The Study of Sanskrit [=Über Sanskritforschung <Engl.>]

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EPITOMES OF THREE SCIENCES

COMPARATIVE PHILOLOGY, PSYCHOLOGY,

AND

OLD TESTAMENT HISTORY.

H. OLDENBERG

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PREFATORY.

This little book, *Epitomes of Three Sciences*, gives an account of the recent work done in three different fields of modern knowledge; viz., Comparative Philology, Experimental Psychology, and Old Testament History. These three sciences have an almost direct bearing upon the religious views of our time, in spite of their difference of subject and the divergence of their authors' standpoints.*

This preface is intended to explain in a few words the relation in which Comparative Philology, Experimental Psychology, and Biblical History stand to one another.

Philology treats of language; and it is language that has created man and human society. It is speech that distinguishes the soul of man from the souls of brute creation. We shall never understand the mystery of man's dignity, his superiority and dominion over the rest of the animal world upon earth, until we have acquired an insight into the growth of the human soul as mirrored in the evolution of human speech. Language is not, as has been supposed in former times, a supernatural phenomenon; it is of natural growth; and nothing elucidates this truth more than Comparative Philology, which demonstrates that where at first sight the whims of fanciful invention or wilful caprice seemed to reign, in reality definite laws obtain, shaping the development of our speech in all its innumerable phases and changes.

The same holds good of Psychology. The human mind is of natural growth, and the various caprices of the soul that at first.

*It need scarcely be added that every one of the three authors is an authority in his specialty, and that none of these essays was written with any other purpose in view than that of summing up the present state of things in their three several departments.
sight appear to contradict all rule and method, and stand forth as seeming exceptions to the general order of nature, can after all be classified, demonstrated, and reproduced by experiment. This it is that modern Psychology has attempted to do, and the attempts to a great extent have been successful.

Who can doubt that the results arrived at are of the greatest importance for the future development of religion? The problem, What is the human soul? must be fearlessly faced by Theology; it cannot be blinked. The progress of science puts new problems to the defenders of religion, and our moral teachers cannot pass them by in silence. They cannot ignore them.

We have the firm confidence that the kernel of all religion, which is the moral truth that it contains, will remain unshaken through every new discovery and through every broadening of our scientific horizon. The religious teacher, that is to say the moral instructor of mankind, be he a Christian clergyman or a Rabbi, or the leader of an ethical society, need not fear for the great treasures that are entrusted to his care. The moral truths will, we are fully convinced, never suffer from the critical and most radical investigations of science. This the third essay teaches, which is a resumé of the critical investigations of the Old Testament and the stories of the Old Testament.

The author of the third essay is an orthodox Christian believer. This fact must be mentioned, chiefly to prevent the possible misconception that Professor Cornill's standpoint is the same as that of The Open Court. But it has another and greater significance. It proves that the criticism of the Old Testament is not conducted in rashness or in a spirit of hostility, but with scientific sincerity. The historical records of the Old Testament are searched with the same love and at the same time impartial scrutiny that any philological scholar ever bestowed upon Homer or Hesiod. Professor Cornill applies the principles of scientific research to the Bible, and he finds that the Old Testament loses none of its value in ceasing to be an absolutely reliable and lit-
erally inspired revelation from God. The Old Testament, as he takes it, is imperfect; because it had to find and did find its fulfillment in the New Testament. He declares that no conflict is possible between belief and knowledge; because believing and knowing are different.

We go one step farther than Professor Cornill, and we apprehend that the Theology of the future will have to follow us in our path. We look upon the New Testament in exactly the same light that Professor Cornill regards the Old Testament. The Biblical books do not lose one iota of their value because the view that they are literally inspired has, from the standpoint of modern scientific inquiry, become untenable. On the contrary, by understanding their historical growth we shall appreciate the better their grandeur and importance, without being offended at the imperfections that naturally attach to them.

