words and names begin with such consonants without vowels, we find it very difficult to pronounce them.

Besides, the scientific books of the Hindus are composed in various favourite metres, by which they intend, considering that the books soon become corrupted by additions and omissions, to preserve them exactly as they are, in order to facilitate their being learned by heart, because they consider as canonical only that which is known by heart, not that which exists in writing. Now it is well known that in all metrical compositions there is much misty and constrained phraseology merely intended to fill up the metre and serving as a kind of patchwork, and this necessitates a certain amount of verbosity. This is also one of the reasons why a word has sometimes one meaning and sometimes another.

From all this it will appear that the metrical form of literary composition is one of the causes which make the study of Sanskrit literature so particularly difficult.

Secondly, they totally differ from us in religion, as we believe in nothing in which they believe, and vice versa. On the whole, there is very little disputing about theological topics among themselves; at the utmost, they fight with words, but they will never stake their soul or body or their property on religious controversy. On the contrary, all their fanaticism is directed against those who do not belong to them—against all foreigners. They call them *mleccha*, i.e., impure, and forbid having any connection with them, be it by intermarriage or any other kind of relationship, or by sitting, eating, and drinking with them, because
by, they think, they would be polluted. They consider as impure anything which touches the fire and the water of a foreigner; and no household can exist without these two elements. Besides, they never desire that a thing which once has been polluted should be purified and thus recovered, as, under ordinary circumstances, if anybody or anything has become unclean, he or it would strive to regain the state of purity. They are not allowed to receive anybody who does not belong to them even if he wished it, or was inclined to their religion. This, too, renders any connection with them quite impossible, and constitutes the widest gulf between us and them.

In the third place, in all manners and usages they differ from us to such a degree as to frighten their children with us, with our dress, and our ways and customs, and as to declare us to be devil's breed, and our doings as the very opposite of all that is good and proper. By the bye, we must confess, in order to be just, that a similar depreciation of foreigners not only prevails among us and the Hindus, but is common to all nations towards each other. I recollect a Hindu who wreaked his vengeance on us for the following reason:—

Some Hindu king had perished at the hand of an enemy of his who had marched against him from our country. After his death there was born a child to him, which succeeded him, by the name of Sagara. On coming of age, the young man asked his mother about his father, and then she told him what had happened. Now he was inflamed with hatred, marched out of his country into the country of the enemy, and plentifully satiated his thirst of vengeance upon them. After having become tired of slaughtering, he compelled the survivors to dress in our dress, which was meant as an ignominious punishment for them. When I heard of it, I felt thankful that he was gracious enough not to compel us to Indianise ourselves and to adopt Hindu dress and manners.

Another circumstance which increased the already existing antagonism between Hindus and foreigners is that the so-called Shumaniyya (Buddhists), though they cordially hate the Brahmins, still are nearer akin to them than to others. In former times, Khurasan, Persia, Irak, Mosul, the country up to the frontier of Syria, was Buddhist, but then Zarathustra went forth from Adharbaijan and preached Magism in Balh (Baktra). His doctrine came into favour with King Gushtasp, and his son Isfendiyad spread the new faith both in east and west, both by force and by treaties. He founded fire-temples through his whole empire, from the frontiers of China to those of the Greek empire. The succeeding kings made their religion (i.e. Zoroastrianism) the obligatory state-religion for Persis and Irak. In consequence, the Buddhists were banished from those countries, and had to emigrate to the countries east of Balh. There are some Magians up to the present time in India, where they are called Maga. From that time dates their aversion towards the countries of Khurasan. But then came Islam; the Persian empire perished, and the repugnance of the Hindus against foreigners increased more and more when the Muslims began to make their inroads into their country; for Muhammad Ibn Elkatim Ibn Elmuhibih entered Sindh from the side of Sijistan (Sakastane) and conquered the cities of Bahmanwâ and Mullaathâmâ, the former of which he called Al-mansûra, the latter Al-mâ'ûra. He entered India proper, and penetrated even as far as Kanauj, marched through the country of Gandhâra, and on his way back, through the confines of Kashmir, sometimes fighting sword in hand, sometimes gaining his ends by treaties, leaving to the people their ancient belief, except in the case of those who wanted to become Muslims. All these events planted a deeply rooted hatred in their hearts.
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Now in the following times no Muslim conqueror passed beyond the frontier of Kabul and the river Sindh until the days of the Turks, when they seized the power in Ghazna under the Sāmānī dynasty, and the supreme power fell to the lot of Nāṣir-uddaula Sabuktāgin. This prince chose the holy war as his calling, and therefore called himself Al-ghdzi (i.e. warring on the road of Allah). In the interest of his successors he constructed, in order to weaken the Indian frontier, those roads on which afterwards his son Yamin-uddaula Mahmūd marched into India during a period of thirty years and more. God be merciful to both father and son! Mahmūd utterly ruined the prosperity of the country, and performed there wonderful exploits, by which the Hindus became like atoms of dust scattered in all directions and like a tale of old in the mouth of the people. Their scattered remains cherish, of course, the most inveterate aversion towards all Muslims. This is the reason why Hindu sciences have retired far away from those parts of the country conquered by us, and have fled to places which our hand cannot yet reach, to Kashmir, Benares, and other places. And the antagonism between them and all foreigners receives more and more nourishment both from political and religious sources.

In the fifth place, there are other causes, the mentioning of which sounds like a satire—peculiarities of their national character, deeply rooted in them, but manifest to everybody. We can only say, folly is an illness for which there is no medicine, and the Hindus believe that there is no country but theirs, no nation like theirs, no kings like theirs, no religion like theirs, no science like theirs. They are haughty, foolishly vain, self-conceited, and stolid. They are by nature niggardly in communicating that which they know, and they take the greatest possible care to withhold it from men of another caste among their own people, still much more, of course from any foreigner. According to their belief, there is no other country on earth but theirs, no other race of man but theirs, and no created beings besides them have any knowledge or science whatsoever. Their haughtiness is such that, if you tell them of any science or scholar in Khurāsān and Persiā, they will think you to be both an ignoramus and a liar. If they travelled and mixed with other nations, they would soon change their mind, for their ancestors were not as narrow-minded as the present generation is. One of their scholars, Varāhamihira, in a passage where he calls on the people to honour the Brahmans, says: "The Greeks, though impure, must be honoured, since they were trained in sciences, and therein excelled others. What, then, are we to say of a Brahman, if he combines purity the height of science?" In former times, the Hindus used to acknowledge that the progress of science due to the Greeks is much more important than that which is due to themselves. But from this passage of Varāhamihira alone you see what a self-lauding man he is, whilst he gives himself airs as doing justice to others. At first I stood to their astronomers in the relation of a pupil to his master, being a stranger among them and not acquainted with their peculiar national and traditional methods of science. On having made some progress, I began to show them the elements on which this science rests, to point out to them some rules of logical deduction and the scientific methods of all mathematics, and then they flocked together round me from all parts, wondering, and most eager to learn from me, asking me at the same time from what Hindu master I had learnt those things, whilst in reality I showed them what they were worth, and thought myself a great deal superior to them, disdaining to be put on a level with them. They almost thought me to be a sorcerer, and when speaking of me to their leading men in their native tongue, they spoke of me as the sea or as...
the water which is so acid that vinegar in comparison is sweet.

