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ART. I.—*Avesta die heiligen Schriften der Parsen. Aus dem grundtext übersetzt, mit steter rücksicht auf die tradition.* Von Dr. FRIEDRICH SPIEGEL. Leipzig, 1852, 1859, 1863.

Die altpersischen Keilenschriften, im grundtexte, mit übersetzung, grammatik und glossar. Von FR. SPIEGEL. Leipzig, 1862.

A History of Ancient Sanskrit Literature, so far as it illustrates the primitive religion of the Brahmans. By MAX MÜLLER, M. A., Taylorian Professor in the University of Oxford. London, 1859.

The Religions before Christ: being an Introduction to the first three Centuries of the Church. By EDMOND DE PRESSENSÉ. Translated by L. Corkran. Edinburgh, 1862.

ON the religion of pre-Hellenic antiquity the materials are copious; and if not satisfactory on all points, are decisive as to the great features of the subject. They consist of Egyptian and Assyrian monuments, the Hebrew Scriptures, and the ancient books of the Parsees and Hindoos, with incidental help from other quarters.

The primitive elements of religion, as well as its subsequent history, appear to have been very similar in the different nations thus represented. The progressive changes, as exhibited in the books now mentioned, when the older are compared with the later, are found to be of the same general tenor in all.

And the book of Genesis extends its testimony beyond the families of the Hebrew patriarchs, and, although very briefly, yet decisively, determines the same point for some of the contemporaneous inhabitants of Mesopotamia, of Canaan, and of Arabia. Of the Egyptians, although much is said in that book, it is surprising how little information is given touching the observances of religion. But otherwise we learn that the earlier faith of that people, as well as of the Assyrians, was also of the same type. Over the whole area of primitive human residence, the same religion in the main prevailed. That early type, and the nature of the changes wrought upon it in the course of time, as now appears from the fruits of recent antiquarian and literary research, are exactly the reverse of what has hitherto been deemed the beginning and progressive development of heathen religion.

The prevailing misapprehension is natural, and easy to be accounted for. Philosophical development of idolatry, admitting the symbolism of nature, leads generally to pantheism. And the phenomenon presented by every historical country, civilized under such a system, is that of gradually constructing its elements into a celestial hierarchy, with one principal God at the head of all the gods, as the actual creed of the multitude, and connected with the all-pervading deity in various ways by the educated and speculative intellect, as in Greece and Italy; or of weaving out of them a regular theological system, in which each of the popular gods is assumed to embody some attribute of the Deity, which is present in all, and which ends in conceiving of God as blended with nature in all her parts and substance, as in India; or matter being set on one side, God is set on the other, a great everlasting inactive potentiality. To an observer in the later days of such systems, the natural course of thinking led to the conclusion that monotheism was the growth of progressive culture. And the conclusion is correct as respects the one god of the pantheist; or any other mere abstract generalization. But the fact to which we now refer is one entirely different from that involved in any of those systems. It concerns neither an inactive abstraction, nor an impersonal all-pervading power; nor is it a mere superiority over other gods; but it is of a personal god, sole,

almighty, the intelligent creator and ruler of all things. The pantheist's plausible talk about his system as monotheistic—although every country where it has been popularly accepted is, or was, in reality polytheistic—and the connection of Christianity with the highest culture of modern times, readily account for the impression that monotheism has gradually developed itself out of polytheism, in the course of improvement. It is the direct reverse of that impression which we find to be proved by the ancient documents now referred to and the course of subsequent history.

Religion underwent very great changes in some of those countries, in the course of ages, which have left little or no record of themselves. And in order to reach a just conclusion, it is necessary to compare contemporaneous, or nearly contemporaneous authorities, and with that view to classify them, as well as we can, chronologically.

In relation to the greatest of those religious changes, the whole history arranges itself into two periods, divided by the broad belt of some two or three hundred years, the central line of which lies about the middle of the sixteenth century before Christ. In the former the *style* of religion in every country where we obtain a view of it, is one. The change which passed upon it during the transition was of the same nature in all recorded cases. But it did not in all cases proceed to the same degree. And consequently there is greater variety in the latter period than in the former. Still, the differences are all variations upon one common theme.

In that part of the world's history which preceded the supremacy of Greece, there is apparently an extreme self-contradiction. From one point of view, the people seem to have been enormously wicked; their debasing and persistent vices such that, in several cases, God employed miraculous, or specially ordained means to remove them out of his sight: from another, they seem to have been eminently religious, and to have enjoyed favours from God, such as we never hear of among ourselves, and to have done, in the work of religion, what no longer can be done.

The truth is, that from the great distance in time at which they all stand from us, several historical periods, making up

that long series of ages, blend together before our eyes. We think of the call of Abraham and that of Moses as if they were quite near one another, instead of being separated by more than four hundred years—a lapse of time longer than from now back to the opening of the Reformation. And from Noah to the Babylonish captivity, longer than from now back to the time of Christ upon earth, what changes must have taken place, which we ordinarily make little allowance for.

Declension in religion began early, and in some quarters progressed rapidly, and had little to restrain it in the prudential arrangements of society gathered from the lessons of experience. Great wickedness was allowed to become conspicuous, and to run its course until it reached the degree of being intolerable. And national religion, when once it had begun to err, being left to the hands of the nation which believed it, sank with facility into error, and became base in practice, while continuing to be revered as religion. Accordingly, both among individuals and nations, iniquity, in many cases, developed itself in degrees which were monstrous.

On the other hand, great attention was given to the subject of religion, through all that time. Religion—whether true or false—was, in most nations which appear in its history, the first of all concerns. The Greco-Roman period was comparatively rationalistic and infidel. Speaking generally, the people of pre-Hellenic civilization seem to have lived with a more steady eye to God than did their successors. The direction of the mind was often wrong, still it was eminently concerned with the way of meeting God's favour, and averting his wrath. The literature bequeathed to us by Greeks and Romans is recommended by its scientific and æsthetic merit; but that which has been preserved from the higher antiquity comes to us as revelation from Heaven, or as consecrated to divine service. The great works of ancient Sacred Scripture, with the single exception of the New Testament, are the product of pre-Hellenic antiquity. Then were written the sacred books of the Hebrews, and those most highly venerated in the religion of the Egyptians, of the Hindoos, and of the Persians. The esteem of those, in whose keeping ancient literature was, has extended to the preservation of no other. The remains of

ancient Greco-Roman literature are classic, those of pre-Hellenic literature are sacred.