Many are the conflicts between belief and science, if belief means imperfect knowledge: belief always has to give way to, and must attempt to develop into, scientific knowledge. Yet there can never be a conflict between faith and science, if faith means man's fidelity to, his confidence in, his love for, the moral ideal. Every progress of science gives us new knowledge, and will accordingly alter some of our beliefs; but it will never alter our moral aspirations—or, if it alters them, the change will be for the better; it will purify them, it will make them nobler and more humane.

There are Jewish Rabbis who, though they have no New Testament which they look upon as a fulfilment of the Old, accept the results of modern critical research as regards their own sacred scriptures; and yet their religion is not destroyed in this way. The kernel of religion consists in its moral truths; and the moral truths remain the same in the Biblical books, nay, are better appreciated if scientific criticism has cleared them from the briars and brambles of errors. No scriptural authority ought to be exempt from criticism. Let us, therefore, not hesitate to acknowl-
edge the principle of scientific research for the New Testament just as much as has been done for the Old Testament. Says Professor Cornill: "To that which has been acquired through strict and methodical scientific research, we are bound to bow unconditionally." And this is universally true, not only in all scriptural investigations, but also in the researches of the natural sciences, and especially in the science of soul-life.

Thus, modern Psychology throws a new light upon the problems of the soul. Long cherished errors are dispelled and a scientific insight is gained into the nature of the human mind. The situation is as thoroughly altered as our conception of the universe was in the times of Copernicus, when the geocentric standpoint had to be abandoned.

Modern psychology will influence the religious development of humanity in no less a degree than modern astronomy has done. At first sight the new truths seem appalling, and it appears difficult to renounce the egocentric standpoint. However, a closer acquaintance with the modern solutions of the problems of soul-life shows, that, instead of destroying religion, they place it upon a firmer foundation than it ever before possessed.

This little volume, Epitomes of Three Sciences, is not intended as a solution of the religious problem. It is a contribution only, to help the student in the gathering of material that will prove useful in the attempt to work out a solution.

There is a new Religion dawning upon mankind in which belief will become unnecessary because faith will have taken the place of belief. The old religions are in a state of transition; their dogmas are now recognized as unbelievable monstrosities irreconcilable with science. A superficial observer might declare that science will destroy all religion. Yet it is not so. Science is hostile to religion and to the antiquated dogmas of religion only because it is about to create a new religion, and the new religion will not come to destroy, but to fulfil, the old religions.

Editor of The Open Court.
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THE STUDY OF SANSKRIT.
INTRODUCTION.

The work of investigation in the language and literature of Ancient India, the development of which the following pages attempt to portray, has also in America long since acquired the rights of citizenship. A band of distinguished American scholars stands in the first rank among the laborers in this common work of investigation. We have sought in the following presentation to estimate the services of Böhtlingk and Roth, who produced the great Sanskrit Dictionary: we must add that by the side of this most excellent lexical production there stands a Grammar of the Sanskrit language, of modest compass compared with the monumental dimensions of the work first-mentioned, yet of not less fundamental importance.

The scholar to whom we are indebted for this Grammar, is the head of the American Sankritists—William D. Whitney. Whitney it was that first attempted to get at the meaning of, and to present the data of Sanskrit grammar, the exuberant inflectional systems of the Indian Noun and the Indian Verb as they actually exist in the literature of the language, and not as they appear, full of distortions mingled with phantasies of every description, in the theories of the native Indian grammarians. The investigator of the often so enigmatic texts of the Veda, the comparative philologist that seeks to explain the obscure formations of the Greek and Teutonic tongues by the aid of the light that Sanskrit sheds upon them, finds himself obliged, at every step, to have recourse to the grammatical data that the industry of Whitney has gathered and that Whitney's acumen has placed in their proper light.
The German author of the following essay believes that he can preface the same with no better word of introduction than by the expression of his admiration and gratitude for the aid and advancement that he has constantly received from the labors of his American friends and colleagues. It is to be hoped that the intimate and fruitful coöperation that has ever obtained between the Sanskrit scholars of Germany and America shall also, in the future, continue and endure; to the manifold advantage of the investigation of these venerable monuments of primitive Indian civilization.