Now such is the state of things in India. I have found it very hard to work my way into the subject, although I have a great liking for it, in which respect I stand quite alone in my time, and although I do not spare either trouble or money in collecting Sanskrit books from places where I supposed they were likely to be found, and in procuring for myself, even from very remote places, Hindu scholars who understand them and are able to teach me. What scholar, however, has the same favourable opportunities of studying this subject as I have? That would be only the case with one to whom the grace of God accords, what it did not accord to me, a perfectly free disposal of his own doings and goings; for it has never fallen to my lot in my own doings and goings to be perfectly independent, nor to be invested with sufficient power to dispose and to order as I thought best. However, I thank God for that which he has bestowed upon me, and which must be considered as sufficient for the purpose.

The heathen Greeks, before the rise of Christianity, held much the same opinions as the Hindus; their educated classes thought much the same as those of the Hindus; their common people held the same idolatrous views as those of the Hindus. Therefore I like to confront the theories of the one nation with those of the other simply on account of their close relationship, not in order to correct them. For that which is not the truth (i.e. the true belief or monotheism) does not admit of any correction, and all heathenism, whether Greek or Indian, is in its pith and marrow one and the same belief, because it is only a deviation from the truth. The Greeks, however, had philosophers who, living in their country, discovered and worked out for them the elements of science, not of popular superstition, for it is the object of the upper classes to be guided by the results of science, whilst the common crowd will always be inclined to plunge into wrong-headed wrangling, as long as they are not kept down by fear of punishment. Think of Socrates when he opposed the crowd of his nation as to their idolatry and did not want to call the stars gods! At once eleven of the twelve judges of the Athenians agreed on a sentence of death, and Socrates died faithful to the truth.

The Hindus had no men of this stamp both capable and willing to bring sciences to a classical perfection. Therefore you mostly find that even the so-called scientific theorems of the Hindus are in a state of utter confusion, devoid of any logical order, and in the last instance always mixed up with the silly notions of the crowd, e.g. immense numbers, enormous spaces of time, and all kinds of religious dogmas, which the vulgar belief does not admit of being called into question. Therefore it is a prevailing practice among the Hindus jurare in verba magistri; and I can only compare their mathematical and astronomical literature, as far as I know it, to a mixture of pearl shells and sour dates, or of pearls and dung, or of costly crystals and common pebbles. Both kinds of things are equal in their eyes, since they cannot raise themselves to the methods of a strictly scientific deduction.

In most parts of my work I simply relate without criticizing, unless there be a special reason for doing so. I mention the necessary Sanskrit names and technical terms once where the context of our explanation demands it. If the word is an original one, the meaning of which can be rendered in Arabic, I only use the corresponding Arabic word; if, however, the Sanskrit word be more practical, we keep this, trying to transliterate it as accurately as possible. If the word is a secondary or derived one, but in general use, we also keep it, though there be a corresponding term in Arabic, but before using it we explain its signification.
this way we have tried to facilitate the understanding of the terminology.

Lastly, we observe that we cannot always in our discussions strictly adhere to the geometrical method, only referring to that which precedes and never to that which follows, as we must sometimes introduce in a chapter an unknown factor, the explanation of which can only be given in a later part of the book, God helping us!

CHAPTER II.

ON THE BELIEF OF THE HINDUS IN GOD.

The belief of educated and uneducated people differs in every nation; for the former strive to conceive abstract ideas and to define general principles, whilst the latter do not pass beyond the apprehension of the senses, and are content with derived rules, without caring for details, especially in questions of religion and law, regarding which opinions and interests are divided.

The Hindus believe with regard to God that he is one, eternal, without beginning and end, acting by free-will, almighty, all-wise, living, giving life, ruling, preserving; one who in his sovereignty is unique, beyond all likeness and unlikeness, and that he does not resemble anything nor does anything resemble him. In order to illustrate this we shall produce some extracts from their literature, lest the reader should think that our account is nothing but hearsay.

In the book of Patanjali the pupil asks:

"Who is the worshipped one, by the worship of whom blessing is obtained?"

The master says:

"It is he who, being eternal and unique, does not for his part stand in need of any human action for which he might give as a recompense either a blissful repose, which is hoped and longed for, or a troubled existence, which is feared and dreaded. He is unattainable to thought, being sublime beyond all unlikeness which is abhorrent and all likeness which is sympathetic. He
by his essence knows from all eternity. Knowledge, in
the human sense of the term, has as its object that
which was unknown before, whilst not knowing does
not at any time or in any condition apply to God."

Further the pupil speaks:
"Do you attribute to him other qualities besides
those you have mentioned?"

The master says:
"He is height, absolute in the idea, not in
space, for he is sublime beyond all existence in any space.
He is the pure absolute good, longed for by every created
being. He is the knowledge free from the defilement
of forgetfulness and not-knowing."

The pupil speaks:
"Do you attribute to him speech or not?"

The master says:
"As he knows, he no doubt also speaks."

The pupil asks:
"If he speaks because he knows, what, then, is the
difference between him and the knowing sages who
have spoken of their knowing?"

The master says:
"The difference between them is time, for they have
learned in time and spoken in time, after having been
not-knowing and not-speaking. By speech they have
transferred their knowledge to others. Therefore their
speaking and acquiring knowledge take place in time.
And as divine matters have no connection with time,
God is knowing, speaking from eternity. It was he
who spoke to Brahman, and to others of the first beings
in different ways. On the one he bestowed a book;
for the other he opened a door, a means of communicating
with him; a third one he inspired so that he
obtained by cogitation what God bestowed upon him."