The oldest books of the Hindoos are the Vedas, containing their sacred canon, with the forms of worship and other observances of their religion. Of those books, the oldest is a large collection of hymns called the Rig Veda. It seems to have been put together at a date prior to the established Brahminical worship. It is arranged without reference to the order of the sacrificial observances. From it hymns were selected and arranged for liturgical use in other books, in connection with the details of ceremonial worship, including all the formulas of prayer and sacrifice. The Rig Veda is the historical collection, from which the ceremonial or prayer books derive their supply of prayer and praise. The work of making that most ancient collection, "we may safely," says Professor Müller, "ascribe to an age not entirely free from the trammels of a ceremonial, yet not completely enslaved by a system of mere formalities; to an age no longer creative and impulsive, yet not without some power of upholding the traditions of a past that spoke to a later generation of men through the very poems which they were collecting with so much zeal and accuracy."

If the making of the collection belonged to the incipient period of the national ceremonial, when a particular branch of the people was only beginning to take to itself the duties, and to exercise the power of a sacerdotal class, many of the hymns themselves must date from an earlier stage in that process, if not from before it began. All the other religious books of India are of later ages, and belong to the history of the growing and matured polytheistic system, with its ceremonial and priesthood. They are entirely legal, liturgical, and sacerdotal.

The Avesta is a collection of religious books much smaller than the Vedas, but of analogous character. Their names are the Yaçna, Vendidad, Vispered, and Khorda-Avesta, of which the most ancient is the Yaçna. And that again is composed of three parts, the second of which is a collection called the Gâthas.

Such a relation as the Rig Veda holds to the other religious

books of India do the Gâthas hold to the other sacred books of the ancient Persians. They consist of the hymns, including also the prayers, of which the recitation is prescribed in the ceremonial books. By its language also and other features it is clearly evinced as older than they. The Yaçna is reverentially mentioned, or alluded to in the other books of the Avesta; and the second part of it, and especially the Gâthas, are praised as eminently holy. The Gâthas are also mentioned in the first and last parts of the Yaçna itself. Beyond question they are the oldest of the whole collection. Compared with their religion, that of the later books of the Avesta is degenerate. But the development of the ceremonial, and growth of a sacerdotal power, made comparatively little progress among the Persians. Repeated revolutions interfered, and turned the course of things back towards their earlier condition.

In Egypt, the beginning of the ceremonial, as well as of the priesthood as a separate class, goes back into antiquity beyond the reach of history. They were both fully established before the Hebrew removal into that country. On the other hand, we have upon the monuments of the ancient dynasties, evidence that the religious observances belonging to their time was the regular development of the patriarchal. The priests are of the highest rank of nobles, or princes, of their cities respectively, and the king is the high priest of the nation. And out of prayer, sacrifice, and offering, the whole elaborate ceremonial has grown, and around those elements it still circles. And the course of progress from ancient to more recent is towards a more complicated and cumbrous ritual. Although Egypt began that career earlier than her neighbours, she had begun from the same point.

Of all the authorities now mentioned, we are satisfied, even without adducing its weight of inspiration, that the book of Genesis is by far the most important, and furnishes the true key to the religious history of the whole ancient oriental world. That book, whether preserved by writing or by oral recitation, retains a more historical form than any other to which a similar antiquity is ascribed. It takes a much wider view of the world, and of human life beyond the strict sphere of religion,

than does the Veda or the Avesta. Its narrative comes down to between nineteen hundred and seventeen hundred years before Christ. The oldest Egyptian monuments, until the end of the twelfth dynasty, belong to the same period. Of the Vedas the date is quite unsettled, and the antiquity claimed by native Hindoo authorities extravagant. But it is hardly possible that the mass of the oldest, or Rig Veda, can be later than fifteen hundred years before Christ; and some of its hymns are certainly much older than the collection. The origin of the Avesta is also lost in the depth of ages; and some parts of it are demonstrably of greater antiquity than the collection. The religion which it teaches was ancient in the days of Darius Hystaspes. It had even then passed through the period of its primitive purity; had been the religion of a powerful and wide-spread people; had suffered some degree of subsequent depression, from which it is clearly the design of Darius to rescue it, and to assign it to the honour and singleness of authority which it had in the days of his ancient forefathers. Darius was a great admirer of antiquity, and thought much of his own long line of regal descent, and informs us that he was the ninth in a succession of kings. And if the religion which he desired to restore to its purity was that of his countrymen in the days of his earliest royal ancestor, which he leaves us no room to doubt was his conviction, the antiquity of its introduction among them must be carried much further back. In order to become the sole national religion, embodying all the cherished traditions of the people, it must have been observed among them from time to time immemorial, and without a rival of an older date. And whether originally written or not, some parts of the Avesta are apparently coeval with the establishment of the worship of Ahura Mazda as a national religion. For they belong to the essential forms of the worship. And whatever may be the absolute antiquity of the hymns of the Avesta and the Veda, they are beyond dispute the most ancient writings in their respective languages. Prayers and hymns prepared for worship, and inscriptions of a monumental and religious character, are the oldest materials of human history outside of the Hebrew Scriptures.

Some Assyrian monuments have been preserved from a

distance in time perhaps greater than that of Moses; but the larger number, and those the most useful for our purpose, are later, and pertain most probably to the ninth or eighth centuries before Christ. Their testimony, as far as yet understood, is to the same purport as that of the books now mentioned.

All these remains, literary and pictorial, except perhaps some of the last named, are of a date greatly anterior to the earliest extant writing in the Greek language; anterior to the earliest information that can possibly be obtained of mythology in its classical form; anterior to the subject of the Homeric poems, in which we first meet with that mythology, lying away back in the antiquity to which Æschylus refers the immediate antecedents of his Prometheus. No literature of Europe, nor of perhaps any other country, comes to us from an equal depth of ages.

From such witnesses it is highly interesting to receive testimony that the religion of the oldest nations in the world reposed upon belief in one spiritual God. Instead of beginning with the worship of various objects in nature, and gradually rising to the idea of one all-powerful God, it appears that mankind at first held a monotheistic creed; and that subsequent progress was in the opposite direction.