H. Oldenberg.

KIEL, October 20, 1889.
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The study of Sanskrit, the science of the antiquities of India, is about a century old. It was in the year 1784 that a number of men acting in Calcutta as judges or administrative officers of the East India Company, formed themselves into a scientific society, the Asiatic Society. We may say that the founding of the Asiatic Society was contemporaneous with the rise of a new branch of historical inquiry, the possibility of which preceding generations had barely or never thought of.

Englishmen began the work; soon it was taken up by other nations; and in the course of time, in a much greater degree than is the case with the study of hieroglyphic and cuneiform inscriptions, it has become ever more distinctly a branch of inquiry peculiarly German.

The little band of workers who are busy in the workshops of this department of science, have not been accustomed to have the eyes of other men turned upon their doings—their successes and failures. But, in spite, nay, rather in consequence of this, it is right that an attempt should be made to invite even the most disinterested to an inspection of these places of industry, and to point out and show to them, piece by piece, the work, or at least part of the work, that has been done in them.

There still lies formless in the workshops of this department of inquiry many a block of unhewn stone,
which perhaps will forever resist the shaping hand. But still, under the active chisel, many a form has become visible, from whose features distant times and the past life of a strange people look down upon us—a people who are related to us, yet whose ways are so far removed in every respect from our ways.

We shall first cast a glance at the beginning of Indian research toward the close of the last century. We shall trace the way in which the new science, after the first hasty survey of its territory, at once concentrated its efforts to a more profound investigation of its subject and advanced to an incomparably broader plane of study. We shall, above all, follow the difficult course pursued in the study of the Veda, the most important of the literary remains of ancient India, a production with which even the works of the oldest Buddhism are not to be compared in point of historical importance. Of the problems that this science encountered, of its aspirations, and of the successes that attended its efforts in solving difficult questions, we may venture to give a description, or at least an outline.

I.

The first effective impulse to the study of Sanskrit and Sanskrit literature was given by Sir William Jones, who, in 1783, embarked for India to assume the post of Judge of the Supreme Court of Judicature at Fort William. The honor of having inaugurated a new era of philological inquiry, was heightened by the lustre and charm of personal character which this gifted and versatile man exerted upon his contemporaries. In prose and in verse Jones is extolled by his
friends of both sexes as the phœnix of his time, "the most enlightened of the sons of men"—encomiums many of which a calmer and more distant observer would be inclined to modify. The correspondence and other memoranda of Jones, which exist in great abundance,* furnish the reader of to-day rather the picture of an indefatigable and euphuistic dilettante, than that of an earnest investigator,—apart from the fact that he was alike greatly deficient in discernment and zeal.

As a young man we find Jones engaged in reading and reproducing in English verse, the works of Persian and Arabian poets; occasionally also with glimpses into Chinese literature. Then, again, a project of his own, an heroic epic—a sort of new Æneid, for which, and certainly with ingenuity enough, the Phœnician mythological deities were impressed into service—was to celebrate the perfections of the English constitution. On the journey to India this man of thirty-seven sketched a catalogue of the works, which, God granting him life, he hoped to write after celebrated models. These models were carefully designated opposite the separate projects of the outline. By the side of this heroic epic (after the pattern of Homer), we find a history of the war with America (after the patterns of Thucydides and Polybius), a philosophical and historical dialogue (after the pattern of Plato), and other plans of similar works.

With this feeling of omnipotent self-assurance, wholly untroubled with doubts, Jones was placed in India before the task of opening a way into the gigan-

*Edited by his biographer, Lord Teignmouth, and often given with more completeness than appears advisable considering the panegyrical character of the biography.
tic masses of an unknown literature, of a strange and beautiful poetry. He was as well qualified for the purpose (perhaps in a higher degree so) as many a more earnest and gifted scholar might have been.