The pupil asks:
"Whence has he this knowing?"

The master answers:

"His knowing is the same from all eternity, for ever
and ever. As he has never been not-knowing, he is
knowing of himself, having never acquired any knowl-
dge which he did not possess before. He speaks in
the Veda which he sent down upon Brahman:
"Praise and celebrate him who has spoken the Veda,
and was before the Veda."

The pupil asks:
"How do you worship him to whom the perception
of the senses cannot attain?"

The master says:
"His name proves his existence, for where there is a
report there must be something to which it refers, and
where there is a name there must be something which
is named. He is hidden to the senses and unperceiv-
able by them. However, the soul perceives him, and
thought comprehends his qualities. This meditation
is identical with worshipping him exclusively, and by
practising it uninterruptedly beatitude is obtained."

In this way the Hindus express themselves in this
very famous book.

The following passage is taken from the book Gita, Quotation
a part of the book Bhāratīya, from the conversation be-
tween Vasudeva and Arjuna:—
"I am the universe, without a beginning by being
born, or without an end by dying. I do not aim by
whatever I do at any recompense. I do not specially
belong to one class of beings to the exclusion of others,
as if I were the friend of one and the enemy of others.
I have given to each one in my creation what is suffi-
cient for him in all his functions. Therefore whoever
knows me in this capacity, and tries to become similar
to me by keeping desire apart from his action, his
fetters will be loosened, and he will easily be saved and
freed."

This passage reminds one of the definition of philo-
sophy as the striving to become as much as possible similar to God.

Further, Vasudeva speaks in the same book:—

"It is desire which causes most men to take refuge with God for their wants. But if you examine their case closely, you will find that they are very far from having an accurate knowledge of him; for God is not apparent to every one, so that he might perceive him with his senses. Therefore they do not know him. Some of them do not pass beyond what their senses perceive; some pass beyond this, but stop at the knowledge of the laws of nature, without learning that above them there is one who did not give birth nor was born, the essence of whose being has not been comprehended by the knowledge of any one, while his knowledge comprehends everything."

The Hindus differ among themselves as to the definition of what is action. Some who make God the source of action consider him as the universal cause; for as the existence of the agents derives from him, he is the cause of their action, and in consequence it is his own action coming into existence through their intermedation. Others do not derive action from God, but from other sources, considering them as the particular causes which in the last instance—according to external observation—produce the action in question.

In the book Sāṇkhya the devotee speaks: "Has there been a difference of opinion about action and the agent, or not?"

The sage speaks: "Some people say that the soul is not alive and the matter not living; that God, who is self-sufficing, is he who unites them and separates them from each other; that therefore in reality he himself is the agent. Action proceeds from him in such a way that he causes both the soul and the matter to move, like as that which is living and powerful moves that which is dead and weak.

"Others say that the union of action and the agent is effected by nature, and that such is the usual process in everything that increases and decreases. Others say the agent is the soul, because in the Veda it is said, `Every being comes from Purusha.' According to others, the agent is time, for the world is tied to time as a sheep is tied to a strong cord, so that its motion depends upon whether the cord is drawn tight or slackened. Still others say that action is nothing but a recompense for something which has been done before.

"All these opinions are wrong. The truth is, that action entirely belongs to matter, for matter binds the soul, causes it to wander about in different shapes, and then sets it free. Therefore matter is the agent, all that belongs to matter helps it to accomplish action. But the soul is not an agent, because it is devoid of the different faculties."

This is what educated people believe about God. They call him Ṛṣāvā, i.e. self-sufficing, beneficent, who gives without receiving. They consider the unity of God as absolute, but that everything beside God which may appear as a unity is really a plurality of things. The existence of God they consider as a real existence, because everything that exists exists through him. It is not impossible to think that the existing beings are not and that he is, but it is impossible to think that he is not and that they are.

If we now pass from the ideas of the educated people among the Hindus to those of the common people, we must first state that they present a great variety. Some of them are simply abominable, but similar errors also occur in other religions. Nay, even in Islam we must decidedly disapprove, e.g. of the anthropomorphic doctrines, the teachings of the Jabriyya sect, the prohibition of the discussion of religious topics, and such like. Every religious sentence destined for the people at large must
be carefully worded, as the following example shows. Some Hindu scholar calls God a point, meaning to say thereby that the qualities of bodies do not apply to him. Now some uneducated man reads this and imagines, God is as small as a point, and he does not find out what the word point in this sentence was really intended to express. He will not even stop with this offensive comparison, but will describe God as much larger, and will say, "He is twelve fingers long and ten fingers broad." Praise be to God, who is far above measure and number!

Further, if an uneducated man hears what we have mentioned, that God comprehends the universe so that nothing is concealed from him, he will at once imagine that this comprehending is effected by means of eyesight; that eyesight is only possible by means of an eye, and that two eyes are better than only one; and in consequence he will describe God as having a thousand eyes, meaning to describe his omniscience.

Similar hideous fictions are sometimes met with among the Hindus, especially among those castes who are not allowed to occupy themselves with science, of whom we shall speak hereafter.

CHAPTER III.

ON THE HINDU BELIEF AS TO CREATED THINGS, BOTH "INTELLIGIBILIA" AND "SENSIBILIA."

On this subject the ancient Greeks held nearly the same views as the Hindus, at all events in those times before philosophy rose high among them under the care of the seven so-called pillars of wisdom, viz. Solon of Athens, Bias of Priene, Periander of Corinth, Thales of Miletus, Chilon of Lacedæmon, Pittacus of Lesbos, and Cleobulus of Lindos, and their successors. Some of them thought that all things are one, and this one thing is according to some to λαοῦν, according to others οὐ δύναται; that e.g. man has only this prerogative before a stone and the inanimate world, that he is by one degree nearer than they to the First Cause. But this he would not be anything better than they. Others think that only the First Cause has real existence, because it alone is self-sufficing, whilst everything else absolutely requires it; that a thing which for its existence stands in need of something else has only a dream-life, no real life, and that reality is only that one and first being (the First Cause).