The testimony of Genesis, on this point, is too plain to require much exposition. In the immediate descendants of Noah, we hear of no other than the God whom their father worshipped. And that God was not a generalization, not the fruit of induction, not an ultimate step of progressive refinement, but a holy and almighty person simply and directly revealed. In it we read not a syllable about God, the soul, and the world being one. It recognizes God as all-powerful, and everywhere present; but distinguishes between him and the world, and between him and the human soul, in the most emphatic manner. The simple unity of his nature and his personality, distinct from all the work of his hands, are the primary elements of the idea of God there presented. Some of the Divine attributes were not yet unfolded; but the object of the believer's faith was single, clear, and practically presented. We are informed by God, through the pen of Moses, that the name, whereby he was known to the Hebrew patri-

archs, was *El*, a noun in the singular number. *El Shaddai* was the name by which those early fathers of the Hebrew race called the God whom they adored. From a fragment of Sanchoniathon, we learn that the Phenicians, who were Canaanites, in times very ancient to that writer, called the god, whom they deemed the son of Heaven, by the name which in Philo's Greek translation is made *Ilus*; and that his allies, or auxiliaries, were called *Eloeim*. He also speaks of *Elioun*, of whom he says that he was called *Hypsisstus*, that is, the most high. That is, by recurring to the Semitic forms, the *Eloeim* are plural, corresponding to the singular *Il* or *El*, as it must have been written by Sanchoniathon.* *El* was, then, the name by which God was known to his chosen, twenty-one hundred years before Christ. And either then, or soon after, the same name was used also by their Canaanitish and Babylonian neighbours.

Whatever the origin of the plural *Elohim*, and the use made of it among the Hebrews, it is very clear that the Canaanites, who spoke the same language, used it, in the service of polytheism, to designate a plurality of gods; and that its use among them for that idea was subsequent to the use of the singular. It was in the rise of polytheism that it became necessary. Among the Hebrews of the time of Moses, the word *Elohim* was used in the plural, to designate the many gods of the heathen, that is as a natural plural; and also as a singular for the name of the only true and living God, in his general relations to all mankind, corresponding to the old patriarchal name *El*.

In considering this process in the growth of language, it is important to bear in mind that the Hebrew of the old time was not confined to the patriarchs in the descent of Terah and their families; but was spoken over all Syria and Mesopotamia, and as far east as Elam and western Persia. In other words, the descendants of Terah spoke the common language of the region where they dwelt, and to which the land of their promise belonged. They were, therefore, to some degree con-

* One of the names of the supreme god of Babylon was *Il*, which is sometimes replaced by *Ra*, an Egyptian name.—*Rawlinson*, Herod. 1. 477.

strained to take it as it existed, as it was formed by the greater public, and, until they became a nation themselves, could have but little influence in deciding its idioms.

How soon the plural Elohim came into use, as now mentioned, or why, is nowhere stated in Scripture. The earliest express declaration of the name by which God was known in ancient time, is that contained in Exodus vi. 3, where it is said that God revealed himself to the patriarchs by the singular noun *El*. Remains of that ancient usage appear in several passages of Genesis, as where Jacob designated *El* as the *Elohim* of Israel; and in another place, where God is said to have declared himself to Jacob as the *El* who was the *Elohim* of his fathers. It appears also in some of the proper names contained in Genesis, as in *Mehuja-el*, *Methusa-el*, *Mahalale-el*, *Abima-el*, and *Beth-el*. Now, as some of these are antediluvian names, it is plain that the name of God in the singular was in use from near the very beginning of our race. And when the plural *Elohim* came into general use with the rise of polytheism, *El* was prefixed to distinguish the *Elohim* of Israel from the *Elohim* of the heathen. At a later time also, the same name was used, as in Joshua xxii. 22, to distinguish the true God from the false gods, which had subsequently arisen. And also being the most ancient name of God, it became in subsequent literature the more poetic. As such it several times occurs in the Psalms.

Whatever may be said of the causes which brought the plural of *Eloah* into use, the fact that it is a plural, and that it is construed as such in reference to heathen gods, and that it is notwithstanding construed as singular in reference to the God of Israel, and that it was another word in the singular, by which the latter declared himself to the patriarchs, is beyond question. And this is also entirely in accordance with the otherwise clear teaching of the book of Genesis, that God revealed himself as one, to the primitive fathers of mankind, to Noah, and subsequently to the Hebrews; but that the nations in course of time multiplied to themselves objects of worship, and learned to think and speak of God as many, or at least as manifold. For the first steps towards polytheism were taken without denying the unity of God. Laban wor-

ships the same God with Jacob, and yet has idols in his house which he calls his gods.

In his revelation of himself to Moses as Jehovah, God dictated a return to the use of the singular number by a term of peculiar significance. Thus, according to the testimony of Genesis, both direct and indirect, the oldest religion of the world reposed upon one spiritual God. And when idols were introduced, it seems to have been only as adjuncts to his worship. And when the same God again reveals himself to the Hebrew patriarchs, it is under the same singular name revived, and such a use of the plural as to limit it to the signification of only one almighty Being. And when again God revealed himself to Moses, it was under a name which was not only in the singular number, but admitted of no plural.

Among the Canaanites there appears no trace of polytheism in the time of Abraham. Those of them mentioned in the life of that patriarch seemed to have worshipped the same God, but most likely in a defective or erroneous way. Some of them were shockingly wicked, but not so much by perverting religion as by leaving it entirely out of view. Others were really religious men, who revered the living God according to the manner of the dispensation which had been in force since the days of Noah. Abimelech of Gerar honoured the name and command of God, asked of Abraham and gave in return the solemn obligations of an oath in his name, and received and obeyed a revelation from God in respect to his own conduct, and which we learn was regarded with solemn reverence also by the heads of his people. And it is expressly stated of the king of Salem, that he was priest of the most high God.

It is clear, however, that the transition from monotheism to polytheism had, in some quarters, already commenced, and within a narrower area made considerable progress. Joshua, when addressing the Israelites, after their settlement in Canaan, enjoined them to put away the idols which their fathers had worshipped beyond the flood, that is the Euphrates, and in Egypt; and informed them definitely, that among their fathers, on the other side of the flood, it was Terah the father of Abraham and Nahor, to whom he had special reference.