The situation of affairs which he found in India forced it upon the European rulers of the land as a duty, to acquaint themselves with the Sanskrit language and its literature. The rapid extension and at the same time the redoubled activity of the English rule made it inconceivable that the existence of the old indigenous civilization and literature of the nation could long remain ignored or merely superficially recognized.

Preëminently did this necessity assert itself in the administration of justice, where the policy of the East India Company imperatively demanded that the natives should be suffered to retain as many of their laws and customs as it were possible to concede them. Already, in an act of parliament passed in 1772 in regard to the affairs of the company, a measure had been incorporated, at the suggestion of Warren Hastings, providing that Mohammedan and Indian lawyers should take part in court proceedings, in order to give effect to native laws and assist in the formulation of judgments. The dependence that thus resulted, of European judges upon the reliability or unreliability of Indian pandits, must have been trying indeed, to the conscientious jurist; for the assertions of Indian councillors as to the principles of the Law of inheritance, contract, etc., contained in the native books, were subject to no control.

Warren Hastings, in order to obviate the difficulty, had a digest made by several Brahmancical jurisconsults from the old Sanskrit law books, and this was
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translated into English. The undertaking had but little success, principally because no European was to be found who could translate directly from the Sanskrit. A translation had first to be made from Sanskrit into Persian and from Persian again into English.* The necessity therefore of gaining direct access to the Sanskrit language was unquestionable. The undertaking was not an easy one, though it was still quite different from such apparently impossible feats of philological ingenuity as the deciphering of hieroglyphic and cuneiform inscriptions.

The knowledge and likewise the use of Sanskrit in India had lived on in unbroken tradition.† There were countless pandits who knew Sanskrit as well as the scholars of the Middle Ages knew Latin, and who were eminently competent to teach the language. It was easy to overcome the opposing Brahmanical prejudices. To become master, however, of the obstacles which emanated from the indescribably intricate and perverted grammatical system‡ of the Hindus, offered greater difficulties, which could be only overcome by patience and enthusiasm.

Just at the first moments of this trouble came the arrival of Sir William Jones in India. Immediately he was the central figure. From him came the founding of the Asiatic Society; from him, the impulse to a new revision of the Hindu law of contract and inheri-

*Published in 1776, under the title, "A Code of Gentoo Law."
†This is the case at the present time. Compare, upon this point, Max Müller's "India what can it teach us" p. 78 et seq.
‡The original complaint of Paulinus a S. Bartholomaeo, a missionary in India about the time of Jones, is well known.—"The devil, with a phenomenal display of ingenuity and craft, had incited the Brahmanical sages to invent a language so rich and so complex, that its mysteries might be concealed not only from the people at large, but even from the very scholars who were conversant with it."
tance, this time undertaken on a surer basis. He assembled about him competent Brahmans versed in Sanskrit. In the year 1790 he wrote: "Every day I talk Sanskrit with the pandits; I hope before I leave India to understand it as I understand Latin."

It was not now a question of research, but of acquisition, of study; that clear and satisfactory results might rapidly be acquired, and that a proper selection of noteworthy productions of the Hindu mind might be made and presented before the eyes of all. Jones translated the most delightful of all Hindu dramas, the story of the touching fate of the ascetic maiden, Sakuntala, who in the sylvan quiet of her retreat was seen and loved by the kingly hunter Dushjanta—a work, full of the most delicate sentiment, exhaling fragrance like the summer splendor of Indian Nature, and sung in the delicate rhythms of Kalidasa, of inspired eloquence.*

Still more important than the version of Sakuntala was the publication of a second great work, which Jones translated, the Laws of Manu. It seemed as though a Lycurgus of a primitive oriental era had come to light; for this wonderful picture of a strange people's life was ascribed to the remotest antiquity—a description of Brahmanical rule by the grace of Brahma, magnified and distorted by priestly pride, in which the people are nothing, the prince is little, the priest is everything. In the face of such an abruptly accumulated mass of unexpected revelations, respecting an an-