This is also the theory of the Sūtras, i.e. the sages, for self means in Greek wisdom (σοφία). Therefore a philosopher is called paldópis (φιλόσοφος), i.e. loving wisdom. When in Islam persons adopted something like the doctrines of these philosophers, they also adopted their name; but some people did not understand the meaning of the word, and erroneously combined it with
will attain to us completely. Then you will exist; but you will not report about us to others as long as your doing is like ours."

Abū-Yazīd Abīstāmī once being asked how he had attained his stage in Sufism, answered: "I cast off my own self as a serpent casts off its skin. Then I considered my own self, and found that I was He," i.e. God.

The Sūfī explain the Koranic passage (Sūra 2, 68), "Then we spoke: Beat him with a part of her," in the following manner: "The order to kill that which is dead in order to give life to it indicates that the heart does not become alive by the lights of knowledge unless the body be killed by ascetic practice to such a degree that it does not any more exist as a reality, but only in a formal way, whilst your heart is a reality on which no object of the formal world has any influence."

Further they say: "Between man and God there are a thousand stages of light and darkness. Men exert themselves to pass through darkness to light, and when they have attained to the stations of light, there is no return for them."

(Chapter VIII, pages 89–98, gives a discussion of the various kinds of created beings according to Sankhya philosophy.)

CHAPTER IX.

ON THE CASTES, CALLED "COLOURS" (VARNA), AND ON THE CLASSES BELOW THEM.

If a new order of things in political or social life is created by a man naturally ambitious of ruling, who by his character and capacity really deserves to be a ruler, a man of firm convictions and unshaken determination, who even in times of reverses is supported by good luck, in so far as people then side with him in recognition of former merits of his, such an order is likely to become consolidated among those for whom it was created, and to continue as firm as the deeply rooted mountains. It will remain among them as a generally recognised rule in all generations through the course of time and the flight of ages. If, then, this new form of state or society rests in some degree on religion, these twins, state and religion, are in perfect harmony, and their union represents the highest development of human society, all that men can possibly desire.

The kings of antiquity, who were industriously devoted to the duties of their office, spent most of their care on the division of their subjects into different classes and orders, which they tried to preserve from intermixture and disorder. Therefore they forbade people of different classes to have intercourse with each other, and laid upon each class a particular kind of work or art and handicraft. They did not allow anybody to transgress the limits of his class, and even
punished those who would not be content with their class.

All this is well illustrated by the history of the ancient Chosroes (Khusrau), for they had created great institutions of this kind, which could not be broken through by the special merits of any individual nor by bribery. When Ardashir ben Babak restored the Persian empire, he also restored the classes or castes of the population in the following way:

I. The highest caste are the Brāhmaṇa, of whom the books of the Hindus tell that they were created from the head of Brahman. And as Brahman is only another name for the force called nature, and the head is the highest part of the animal body, the Brāhmaṇa are the choice part of the whole genus. Therefore the Hindus consider them as the very best of mankind.

II. The next caste are the Kshatriya, who were created, as they say, from the shoulders and hands of Brahman. Their degree is not much below that of the Brāhmaṇa.

III. After them follow the Vaiśya, who were created from the thigh of Brahman.

IV. The Śūdra, who were created from his feet.

Between the latter two classes there is no very great distance. Much, however, as these classes differ from each other, they live together in the same towns and villages, mixed together in the same houses and lodgings.

After the Śūdra follow the people called Antyaja, who render various kinds of services, who are not reckoned amongst any caste, but only as members of a certain craft or profession. There are eight classes of them, who freely intermarry with each other, except the fuller, shoemaker, and weaver, for no others would condescend to have anything to do with them. These eight guilds are the fuller, shoemaker, juggler, the basket and shield maker, the sailor, fisherman, the hunter of wild animals and of birds, and the weaver. The four castes do not live together with them in one and the same place. These guilds live near the villages and towns of the four castes, but outside them.

The people called HādIt, Doma (Domba), Candala, and Badhatau (sic) are not reckoned amongst any caste or guild. They are occupied with dirty work, like the cleaning of the villages and other services. They are considered as one sole class, and distinguished only by their occupations. In fact, they are considered like illegitimate children; for according to general opinion they descend from a Śūdra father and a Brāhmaṇi
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mother as the children of fornication; therefore they are degraded outcasts.

The Hindus give to every single man of the four castes characteristic names, according to their occupations and modes of life. E.g., the Brāhmaṇa is in general called by this name as long as he does his work staying at home. When he is busy with the service of one fire, he is called iṣṭhin; if he serves three fires, he is called agnihotrin; if he besides offers an offering to the fire, he is called dikshita. And as it is with the Brāhmaṇa, so is it also with the other castes. Of the classes beneath the castes, the Hiḍḍi are the best spoken of, because they keep themselves free from everything unclean. Next follow the Dōma, who play on the lute and sing. The still lower classes practise as a trade killing and the inflicting of judicial punishments. The worst of all are the Badhatau, who not only devour the flesh of dead animals, but even of dogs and other beasts.

Each of the four castes, when eating together, must form a group for themselves, one group not being allowed to comprise two men of different castes. If, further, in the group of the Brāhmaṇa there are two men who live at enmity with each other, and the seat of the one is by the side of the other, they make a barrier between the two seats by placing a board between them, or by spreading a piece of dress, or in some other way; and if there is only a line drawn between them, they are considered as separated. Since it is forbidden to eat the remains of a meal, every single man must have his own food for himself; for if any one of the party who are eating should take of the food from one and the same plate, that which remains in the plate becomes, after the first eater has taken part, to him who wants to take as the second, the remains of the meal, and such is forbidden.

Such is the condition of the four castes. Arjuna asked about the nature of the four castes and what must be their moral qualities, whereupon Vāsudeva answered:

"The Brāhmaṇa must have an ample intellect, a quiet heart, truthful speech, much patience; he must be master of his senses, a lover of justice, of evident purity, always directed upon worship, entirely bent upon religion.

"The Kshatriya must fill the hearts with terror, must be brave and high-minded, must have ready speech and a liberal hand, not minding dangers, only intent upon carrying the great tasks of his calling to a happy end.

"The Vaiṣya is to occupy himself with agriculture, with the acquisition of cattle, and with trade.

"The Śūdra is to endeavour to render services and attention to each of the preceding classes, in order to make himself liked by them.

"If each member of these castes adheres to his customs and usages, he will obtain the happiness he wishes for, supposing that he is not negligent in the worship of God, not forgetting to remember him in his most important avocations. But if anybody wants to quit the works and duties of his caste and adopt those of another caste, even if it would bring a certain honour to the latter, it is a sin, because it is a transgression of the rule."