But Laban, the grandson of Nahor, and great-grandson of Terah, who remained a resident in the land of his father, and apparently occupying the estate of his ancestors, when making his covenant with Jacob, mentioned the God of Abraham as also the God of Nahor, and the God of their father. Consequently, the gods to which Joshua refers as worshipped by Terah, did not occupy such a place in his worship as to render it incorrect to say that the God of Abraham was also his God, without alluding to other gods. Laban himself had minor gods, and yet worshipped the God of Jacob, received from him revelations of his will, and gave and accepted the most solemn obligations in his name alone, without allusion to the existence of any other.

It is clear that, in these cases, the gods mentioned could be only images used as helps in the worship of the one living and true God.

That most God-fearing of all generations of Hebrews, educated in the wilderness, and led by Joshua in the conquest of Canaan, still retained the images, or such images as those of Terah and Laban, and seem to have considered the use of them as not exclusive of, nor inconsistent with the service of Jehovah, until its nature was exposed before them by the expostulation of Joshua.

That such a use of images was an initiatory step of error in the service of the true God, without being viewed or intended as a departure from it, appears from several facts in Scripture history. It was a stage of transition from monotheism to polytheism, in which the former is the recognized doctrine, and the latter is only a method of symbols subordinate thereto.

Egypt was at that date only further advanced in the same career. But the next two or three hundred years wrought a great change upon the religious views and practices of all those nations. At the end of that interval, we find idol worship fully and firmly established among them all, and the true God, as far as history makes known to us, entirely lost to view. The Pharaoh of the exode insultingly asks, in the true spirit of a polytheist, who could conceive of the God of Israel as only one among many, a new god, and a stranger to his country, and whom for that reason he was under no obligation to regard,

“Who is Jehovah, that I should obey him?” And the nations of Canaan, the monotheists of the days of Abraham and of Isaac, had become base idolaters in those of Moses and Joshua. The Israelites themselves, when they came out of Egypt, had learned to think of God in the plural. When Aaron made for them the golden calf, they spoke of it as representing the plural. “These be thy gods, O Israel.” And this they do without rejecting the God of their fathers. They are themselves in the transition state from monotheism to polytheism, through which by that time most of their neighbours had passed. But just at that juncture God reveals himself anew to them, to reëstablish his worship among them, and by a new name, in the singular number. Thenceforward the Hebrews used both the singular *Jehovah*, and the plural *Elohim*, and sometimes, though more rarely and poetically, the old singular *El*; as well as some other names indicative of God. But the truth contained in the name Jehovah was to be the centre of their thoughts on the subject of Deity; and whenever they turned aside to the idea of an actual plurality of gods, divine chastisement recalled them to the revealed singular.

Other nations were left to the natural use of the original common instruction on the subject, and preserved or corrupted it according to circumstances. But the highest attainments in civilization did not constitute the circumstances of the greatest purity. The Egyptians, who were certainly at the head of all social, civil, and scientific culture, were also the furthest advanced in polytheism, while the comparatively rude Persians retained until long afterwards the main features of their simpler creed.

It is not heathenism to deny a living and personal God, nor to slight the salvation which he offers; nor is it heathenism to cherish the vain hope that man is able to deliver himself by his own power and wisdom. That is infidelity. Heathenism follows the existing religion, but adds to its observances, accumulates tangible means for faith to take hold by, and loses sight of the spiritual meaning. Heathenism is not always faith in a man's ability to secure his own salvation; it may be, as it often is, a most abject renunciation of self; but it is always a misdirected faith—a faith reposing upon something else than

the God who created the heavens and the earth. Heathenism is not infidelity, but misdirected belief. It is just corruption of revealed religion carried to such extent as to leave out its vital and saving truth. The progress to that end may be long, and may pass through various degrees; and in the course of that transition, however long, there may still remain, in the midst of much error, enough of truth to save the soul which believes it.

The mistaken humility which deems God too far exalted to be addressed immediately by his mortal creature, is the first step in the career of error. When, instead of trusting God's mercy, and approaching him in person as his child, man sets up a symbol of God with the view of worshipping thereby more reverentially, he has taken his first lesson in heathenism. As far as history can reach into the matter, a symbol, taken either from nature, or from among the honoured memories of men of ancient, and, as conceived, better times, is always the first form of idolatry.

Among the early inhabitants of Iran, when their style of living was similar to that of the Hebrew patriarchs, those of whom we have most information were the residents of its north-eastern portion. There, in, and in the neighbourhood of Bactria, at a date long antecedent to the earliest history, the fathers of the Persian and Hindu resided side by side, speaking one language, and observing the duties of the same religion; facts which, although recorded by the pen of no historian, are rendered indubitable by testimony embalmed in the remains of the languages then spoken, as well as by much that still lives in the life of their descendants; and in ancient religious writings which exist to this day. On the half-desert uplands of that oldest historic home of the Indo-European race, and after many a colony had gone off to the west and to the north, and through the glens of the mountains into central Asia, in search of more productive lands, and for the sake of material profit parted company with much of the cultivation which belonged to the place of their birth, those who afterwards became the Indian and the Persian remained until some of the original lines of distinction had been drawn between them. Of the same common descent, near of kin, and speaking languages

originally one, and still in the books of their ancient literature exhibiting their near affinity, and calling themselves by the same name, they agreed in worshipping with similar simple rites the one God of heaven and earth.

The time came when colonies of the Aryas also moved away from the salubrious climate, but scantily productive land of their nativity. Instead of following their migratory kinsmen, who had gone off to the north and west, they turned their steps to the east and south, and lingered for ages on the declivities of the mountains and in the north of the Punjab, where they were not entirely cut off from all communication with their former country. Yet their religious observances were modified by the character of their new place of abode, and in process of time became more ceremonial and complicated, but long retained the features which determined their former identity with the nation which they left behind.