*It was formerly thought, for reasons that have not withstood the assault of criticism, that Kalidasa flourished in the first century before Christ; it was the custom to compare him to the Roman poets of the Augustan era, whose contemporaries he in that event would about have been. In point of fact he must be assigned to an era several centuries later,—about the sixth century after Christ.
cient civilization hitherto removed from all knowledge, how could one resist an attempt to give to that civilization and its language a place among known civilizations and languages? Wherever the eye turned weighty and pregnant suggestions offered themselves, and with them the temptation to let fancy stray in aimless sallies. What is more, Jones was in no wise the man to resist such a temptation. The vocabulary and the grammatical structure of Sanskrit convinced him that the ancient language of the Hindus was related to those of the Greeks, Romans, and Germans, that it must have been derived with them from a common mother tongue.* But side by side with the conception of this incomparably suggestive idea, innumerable fanciful theories abound in the works of Jones, concerning the relationship of the primitive peoples, where everything was found to be in some way related to everything else. Now the Hindu tongue was identified with that of the Old Testament; now Hindu civilization was brought into connection with South American civilization. Buddha was said to be Woden; and the pyramids and sphinxes of Egypt were claimed to show the style of the same workmen who built the Hindu cave-temples and chiseled the ancient images of Buddha.

Fortunately for the new study of Sanskrit, the continuation of the work begun by Jones fell to one of the most cautious and comprehensive observer of facts that have ever devoted their attention and talent to

*The identity of Hindu words with those of Latin, Greek, and other languages had been noticed by several before Jones, and likewise the correct explanation of this phenomenon, namely the kinship of the Hindu nation with the Latins and Greeks, had been declared by Father Pons as early as 1740. For fuller account, see Benfey, "History of the Science of Language," (Geschichte der Sprachwissenschaft) pp. 222, 333-341.
the study of oriental literatures. This was Henry Thomas Colebrooke (born 1765; went to India 1782), the most active in the active band of Indian administrative officers. He officiated now as an officer of the government, now again as a justice, then as diplomatist—a man well versed in Indian agriculture and Indian trade. One can scarcely regard without astonishment the multitude of disclosures which, during the long period he devoted to Sanskrit, he was able to make from his incomparable collection of manuscripts. These to-day are among the principle treasures of the India Office Library. From the province of Indian poetry, Colebrooke, who well knew the limits of his own power, kept aloof. But in the literature of law, grammar, philosophy, and astronomy, he had a wide reading, which in scope may never again be reached. He it was who made the first comprehensive disclosure in regard to the literature of the Veda.

Colebrooke’s investigations are poor in hypotheses; we may say he withheld too much from seeking to comprehend the historical genesis of the subjects with which he dealt. But he established the actual foundation of broad provinces of Hindu research; filled with wonder himself at the ever widening vistas of that literature which were now revealed to him, and awakening our just wonder by the sure and patient toil with which he sought to penetrate into those distant parts.

While Colebrooke was at the height of his activity, interest in Hindu inquiry began to be awakened in a country which has done more than any other land to make of Hindu research a firm and well-established science—in Germany.

For the discoveries of Jones and Colebrooke there
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could have been no more receptive soil than the Germany of that time, full of spirited interest in the old national poetry of all nations and occupied with the stirring movements rife in its own philosophy and literature. Apparently, indeed, the latter were closely allied to the spirit of the distant Hindu literature; for here too oriental romanticism and poetical thought sought no less boldly than the absolute philosophy of Germany, to penetrate to the primal and formless source of all forms. From the beginning, poets stood in the foremost ranks among the Sanskritists of Germany; there were the two Schlegels and Friedrich Rückert, and beside these, careful and unassuming, the great founder of grammatical science, Franz Bopp.