Further, Vāsudeva speaks, inspiring him with courage to fight the enemy: "Dost thou not know, O man with the long arm, that thou art a Kshatriya; that thy race has been created brave, to rush boldly to the charge, to care little for the vicissitudes of time, never to give way whenever their soul has a foreboding of coming misfortune? for only thereby is the reward to be obtained. If he conquers, he obtains power and good fortune. If he perishes, he obtains paradise and bliss. Besides, thou showest weakness in the presence of the enemy, and seemest melancholy at the prospect of
killing this host; but it will be infinitely worse if thy name will spread as that of a timid, cowardly man, that thy reputation among the heroes and the experienced warriors will be gone, that thou wilt be out of their sight; and thy name no longer be remembered among them. I do not know a worse punishment than such a state. Death is better than to expose thyself to the consequences of ignominy. If, therefore, God has ordered thee to fight, if he has deigned to confer upon thy caste the task of fighting and has created thee for it, carry out his order and perform his will with a determination which is free from any desire, so that thy action be exclusively devoted to him.

Hindus differ among themselves as to which of these castes is capable of attaining to liberation; for, according to some, only the Brāhmaṇa and Kshatriya are capable of it, since the others cannot learn the Veda, whilst according to the Hindu philosophers, liberation is common to all castes and to the whole human race, if their intention of obtaining it is perfect. This view is based on the saying of Vyāsa: “Learn to know the twenty-five things thoroughly. Then you may follow whatever religion you like; you will no doubt be liberated.” This view is also based on the fact that Vāsudeva was a descendant of a Śūdra family, and also on the following saying of his, which he addressed to Arjuna: “God distributes recompense without injustice and without partiality. He reckons the good as bad if people in doing good forget him; he reckons the bad as good if people in doing bad remember him and do not forget him, whether those people be Vaiśya or Śūdra or women. How much more will this be the case when they are Brāhmaṇa or Kshatriya.”

CHAPTER X.
ON THE SOURCE OF THEIR RELIGIOUS AND CIVIL LAW, ON PROPHETS, AND ON THE QUESTION WHETHER SINGLE LAWS CAN BE ABBROGATED OR NOT.

The ancient Greeks received their religious and civil laws from sages among them who were called to the work, and of whom their countrymen believed that they received divine help, like Solon, Draco, Pythagoras, Minos, and others. Also their kings did the same; for Minos (sic), when ruling over the islands of the sea and over the Cretans about two hundred years after Moses, gave them laws, pretending to have received them from Zeus. About the same time also Minos (sic) gave his laws.

At the time of Darius I., the successor of Cyrus, the Romans sent messengers to the Athenians, and received from them the laws in twelve books, under which they lived till the rule of Pompilius (Numa). This king gave them new laws; he assigned to the year twelve months, whilst up to that time it had only had ten months. It appears that he introduced his innovations against the will of the Romans, for he ordered them to use as instruments of barter in commerce pieces of pottery and hides instead of silver, which seems on his part to betray a certain anger against rebellious subjects.

In the first chapter of the Book of Laws of Plato, the Athenian stranger says: “Who do you think was the Law.
family, and marry her to some male relative. The child of such a marriage is considered as the offspring of the deceased.

Whoever neglects this duty and does not fulfil it, kills innumerable souls, since he cuts off the progeny and the name of the deceased to all eternity.

We have here given an account of these things in order that the reader may learn by the comparative treatment of the subject how much superior the institutions of Islam are, and how much more plainly this contrast brings out all customs and usages, differing from those of Islam, in their essential foulness.

**CHAPTER XL**

ABOUT THE BEGINNING OF IDOL-WORSHIP, AND A DESCRIPTION OF THE INDIVIDUAL IDOLS.

It is well known that the popular mind leans towards the sensible world, and has an aversion to the world of abstract thought which is only understood by highly educated people, of whom in every time and every place there are only few. And as common people will only acquiesce in pictorial representations, many of the leaders of religious communities have so far deviated from the right path as to give such imagery in their books and houses of worship, like the Jews and Christians, and, more than all, the Manichæans. These words of mine would at once receive a sufficient illustration if, for example, a picture of the Prophet were made, or of Mekka and the Ka'ba, and were shown to an uneducated man or woman. Their joy in looking at the thing would bring them to kiss the picture, to rub their cheeks against it, and to roll themselves in the dust before it, as if they were seeing not the picture, but the original, and were in this way, as if they were present in the holy places, performing the rites of pilgrimage, the great and the small ones.

This is the cause which leads to the manufacture of idols, monuments in honour of certain much venerated persons, prophets, sages, angels, destined to keep alive their memory when they are absent or dead, to create for them a lasting place of grateful veneration in the hearts of men when they die. But when much time
passes by after the setting up of the monument, generations and centuries, its origin is forgotten, it becomes a matter of custom, and its veneration a rule for general practice. This being deeply rooted in the nature of man, the legislators of antiquity tried to influence them from this weak point of theirs. Therefore they made the veneration of pictures and similar monuments obligatory on them, as is recounted in historic records, both for the times before and after the Deluge. Some people even pretend to know that all mankind, before God sent them his prophets, were one large idolatrous body.

The followers of the Thora fix the beginning of idolatry in the days of Serugh, the great-grandfather of Abraham. The Romans have, regarding this question, the following tradition:—Romulus and Romanus (!), the two brothers from the country of the Franks, on having ascended the throne, built the city of Rome. Then Romulus killed his brother, and the consequence was a long succession of intestine troubles and wars. Finally, Romulus humiliated himself, and then he dreamt that there would only be peace on condition that he placed his brother on the throne. Then he got a golden image made of him, placed it at his side, and heuceforward he used to say, "We (not I) have ordered thus and thus," which since has become the general use of kings. Thereupon the troubles subsided. He founded a feast and a play to amuse and to gain over those who bore him ill-will on account of the murder of his brother. Besides, he erected a monument to the sun, consisting of four images on four horses, the green one for the earth, the blue for the water, the red for the fire, and the white for the air. This monument is still in Rome in our days.