The Aryas, who continued to abide by the homestead, or spread themselves abroad only to occupy more widely the great table-land on which they dwelt, as they of all their branch of mankind were the most conservative in other respects, so in this, that they retained the faith of their fathers with the least amount of adulteration. True, even in the oldest parts of the Avesta, other divine beings are mentioned besides Mazda, but they are all of inferior nature as compared with him. Except space, time, and light, which are regarded as existing from all eternity, they are all creatures of Ahura Mazda, in some cases personified attributes of deity. Of all these the highest are the Amesha-Çpentas, six divine beings most intimately connected with Ahura Mazda, of whom he is sometimes represented as the lord, and sometimes as the father. Each of them separately he presented to Zarathustra as his creature. From their names they appear to be merely personified abstractions—Vohn-mano, good disposition; Asha-vahista, the highest holiness; Khshathavairyas, unlimited lordship; Çpenta-armaiti, holy wisdom; Haurvat, plenty, and Ameretat, abundance. Together with all other mythological beings of the Avesta, they stand to Ahura Mazda as ministering spirits, not as gods. He alone is god, the lord of the Amesha-Çpentas, from whom they also proceed, or by whom they are created. Çpenta-armaiti is his

beautiful daughter; and from the word of his mouth the world first sprang into being. Ahura Mazda alone is praised as the creator, the resplendent, the majestic, the greatest, the best, and the fairest, the strongest, the wisest, possessed of the most perfect form, and the highest holiness, who created us, and preserves us in being. No other is honoured with such attributes. He is, wherever mentioned, exalted as God over all.

The mention of inferior mythological beings, whether abstractions personified or objects of nature, is much less in the Gâthas, or old hymns, than in the liturgical, which are the later parts of the Avesta, and the mention of Ahura Mazda proportionately more frequent. They are all addressed directly to him. Nor is there any division of the sovereignty which they attribute between equally balanced powers of good and evil. None of that dualism, which in long subsequent times prevailed in the east, appears in the Avesta. The Amesha-Çpentas and Mithra, the lord of light, are only as it were archangels in the train of Ahura Mazda. He is God, not as first, but as sole, as entirely different from them in his being and perfections. As the first chapter of the Yaçna begins with his attributes, so its last extols him as the greatest of all, the lord and master and the glorious in majesty. In the hymns, the names Ahura and Mazda, or combined Ahura-mazda, occur as frequently as Lord and God in the Hebrew Psalms.

The ancient Persian writings state that their religion was at several distant periods corrupted or repressed, and restored by succeeding reformation. It was not without effort that they maintained that particular type of religion. In the inscriptions of Darius Hystaspes, about five hundred years before Christ, we find it in its simplest form. It appears to have passed through some corruption, and enjoyed revival in that reign. No prince, in his public records, ever gave more distinct expression to a sense of dependence upon Almighty aid—of indebtedness to the grace of Him who rules the heavens and the earth, than that Augustus of the oriental world.

In the inscriptions which he has left carved upon the rocks of Behistan, that confession of his faith is repeated in almost every section. And he does not leave us to conceive of the God whom he worshipped as a creature. "A great God," says

he, "is Auramazda, who made the earth, who made the heaven, who created men, and provided blessedness for them, who made Darius king, the sole king over many." Little mention is made of other gods, and that of them as inferior, and as worshipped by different nations. Auramazda is declared to be the greatest over all gods. He alone is the sovereign, as well as the creator of heaven and earth and of men. And in all the success which the great king records of his reign, the praise is never taken to himself, but invariably ascribed to God. When his enemies rose against him, Auramazda became his refuge; and when he won the victory, it was by the grace of Auramazda. "Through the might of Auramazda am I king." "Through the grace of Auramazda do I rule this kingdom." These and such expressions recur frequently throughout his inscriptions. And his final lesson, yet speaking from the rocks on which he caused it to be written, is an exhortation to reverence the commands of Auramazda. There can be no doubt that the religion of Darius and of his Persian people was not polytheism, but the worship of the Creator, and in some degree according to the creed of the old patriarchal times, before the call of Abraham. In this case we behold that ancient creed brought down to the verge of Hellenic maturity. And that the doctrine was not peculiar to Darius, he informs us himself, when setting it forth as the ancient religion of his nation. It also appears in the quick sympathy of Cyrus with the monotheistic Jews, and the ridicule which Cambyses and his Persians poured upon the idols of the polytheistic Egyptians, and the favour of the Persian kings to the Hebrews throughout.

The language of Cyrus in issuing his decree for allowing all Israelites to return to their own land, is entirely analogous to that of Darius, as respects dependence upon God. He does not speak of himself as having conquered his great empire; but "the God of heaven hath given me all the kingdoms of the earth." *Ezra* i. 2.

In native hands the tendency of corruption in this monotheism manifested itself in the sacred use of fire as in some way symbolical of God, and which was probably connected with the idea that the noblest and most worthy symbol of the Creator

was the sun, as the material source of light and heat, and support of animal and vegetable life. But I do not find in these ancient books that God is ever confounded with the sun. That great orb is spoken of as the creature or the offspring of God. He is the fire or the son of Auramazda.

In the case of the Aryas who went into India, this symbolizing spirit had, at the date of the earliest hymns of the Veda, gone to a greater length; but still not so far as materially to obscure the doctrine of one only God. Although somewhat confused in their ideas by the incipient polytheism of their time, the poets of those ancient hymns fall into the way of addressing God as one and alone. Especially is this the case in hymns to Varuna, the oldest name of God in the Vedic language. I quote some extracts from translations by Professor Müller. We shall find them less purely and sublimely monotheistic than the inscriptions of Darius or the unfaltering declarations of Genesis; but sufficiently decided to demonstrate the existence of the habit of thinking of God as one. And the light in which to judge them truly is that of the progress of Hindu religion in succeeding time. That progress, instead of being towards monotheism, was directly the reverse. Every step in it was a growth in polytheism, until the religion of India became a wilderness of idolatry as tangled and boundless as that of Egypt. It is in the line of that progress that we find the oldest parts the nearest to monotheism.

9. "He who knows the track of the wind, of the wide, the bright and mighty, and knows those who reside on high,

10. "He, the upholder of order, Varuna, sits down among his people; he the wise sits there to govern.

11. "From thence perceiving all wondrous things, he sees what has been, and what will be done."

15. "He who gives to men glory, and not half glory, who gives it even to our own bodies,

16. "Yearning for him, the far-seeing my thoughts move onwards as kine move to their pastures."

19. "O hear this my calling, Varuna be gracious now; longing for help I have called upon thee.

20. "Thou, O wise God, art lord of all, of heaven and earth; listen on thy way."

From another hymn to Varuna, we read the declaration that under that name was adored the Creator.