In the year 1808 appeared Friedrich Schlegel’s work, *Ueber die Sprache und Weisheit der Inder* (The Language and Learning of the Hindus). From what was known to him of Hindu poetry and speculation, and according to his own ideas of the laws and aims of the human mind, Schlegel, with warm and fanciful eloquence, drew a picture of India as a land of exalted primitive wisdom. Hindu religion and Hindu poetry he described as replete with exuberant power and light, in comparison with which even the noblest philosophy and poetry of Greece was but a feeble spark. The time from which the masterpieces of the Hindus dated, appeared to him a distant, gigantic, primeval age of spiritual culture. There was the home of those earnest teachings, full of gloomy tragedy, of the soul’s migration, and of the dark fate which ordains for all beings their ways and their end:

Obedient to this purpose set, they wander; from God to plants; Here, in the abhorred world of existence, that ever moves to destruction.

While Schlegel gave to the world this fanciful
picture of Hindu wisdom, highly effective from its prophetic perspectives, but still wanting in sober truth, Bopp applied himself, more unassumingly, but with an incomparably deeper grasp and patient sagacity, to investigating the grammatical structure of Sanskrit; and, on the recognized fact of the relationship of this language with the Persian and the principal European tongues, to establishing the science of comparative grammar. In the year 1816 appeared his *Conjugationssystem der Sanskritsprache in Vergleichung mit jenem der griechischen, lateinischen, persischen, und germanischen Sprache* (Conjugational System of the Sanskrit Language in Comparison with that of the Greek, Latin, Persian, and Teutonic Languages).

This was no longer merely an attempt to find isolated similarities in the sounds of the words of related languages, but an attempt to trace back not only uniformities but also differences to their fixed laws; and thus in the life and growth of these languages, as they sprang from a common root and evolved themselves into a rich complexity, to discover more and more the traces of a necessity dominated by definite principles.

We can here only briefly touch upon the investigations made during the last seventy years, for which Bopp laid the foundation by the publication of his work. Rarely have such astonishing results been achieved by science as here. Elucidative of the early history of the languages of Homer and the old Italian monuments before they acquired the form in which we now find them written, the most unexpected witnesses were brought to give testimony; namely, the languages of the Hindus, the Germans, the Slavs,
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and the Celts. Of these related tongues, the one sheds light upon the obscure features of the others, just as natural history explains, the stunted organs of some animals by pointing out the same organs in their original, perfect form, in other animals.

The picture of the mother tongue, whose filial descendants are the languages of our linguistic family, was no longer seen in merely vague or doubtful features. The laws under whose dominion the system of sounds and forms in the separate derived languages have been developed from the mother tongue, are being ascertained ever more fully and formulated ever more sharply.

From the very beginning the essential instrument, yes, the very foundation of this investigation, was the Sanskrit language. In the beginning, faith in the primitiveness of Sanskrit in comparison with the related languages was too strong. During the last few years, however, this erroneous conception has been fully rectified; and this in itself is a decided step in advance. We know now that the apparently simpler and clearer state of Sanskrit in sounds and forms is in many respects less primitive than the complicated relations of other languages, e.g., the Greek; and that we must often set out from these languages rather than from the Sanskrit, in order to make possible the explanation of Sanskrit forms. Thus Sanskrit now receives back the light which it has furnished for the historical understanding of the European languages.*