Since, however, here we have to explain the system and the theories of the Hindus on the subject, we shall now mention their ludicrous views; but we declare at once that they are held only by the common uneducated people. For those who march on the path to liberation, or those who study philosophy and theology, and who desire abstract truth which they call \textit{sastra}, are entirely free from worshipping anything but God alone, and would never dream of worshipping an image manufactured to represent him. A tradition illustrative of this is that which Saunaka told the king Pariksha in these words:—

There was once a king called Ambarisha, who had obtained an empire as large as he had wished for. But afterwards he came to like it no longer; he retired from the world, and exclusively occupied himself with worshipping and praising God for a long time. Finally, God appeared to him in the shape of Indra, the prince of the angels, riding on an elephant. He spoke to the king: "Demand whatever you like, and I will give it you."

The king answered: "I rejoice in seeing thee, and I am thankful for the good fortune and help thou hast given; but I do not demand anything from thee, but only from him who created thee."

Indra said: "The object of worship is to receive a noble reward. Realise, therefore, your object, and accept the reward from him from whom hitherto you have obtained your wishes, and do not pick and choose, saying, 'Not from thee, but from another.'"

The king answered: "The earth has fallen to my lot, but I do not care for all that is in it. The object of my worship is to see the Lord, and that thou canst not give me. Why, therefore, should I demand the fulfilment of my desire from thee?"

Indra said: "The whole world and whoever is upon it are obedient to me. Who are you that you dare to oppose me?"}

The king answered: "I, too, hear and obey, but I worship him from whom thou hast received this power,
who is the lord of the universe, who has protected thee against the attacks of the two kings, Bali and Hira. Therefore let me do as I like, and turn away from me with my farewell greeting.

Indra said: "If you will absolutely oppose me, I will kill you and annihilate you."

The king answered: "People say that happiness is envied, but not so misfortune. He who retires from the world is envied by the angels, and therefore they will try to lead him astray. I am one of those who have retired from the world and entirely devoted themselves to worship, and I shall not give it up as long as I live. I do not know myself to be guilty of a crime for which I should deserve to be killed by thee... If thou killest me without any offence on my part, it is thy concern. What dost thou want from me? If my thoughts are entirely devoted to God, and nothing else is blended with them, thou art not able to do me any harm. Sufficient for me is the worship with which I am occupied, and now I return to it."

As the king now went on worshipping, the Lord appeared to him in the shape of a man of the grey lotus colour, riding on a bird called Garuda, holding in one of the four hands the sankha, a sea-shell which people blow when riding on elephants; in the second hand the cakrā, a round, cutting, orbicular weapon, which cuts everything it hits right through; in the third an amulet, and in the fourth padma, i.e. the red lotus. When the king saw him, he shuddered from reverence, prostrated himself and uttered many praises.

The Lord quieted his terrified mind and promised him that he should obtain everything he wished for. The king spoke: "I had obtained an empire which nobody disputed with me; I was in conditions of life not troubled by sorrow or sickness. It was as if the whole world belonged to me. But then I turned away from it, after I had understood that the good of the world is really bad in the end. I do not wish for anything except what I now have. The only thing I now wish for is to be liberated from this fetter."

The Lord spoke: "That you will obtain by keeping aloof from the world, by being alone, by uninterrupted meditation, and by restraining your senses to yourself."

The king spoke: "Supposing that I am able to do so through that sanctity which the Lord has deigned to bestow upon me, how should any other man be able to do so? For man wants eating and clothing, which connects him with the world. How is he to think of anything else?"

The Lord spoke: "Occupy yourself with your empire in as straightforward and prudent a way as possible; turn your thoughts upon me when you are engaged in civilising the world and protecting its inhabitants, in giving alms, and in everything you do. And if you are overpowered by human forgetfulness, make to yourself an image like that in which you see me; offer to it perfumes and flowers, and make it a memorial of me, so that you may not forget me. If you are in sorrow, think of me; if you speak, speak in my name; if you act, act for me."

The king spoke: "Now I know what I have to do in general, but honour me further by instructing me in the details."

The Lord spoke: "That I have done already. I have inspired your judge Vasishtha with all that is required. Therefore rely upon him in all questions."

Then the figure disappeared from his sight. The king returned into his residence and did as he had been ordered.

From that time, the Hindus say, people make idols, some with four hands like the appearance we have described, others with two hands, as the story and description require, and conformably to the being which is to be represented.
Another story of theirs is the following:—Brahman had a son called Nṛada, who had no other desire but that of seeing the Lord. It was his custom, when he walked about, to hold a stick. If he threw it down, it became a serpent, and he was able to do miracles with it. He never went without it. One day being walked about, to hold a stick. If he threw it down, it was talked to him out of the voice spoke to him out of the fire, from the voice.

He thus. "When he looked in that direction, he saw a fiery appearance in something like human shape. Henceforward it has been the custom to erect idols of certain shapes.

A famous idol of theirs was that of Multān, dedicated to the sun, and therefore called Āditya. It was of wood and covered with red Cordovan leather; in its two eyes were two red rubies. It is said to have been made in the last Kṛitayuga. Suppose that it was made in the very end of Kṛitayuga, the time which has since elapsed amounts to 216,432 years. When Muhammad Ibn Alkāšim Ibn Almūnabhī conquered Multān, he inquired how the town had become so very flourishing and so many treasures had there been accumulated, and then he found out that this idol was the cause, for there came pilgrims from all sides to visit it. Therefore he thought it best to have the idol where it was, but he hung a piece of cow's flesh on its neck by way of mockery. On the same place a mosque was built. When then the Kārmānians occupied Multān, Jalāl Ibn Shāhīn, the usurper, broke the idol into pieces and killed its priests. He made his mansion, which was a castle built of brick on an elevated place, the mosque instead of the old mosque, which he ordered to be shut from hatred against anything that had been done under the dynasty of the Caliph of the house of ‘Umayya. When afterwards the blessed Prince Mul-

med swept away their rule from those countries, he made again the old mosque the place of the Friday-worship, and the second one was left to decay. At present it is only a barn-floor, where bunches of Hinnī (Lawsonia inermis) are bound together.

If we now subtract from the above-mentioned number of years the hundreds, tens, and units, i.e. the 432 years, as a kind of arbitrary equivalent for the sum of about 100 years, by which the rise of the Kārmānians preceded our time, we get as the remainder 216,000 years for the time of the end of the Kṛitayuga, and about the epoch of the era of the Hijrī. How, then, could wood have lasted such a length of time, and particularly in a place where the air and the soil are rather wet? God knows best!