“Wise and mighty are the works of him who stemmed asunder the wide firmament. He lifted on high the bright and glorious heaven, he stretched out apart the starry sky and the earth.”

Again he is addressed as the god who has mercy for sinners.

1. “Let me not yet, O Varuna, enter into the house of clay: have mercy, almighty, have mercy.

2. “If I go along trembling, like a cloud driven by the wind; have mercy, almighty, have mercy.

3. “Through want of strength, thou strong and bright god, have I gone to the wrong shore: have mercy, almighty, have mercy.

4. “Thirst came upon the worshipper, though he stood in the midst of the waters; have mercy, almighty, have mercy.

5. “Whenever we men, O Varuna, commit an offense before the heavenly host; whenever we break thy law through thoughtlessness; have mercy, almighty, have mercy.”

Were all the Vedic hymns such as these, we should pronounce the religion in whose service they were produced a pure monotheism. But there are also hymns which have equal evidence of antiquity addressed to other divine beings. In each case the god is addressed as sovereign. But I remark, in reading the translations of Professor Müller, that there is a difference between the sovereignty ascribed to Varuna and that of any other god. When adoration is paid to Indra or to Agni, the god is represented as the possessor of certain attributes of sovereignty. He is addressed as almighty; but that almighty power is invoked in reference to his own special jurisdiction. But Varuna is the absolute sovereign, the lord of all, of heaven and of earth. In the following extracts from a hymn to Indra, the feature now mentioned will be observed.

3. “Desirous of riches, I call him, who holds the thunderbolt with his arm, and who is a good giver, like as a son calls his father.

4. “These libations of Soma, mixed with milk, have been prepared for Indra. Thou armed with the thunderbolt, come with the steeds to drink of them for thy delight; come to the house.

5. "May he hear us; for he has ears to hear. He is asked for riches. Will he despise our prayers? He could soon give hundreds and thousands: no one could check him if he wishes to give."

8. "Offer Soma to the drinker of Soma, to Indra, the lord of the thunderbolt; roast roasts: make him to protect us. Indra, the giver, is a blessing to him who gives oblations."

13. "Make for the sacred gods a hymn that is not small, that is well set and beautiful. Many snares pass by him who abides with Indra, through the sacrifice."

14. "What mortal dares to attack him, who is rich in thee? Through faith in thee, O mighty, the strong acquires spoil in the day of battle."

22. "We call for thee, O hero, like cows that have not been milked. We praise thee as ruler of all that moves, O Indra, as ruler of all that is immovable."

23. "There is no one like thee in heaven or earth: he is not born, and will not be born. O mighty Indra, we call upon thee, as we go fighting for cows and horses."

26. "Indra, give wisdom to us, as a father to his sons. Teach us in this path. Let us living see the sun."

27. "Let not unknown wretches, evil-disposed and unhallowed, tread me down. Through thy help, O hero, let us step over the rushing eternal waters."

"In this hymn," remarks Professor Müller, "Indra is clearly conceived of as the supreme god; and we can hardly understand how a people, who had formed so exalted a notion of the deity, and embodied it in the person of Indra, could, at the same sacrifice, invoke other gods with equal praise. When Agni, the lord of fire, is addressed by the poet, he is spoken of as the first god, not inferior even to Indra. While Agni is invoked, Indra is forgotten. There is no competition between the two, nor any rivalry between them and other gods. This is a most important feature in the religion of the Veda, and has never been taken into consideration by those who have written on the history of ancient polytheism."

It is obvious that in these hymns we listen to the language of a people, who, inheriting the worship of one god, are passing over to the practice of paying their adoration to several. They

have not yet learned to divide, or discriminate between different kinds and degrees of worship. Whatever being is adored as god, is conceived of for the time as almighty. Their language of religion, and their predominant habit of religious thought, are those which belong to the worship of only one god. The use of the plural of God they have acquired to the extent that they worship different persons; but the correspondent style of adoration has not yet entered consistently into their religious formulas. It has not yet transformed their religious thinking into consistency with itself. Admitting the existence of various gods, they address each of them, in separate hymns, as if he were the only one. In fact most of them, translated by Professor Müller, are only personifications of divine attributes. Under different names the poets of the hymns actually sang the praise of the same god in the exercise of different attributes.

To a great extent their deification of certain objects of nature is still only the work of figurative language—a bold personification, such as a poet might indulge in without blame, were it not united to the worship of God under that particular form—one of the steps from the wonder created by observation of nature to idolatry of her objects. The following hymn to Agni (*ignis*), fire, will illustrate this remark.

“Neighing like a horse that is greedy for food, when it steps out from the strong prison: then the wind blows after his blast: thy path, O Agni, is dark at once.

“O Agni, thou from whom, as a new-born male, undying flames proceed, the brilliant smoke goes toward the sky; for as messenger thou art sent from the gods.

“Thou, whose power spreads over the earth in a moment, when thou hast grasped food with thy jaws—like a dashing army thy blast moves forth, with thy lambent flame thou seemest to tear up the grass.

“Him alone, the ever youthful Agni, men groom like a horse in the evening and at dawn: they bed him as a stranger in his couch; the light of Agni, the worshipped male is lighted.

“Thy appearance is fair to behold, thou bright-faced Agni, when like gold thou shinest at hand; thy brightness comes like

the lightning of heaven, thou showest splendour like the bright sun."

The process observable here, as in other hymns of the Veda, is that of first wonder at the mysterious operation of nature, then the ascription of it to the power of life: it is then personified as human and intelligent, and lastly conceived of as divine—as the very presence and person of God.

Comparatively the number of such objects of worship, in the most ancient Veda, is small. Subsequent development enlarged their number, until in course of time it went beyond all bounds, while degrading the practical worship to the grossest idolatry, and separating and abstracting the idea of absolute deity to the state of a great eternal negation of all limitations. On the contrary, the idea of God presented in the most ancient Vedic hymns is, like that in Genesis, a being whom man can love, who stoops to treat men as his children, walking in the garden in the cool of the day, directing Noah to prepare an ark for the safety of his family, talking with Abraham as a man talks with his friend; so "Varuna, the upholder of order, sits down among his people; he the wise sits there to govern." He listens to their wants, and from his love to them is influenced by their prayers and pleased with their songs. And they address him as one who can be so moved: "However we break thy laws from day to day, men as we are, O god Varuna, do not deliver us unto death, nor to the blow of the furious; nor to the anger of the spiteful. To propitiate thee, O Varuna, we bind thy mind with songs as a charioteer a weary steed." There are still here some features of the style of thinking of God which belonged to the early time, when God manifested his presence and revealed his will to men by theophany. He has not yet become a mere idol, nor a far-off impassive abstraction. And although other gods are admitted, the idea of the godhead being one, still holds its place. True, it is almost inevitable that even in the grossest polytheism, some god should not be esteemed above the rest; but it is one thing to conceive of a chief among gods, or over them, and a very different thing, even from the midst of incipient polytheism, to look up to one God as the alone ruler of heaven and earth, with power undivided, and all other beings as only the ministers of his will, as

everywhere present and yet personal, and as working in all and through all, without losing himself in any.

At the date of the oldest Vedic hymns, the progress towards nature worship, among the Aryans of India, had reached the stage of apotheosis of the sun, of fire, of the clear sky, of the dawn, and of some other phenomena, and yet not the length of forgetting that these are only agencies accomplishing the will of the only true and spiritual God. In each of them is adored the power of the Almighty.

A very similar stage of progress is exhibited upon the monuments of ancient Nineveh. Although many mythological objects are there depicted, yet worship is paid to only one in heaven and one on the earth, which both clearly refer to the same god. The winged wheel in heaven, and a conventional figure on earth, seeming to represent vegetation, sometimes appear together, and sometimes singly, but always as objects of worship, which is paid to nothing else.

Of the antiquity of those monuments our estimate may be very wide of the truth; but they are probably of a date less than a thousand years prior to the Christian era, and they cannot be less than seven hundred. And as the whole tendency of religious history in those lands, in those times, was to the multiplication of objects of worship, such testimony seems distinctly to declare the monotheism of earlier times.

On the oldest monuments of Egypt the progress of polytheism is further advanced; but even there the marks of an original monotheism are not entirely effaced. Of all historical countries, Egypt is the oldest in idolatry—the mother of errors and corruptions in religion, which spread abroad to her neighbours of ancient times, and many of which survive to this day. There is no date upon her monuments so ancient as to precede her idolatry. And yet even the monumental history of that idolatry evinces a progress which must have had its beginning in monotheism.

In her ancient history, Egypt was not all one country, but several; each great city being the seat of government for the adjoining district of greater or less extent. Thus Zoan, Bubastis, On, Memphis, Choïs, and Thebes, were all at one time or another seats of a monarchy. Almost every great city was at

the head of a certain jurisdiction of its own, all of which together went to make Egypt; and each of those great cities, growing up from its own proper basis by its own proper progress, as if it were a separate country, had its one god. Memphis worshipped Phtah, On worshipped Ra, and Thebes, Amun. They were each anciently monotheistic in themselves. The union of all Egypt under one crown comprehended all those cities, with their respective gods, in one country. And Egypt became polytheistic at once by the very act of union. When Thebes became the capital of the whole country, she set up her god as the chief god in all parts of it; but did not prevent the old provincial cities from each retaining their own, which were in some cases combined with Amun, thereby giving rise to new gods. Thus objects of worship were multiplied in that country by the very means whereby the nation grew. And yet, after all, certain great common impressions of God exhibit themselves in the religion of the whole people. High above all, the worship of one God, as symbolized by the sun, was supreme. In order to a just apprehension of this fact, it is indispensable to emancipate one's mind from the ideas presented by the monuments of later times, and the writings of Greeks, who knew Egypt only in her decline, and to limit attention to testimonies of the truly ancient alone.

A pervading passion of the Egyptian people was that of representing or picturing everything to the eye. Figures of the animate and inanimate, of the brute and human, were combined, blended, or transposed to subserve that end. The products of hero-worship and of nature-worship are mingled in their later mythology, incongruously and monstrously; but, over and above all, the one god everywhere recognized in Egypt is the sun, or more correctly, perhaps, God as represented by the sun. The image of the sun is the commonest of all Egyptian images, from one end of the land to the other, and in all ages of its history; and attributes belonging to the same great natural symbol are embodied in the oldest gods created by the impulse of hero-worship. And the same is evinced in the fact that the early mythology of Egypt is simpler, less numerous than the later; and the earliest the simplest.

Among the primitive Hamitic inhabitants of Syria, idolatry made great progress after the time of Jacob, and the Israelites upon their return from Egypt found them sunk in the depths of that error. And yet, for centuries afterwards, a witness and remnant of original monotheism retained its place in the almost single devotion which the Sidonians and other principal nations of Syria paid to him whom they called the Lord, pronounced in their different dialects, Habaal, Baal, Bal, and Bel.

All the most ancient extant authorities on the subject either speak to us from an actual period of primitive monotheism, or point back to it as the immediately antecedent out of which they have come. And when compared with succeeding authorities in the same line of succession, in no case do we find the progress to be in the direction of a purer monotheism, but the contrary. The progress is in all cases, where there is progress, towards a multiplication of gods, and the increase of distinctions between them; so that in some quarters they become almost innumerable, and the distance between the highest and the lowest infinite. The cases where there was no progress were those which remained monotheistic.

The doctrine of coëternally existing powers of good and evil does not occur in those ancient books. Evil is viewed simply as a violation of the law of God, by an agent free to obey or disobey. This is not more distinct in the book of Genesis than in the ancient hymns of the Veda and of the Yaçna.

From those same most ancient authorities it also appears that the early idea of God was that of his being a spirit, all-powerful and everywhere present, immaculately holy, inflexibly just, and yet tender in his love to those who forsake their sins and worship him as he requires. He is at once a being of severe justice, and yet of tender mercy to all who call upon him in truth. In all those ancient books alike is he presented as a God who bates sin, is angry with the sinner, and who loves and rewards the righteous.

Man is presented as the creature of God, as capable of righteousness; but as having sinned, and forfeited the favour of God thereby. This condition is held by all those books alike, as belonging to the whole race of mankind. Men are viewed as

guilty not only of actually committed wrong, but also as under the burden of inherited guilt. "Was it an old sin, O Varuna, that thou wishest to destroy thy friend, who always praises thee? Tell me, thou unconquerable lord, and I will quickly turn to thee from praise freed from sin. Absolve us from the sins of our fathers, and from those which we committed with our own bodies."* In the book of Genesis alone is the origin of that inheritance recounted, or the cause set forth; but in all is the fact admitted. Man is viewed in them all as a helpless sinner, dependent for any righteous act he may do, for any success he may attain, for any happiness he may enjoy, for deliverance from the penalty due to his transgressions, solely to the mercy of God.