The city of Tāneshar is highly venerated by the Hindus. The idol of that place is called Cakrasvāmī, i.e. the owner of the cakra, a weapon which we have already described (page 114). It is of bronze, and is nearly the size of a man. It is now lying in the hippodrome in Ghazni, together with the Lord of Somānāth, which is a representation of the penis of Mahādeva, called Linga. Of Somānāth we shall hereafter speak in the proper place. This Cakrasvāmī is said to have been made in the time of Bhrūtrā as a memorial of wars connected with this name.

In Inner Kāshmīr, about two or three days' journey from the capital in the direction towards the mountains of Boler, there is a wooden idol called śrāvasta, which is much venerated and frequented by pilgrims.

We shall now communicate a whole chapter from the book Šamhitā relating to the construction of idols, which will help the student thoroughly to comprehend the present subject.

Varāhamihira says: "If the figure is made to represent Rūna the son of Daśaratha, or Bali the son of Vairocana, give it the height of 120 digits," i.e. of idol
digits, which must be reduced by one-tenth to become common digits, in this case 108.

"To the idol of Vishnu give eight hands, or four, or two, and on the left side under the breast give him the figure of the woman Śrī. If you give him eight hands, place in the right hands a sword, a club of gold or iron, an arrow, and make the fourth hand as if it were drawing water; in the left hands give him a shield, a bow, a cakra, and a conch.

"If you give him four hands, omit the bow and the arrow, the sword and shield.

"If you give him two hands, let the right hand be drawing water, the left holding a conch.

"If the figure is to represent Baladeva, the brother of Nārāyaṇa, put earrings into his ears, and give him eyes of a drunken man.

"If you make both figures, Nārāyaṇa and Baladeva, join with them their sister Bhagavati (Durgā=Śrī-nānšā), her left hand resting on her hip a little away from the side, and her right hand holding a lotus.

"If you make her four-handed, place in the right hands a rosary and a hand drawing water; in the left hands, a book and a lotus.

"If you make her eight-handed, place in the left hands the kamaśālā, i.e. a pot, a lotus, bow and book; in the right hands, a rosary, a mirror, an arrow, and a water-drawing hand.

"If the figure is to represent Śambha, the son of Vishnu, put only a club in his right hand. If it is to represent Pradyumna, the son of Vishnu, place in his right hand an arrow, in his left hand a bow. And if you make their two wives, place in their right hand a sword, in the left a buckler.

"The idol of Brahmān has four faces towards the four sides, and is seated on a lotus.

"The idol of Skanda, the son of Mahādeva, is a boy riding on a peacock, his hand holding a śakti, a weapon like a double-edged sword, which has in the middle a pestle like that of a mortar.

"The idol Indra holds in its hand a weapon called vajra of diamond. It has a similar handle to the śakti, but on each side it has two swords which join at the handle. On his front place a third eye, and make him ride on a white elephant with four tusks.

"Likewise make on the front of the idol of Mahādeva a third eye right above, on his head a crescent, in his hand a weapon called śūla, similar to the club but with three branches, and a sword; and let his left hand hold his wife Gaurī, the daughter of Himavant, whom he presses to his bosom from the side.

"To the idol Jina, i.e. Buddha, give a face and limbs as beautiful as possible, make the lines in the palms of his hands and feet like a lotus, and represent him seated on a lotus; give him grey hair, and represent him with a placid expression, as if he were the father of creation.

"If you make Arhant, the figure of another body of Buddha, represent him as a naked youth with a fine face, beautiful, whose hands reach down to the knees, with the figure of Śrī, his wife, under the left breast.

"The idol of Revanta, the son of the sun, rides on a horse like a huntsman.

"The idol of Yima, the angel of death, rides on a buffalo, and holds a club in his hand.

"The idol of Kubera, the treasurer, wears a crown, has a big stomach and wide hips, and is riding on a man.

"The idol of the sun has a red lace like the pith of the red lotus, beams like a diamond, has protruding limbs, rings in the ears, the neck adorned with pearls which hang down over the breast, wears a crown of several compartments, holds in his hands two lotuses, and is clad in the dress of the Northerners which reaches down to the ankle.

"If you represent the Seven Mothers, represent several of them together in one figure, Brahmānī with four faces
towards the four directions, Kaumărti with six faces, Vaishnavi with four hands, Vârâhi with a hog's head on a human body, Indraṇi with many eyes and a club in her hand, Bhagavattî (Durgâ) sitting as people generally sit, Cămûndâ ugly, with protruding teeth and a slim waist. Further join with them the sons of Mahâdeva, Kshetrapâla with bristling hair, a sour face, and an ugly figure, but Vinâyaka with an elephant's head on a human body, with four hands, as we have heretofore described.

The worshippers of these idols kill sheep and buffaloes with axes (kûlāra), that they may nourish themselves with their blood. All idols are constructed according to certain measures determined by idol-fingers for every single limb, but sometimes they differ regarding the measure of a limb. If the artist keeps the right measure and does not make anything too large nor too small, he is free from sin, and is sure that the being which he represented will not visit him with any mishap. "If he makes the idol one cubit high and together with the throne two cubits, he will obtain health and wealth. If he makes it higher still, he will be praised.

"But he must know that making the idol too large, especially that of the Sun, will hurt the ruler, and making it too small will hurt the artist. If he gives it a thin belly, this helps and furthers the famine in the country; if he gives it a lean belly, this ruins property.

"If the hand of the artist slips so as to produce something like a wound he will have a wound in his own body which will kill him.

"If it is not completely even on both sides, so that the one shoulder is higher than the other, his wife will perish.

"If he turns the eye upward, he will be blind for lifetime; if he turns it downward, he will have many troubles and sorrows."

If the statue is made of some precious stone, it is better than if it were made of wood, and wood is better than clay. "The benefits of a statue of precious stone will be common to all the men and women of the empire. A golden statue will bring power to him who erected it, a statue of silver will bring him renown, one of bronze will bring him an increase of his rule, one of stone the acquisition of landed property."

The Hindus honour their idols on account of those who erected them, not on account of the material of which they are made. We have already mentioned that the idol of Multân was of wood. Eg. the linga which Râma erected when he had finished the war with the demons was of sand, which he had heaped up with his own hand. But then it became petrified all at once, since the astrologically correct moment for the erecting of the monument fell before the moment when the workmen had finished the cutting of the stone monument which Râma originally had ordered. Regarding the building of the temple and its peristyle, the cutting of the trees of four different kinds, the astrological determination of the favourable moment for the erection, the celebration of the rites due on such an occasion, regarding all this Râma gave very long and tedious instructions. Further, he ordered that servants and priests to minister to the idols should be nominated from different classes of the people. "To the idol of Vishû are devoted the class called Bhâgavata; to the idol of the Sun, the Maga, i.e. the Magians; to the idol of Mahâdeva, a class of saints, anchorites with long hair, who cover their skin with ashes, hang on their persons the bones of dead people, and swim in the pools. The Brâhmaṇa are devoted to the Eight Mothers, the Shamanians to Buddha, to Arhant the class called Nâgâ. On the whole, to each idol certain people are devoted who constructed it, for those know best how to serve it."
Our object in mentioning all this mad raving was to teach the reader the accurate description of an idol, if he happens to see one, and to illustrate what we have said before, that such idols are erected only for uneducated low-class people of little understanding; that the Hindus never made an idol of any supernatural being, much less of God; and, lastly, to show how the crowd is kept in thralldom by all kinds of priestly tricks and deceits. Therefore the book Gita says: "Many people try to approach me in their aspirations through something which is different from me; they try to insinuate themselves into my favour by giving alms, praise, and prayer to something besides me. I, however, confirm and help them in all these doings of theirs, and make them attain the object of their wishes, because I am able to dispense with them."

In the same book Vasudeva speaks to Arjuna: "Do you not see that most of those who wish for something address themselves in offering and worshipping to the several classes of spiritual beings, and to the sun, moon, and other celestial bodies? If now God does not disappoint their hopes, though he in no way stands in need of their worship, if he even gives them more than they asked for, and if he gives them their wishes in such a way as though they were receiving them from that to which they had addressed their prayers—viz. the idol—they will proceed to worship those whom they address, because they have not learned to know him, whilst he, by admitting this kind of intermedia
tion, carries their affairs to the desired end. But that which is obtained by desires and intermedation is not lasting, since it is only as much as is deserved for any particular merit. Only that is lasting which is obtained from God alone, when people are disgusted with old age, death, and birth (and desire to be delivered therefrom by Moksha)."

This is what Vasudeva says. When the ignorant crowd get a piece of good luck by accident or something at which they had aimed, and when with this some of the preconcerted tricks of the priests are brought into connection, the darkness in which they live increases vastly, not their intelligence. They will rush to those figures of idols, maltreating their own figures before them by shedding their own blood and mutilating their own bodies.

The ancient Greeks, also, considered the idols as mediators between themselves and the First Cause, and worshipped them under the names of the stars and the highest substances. For they described the First Cause, not with positive, but only with negative predicates, since they considered it too high to be described by human qualities, and since they wanted to describe it as free from any imperfection. Therefore they could not address it in worship.

When the heathen Arabs had imported into their country idols from Syria, they also worshipped them, hoping that they would intercede for them with God.

Plato says in the fourth chapter of the Book of Laws: "It is necessary to any one who gives perfect honours (to the gods) that he should take trouble with the mystery of the gods and Saknakt, and that he should not make special idols masters over the ancestral gods. Further, it is the greatest duty to give honours as much as possible to the parents while they live."

By mystery Plato means a special kind of devotion. The word is much used among the Sobians of Harran, the dualistic Manichaeans, and the theologians of the Hindus.

Galenus says in the book De Indole Anima: "At the time of the Emperor Commodus, between 500-510 years after Alexander, two men went to an idol-merchant and bargained with him for an idol of Hermes. The one wanted to erect it in a temple as a memorial of Hermes, the other wanted to erect it on a tomb as a
memorial of the deceased. However, they could not settle the business with the merchant, and so they postponed it until the following day. The idol-merchant dreamt the following night that the idol addressed him and spoke to him: 'O excellent man! I am thy work. I have received through the work of thy hands a figure which is thought to be the figure of a star. Now I am no longer a stone, as people called me heretofore; I am now known as Mercury. At present it stands in thy hands to make me either a memorial of something imperishable or of something that has perished already.'

There is a treatise of Aristotle in which he answers certain questions of the Brahmins which Alexander had sent him. There he says: "If you maintain that some Greeks have fabled that the idols speak, that the people offer to them and think them to be spiritual beings, of all this we have no knowledge, and we cannot give a sentence on a subject we do not know." In these words he rises high above the class of fools and uneducated people, and he indicates by them that he does not occupy himself with such things. It is evident that the first cause of idolatry was the desire of commemorating the dead and of consoling the living; but on this basis it has developed, and has finally become a foul and pernicious abuse.

The former view, that idols are only memorials, was also held by the Caliph Mu'aiya regarding the idols of Sicily. When, in the summer of A.H. 53, Sicily was conquered, and the conquerors sent him golden idols adorned with crowns and diamonds which had been captured there, he ordered them to be sent to Sind, that they should be sold there to the princes of the country; for he thought it best to sell them as objects costing sums of so-and-so many denars, not having the slightest scruple on account of their being objects of abominable idolatry, but simply considering the matter from a political, not from a religious point of view.

CHAPTER XII.

ON THE VEDA, THE PURĀNAS, AND OTHER KINDS OF THEIR NATIONAL LITERATURE.

VEDA means knowledge of that which was before unknown. It is a religious system which, according to the Hindus, comes from God, and was promulgated by the mouth of Brahman. The Brahmins recite the Veda without understanding its meaning, and in the same way they learn it by heart, the one receiving it from the other. Only few of them learn its explanation, and still less is the number of those who master the contents of the Veda and their interpretation to such a degree as to be able to hold a theological disputation.

The Brahmins teach the Veda to the Kshatriyas. The latter learn it, but are not allowed to teach it, not even to a Brahmin. The Vaisya and Shādra are not allowed to hear it, much less to pronounce and recite it. If such a thing can be proved against one of them, the Brahmins drag him before the magistrate, and he is punished by having his tongue cut off.

The Veda contains commandments and prohibitions, detailed statements about reward and punishment intended to encourage and to deter; but most of it contains hymns of praise, and treats of the various kinds of sacrifices to the fire, which are so numerous and difficult that you could hardly count them.

They do not allow the Veda to be committed to writing, because it is recited according to certain modes.