God was expected to be merciful to those who approached him with sacrifice, with offering of something precious to themselves, or held to be acceptable to God; but especially with the shedding of blood, which was the central observance of religion. At the same time he was invoked with prayers, and with hymns of supplication, of adoration, of confession, petition, and thanksgiving. In those early days, beautiful songs newly composed were believed to be eminently prevalent with the divine mind. The same fundamental elements of worship were observed by individuals for themselves, and by the heads of families for their households, and by nations in public. Sacrifice was the radical observance alike in family and national worship. Noah, as soon as he issued from the ark, built an altar to the Lord; so Abraham, when taking up his residence in Canaan, consecrated the place of his abode; and with the successive heirs of the promise made to him, the altar was the sacred adjunct of the homestead. Among their neighbours, those who are mentioned as worshipping God, observed the same forms. No allusion occurs to a religion of any other type in that time.

The ministers of that early religion were not a separate caste, or tribe, or profession; but those whose natural relations pointed them out for that office. The individual offered prayers and sacrifice for himself, the father was the priest of his family,

* From a Vedic hymn, given in Müller's *History of Sanscrit Literature*, p. 541.

the head of the tribe performed the service of the tribe, and the king was the high priest of the nation; and it was through the same persons that, when God vouchsafed a special revelation, it was made. The ruler, the priest, and the prophet were one. It was a patriarchal system, falling in entirely with the primitive arrangements of social order. In Genesis this is clear and indisputable. The date at which the Vedic and Avestan hymns were collected was later, namely, that of an incipient legal priesthood; but some of the hymns themselves, and certain hereditary practices, such as that touching the Agni hymns of the Veda, whereby different families had their own proper selections for sacrifice, seem to point back to an origin in an earlier patriarchal system, when each family conducted its own religious service through its own patriarchal priest.* And the place which the king occupies on the religious monuments of ancient Egypt and Nineveh testifies to the same original state of the ministry in those nations.

The prayers and praise were unwritten, and the sacrifice performed with the simplest traditional rites, on an altar in the open air, and unconnected with any temple structure.

To what extent the early fathers of the nations understood the meaning of sacrifice, or apprehended the promise implied in it, or, if they did rightly understand it, how long their descendants retained that knowledge, does not appear; but that the radical doctrines now mentioned, and forms of worship, were the same in all those ancient nations, is now put beyond reasonable doubt.

In thus adducing the testimony of the book of Genesis with that of the ancient Vedic and Avestan hymns, we would not be understood as putting it on the same level with them; but we certainly do not rank it beneath them. If they are to be taken, as they must be, for authorities touching the oldest religion of the prophetic branch of mankind, it is as truly to be accepted for the most ancient type of religion among the Hamitic and Semitic nations. And the interesting fact deduced by comparison of them, is the sameness of the original creed of all man-

* The magi are not once mentioned in the Avesta. The name for priest which occurs there is *Athrava*.—*Spiegel, Intro. to Yaçna*, p. vi.

kind—the most gratifying assurance that our race, for many ages in the early time, as a whole, worshipped the true God of revelation, in the way of his appointment, and held the fundamental doctrines of sin and redemption. Men were not all cast off from the beginning, except a particular family, and left to grope their way to as much of truth as they could find; but, on the contrary, were all alike put on the footing of the same revelation. The primitive dispensation of Divine mercy was one addressed to all mankind. That first way of God's dealing with men, when the king, priest, and prophet were one, in which Melchizedek was conspicuous, if he was not also the last to observe it in its purity, was limited to no specially favoured nation, but addressed itself equally to all. How long it was retained by the different nations correctly, we cannot say; but certainly in its proper features, in some quarters, until the days of Abraham. And even the corruption which fell upon it during the succeeding two or three centuries, was not greater than that which befel the Christian church in the dark ages of European history. And if, as we feel assured there was, even in the depths of papal degeneracy, still enough of truth remaining to save the soul which apprehended it in faith, is it extravagant to believe that God had his true people among those who worshipped him according to the matter and the manner of the old economy, while the old economy was in force, although they were not of the seed of Shem, nor of the family of Terah?

God had never, at any period, left the world without a valid dispensation of his merey. The old Noachic covenant was not suffered to become void before the Abrahamic was instituted. While the former still retained the life-giving power, the latter was formed to prepare for the evil days which were coming in the sequel of the error already working. As Christ did not delay his coming until Jerusalem and the temple were destroyed, and the Jewish system utterly abolished, so the Abrahamic dispensation is opened while the preceding is still in force. God has never allowed any dispensation to become so corrupt as to completely submerge all saving truth, before setting on foot an efficient means of reforming it. Corrupt as the Jewish

church was at the coming of the Lord, it still contained the means of salvation. There were still Elizabeths, and Annas, and Simeons to welcome him when he came. And low as the idolatry to which the mediæval church descended, it still carried its sacred message to the hearts of some. And all were not lost who clung to its forms after the first step had been taken in reformation. So in the primitive period, we feel constrained to believe that God may have had his people among every branch of mankind; and that, even when much corruption had contaminated the truth, there may still have been some who saw in the forms of worship their spiritual meaning, and received its message in their hearts.

By what date corruption had progressed so far as entirely to leave out or defeat all such truth, it is perhaps impossible to determine—ancient heathenism certainly reached that degree—but in the pre-Mosaic time, we may be free to believe that multitudes were saved for God out of every land and nation, in accordance with the old Noachic covenant; that God had then his people among the sons of Japhet and of Ham, as well as of Shem—on the highlands of Iran and of Assyria, as well as in Mesopotamia and the land of Canaan. And it is pleasant to believe that the early message of salvation may have been carried, in many a heart and on many a tongue, long and far, among emigrating tribes on their protracted migrations. Corruption, in some countries earlier and in some later, but in every historical case to greater or less degree, built up her complication of falsehoods; but all upon the basis of the same original creed. Heathenism is man's development of God's revelation; and is related to the ancient dispensations as Romanism to the Christian.