*It may be permissible here to illustrate this reversion of methods in a single point that has become of especially great importance to grammar. The Greek has five short vowels, \(a, e, o, i, u\). The Sanskrit has \(i\) and \(u\) corresponding to \(i\) and \(u\); but to the three sounds, \(a, e, o\) corresponds in Sanskrit only a single vowel \(a\). Thus, for example, the Greek \(apo\) (English, from) reads in Sanskrit \(apa\); the \(a\) of the first syllable, and the \(o\) of the second syllable of the
I must not attempt to follow in detail the course which the science of comparative grammar, apart from its connection with Hindu research, has taken. While the two branches of the study were rapidly advanced by Germans particularly, and likewise in France by the sagacious Bernouf, new material kept pouring in from India no less rapidly. In two countries on the outskirts of Indian civilization, in the Himalayan valleys of Nepal, and in Ceylon, the sacred literature of the Buddhists, which had disappeared in India proper, was brought to light in two collections, one in Sanskrit and one in the popular dialect Pali. The ingenuity of Prinseps succeeded in deciphering the oldest Indian written characters on inscriptions and coins. In Calcutta was undertaken and completed in the Thirties the publication of the *Mahabharata*, a gigantic heroic poem of almost a hundred thousand Greek word is thus represented in Sanskrit by a. Or, to use another example, the Greek *menos* (English, courage) is in Sanskrit *manas*; Greek *epheron* (I carried)—*abharam*. What now is the original, i.e., what existed in the Indo-Germanic mother tongue for the three sounds of the Greek a, e, o, or the single sound of the Sanskrit a? When scholars began to study comparative philology upon the basis of the Sanskrit they thought the a—and this was a conclusion apparently supported by the simplicity of the language—to be alone the original sound; and were led to believe that this vowel was later divided on European soil into three sounds, a, e, o. Investigations of the most recent time—and for these we are to thank Amelung, Burgman, John Schmidt, and others—have shown that the development of the vowel system took the opposite course. The vowels a, e, o were already in the Indo Germanic mother tongue; and in Sanskrit, or more accurately, before the time of Sanskrit, in the language which the ancestors of the Indians and Persians spoke when both formed one people, these vowels were merged into a single vowel. Thus the e of *esti* and the o of *apo* are more original than the a of *asti*, *apa*.

Now, we find in Sanskrit that where the Greek e corresponds to the Sanskrit a, certain consonants preceding this vowel, as e.g., k, are affected in a different way by the latter, than in instances where for the a of Sanskrit the Greek a or o is used. From the linguistic form of Sanskrit alone, which in the one case as in the other has a, it would not be intelligible why the k should each time meet a different fate. The Greek, in that it has preserved the original differences of the vowels, gives the key to an understanding of the peculiar transformations which have taken place in the k-sound in large and important groups of Sanskrit words.
couplets, in whose vast cantos with their labyrinth of episodes and sub-episodes many generations of poets have brought together legends of the heroes and days of the olden time, of their struggles and flagellations.

The sum and substance of all this newly-acquired knowledge has been incorporated in the great work of a Norwegian, who became, in Germany, a German—in the *Indische Alterthumskunde* (Hindu Antiquities) of Christian Lassen.

Lassen did not belong to the great pioneers of science, like Bopp. It must also be said that often that sagacity of philological thought is wanting in him, which sheds light on questions even where it affords no definite solution of them. And, indeed, was it not a herculean undertaking, a work like that of the Danaides, to explore the older periods of the Hindu past when, as the chief sources of information, one was solely limited to the great epic, and the law book of Manu? Even a surer critical power than Lassen possessed could not have discovered much of history in the nebulous confusion of legends, in the invented series of kings in *Mahabharata*, and in that colorless uniformity which the style of the Hindu Virgils spreads unchangeably over the enormous periods of time of which they assume to inform us. In spite of this, Lassen’s *Antiquities*—the work of tireless diligence and rare learning—stands as a landmark in the history of Hindu investigations, uniting all the results of past time, and pointing out anew, by the very things in which it is lacking, still untried undertakings.

Just at this time, however, when the first volume of Lassen’s work, treating of the earliest periods, appeared, came the beginning of a movement which has severed the development of Hindu studies into two
parts. New personalities appeared upon the scene and pushed to the front a new series of problems, for the solution of which an apparently inexhaustible, and to this day, in a certain sense, a still inexhaustible supply of freshly acquired material was offered. This was the most important acquisition that has ever been added to our knowledge of the world’s literature through any one branch of oriental inquiry—the acquisition of the *Veda* for science.

II.

Considering the circumstances, this acquisition of the *Veda* for science can hardly be accounted a discovery. The existence and position in Hindu literature of this great work, had long been known. At every step the writings that had previously been brought to light, pointed to the *Veda* as the source from which all proceeded—even more strikingly than in the literature of Greece, we are led back, at every turn, to the poems of Homer. Manuscripts of the *Vedic* texts, moreover, were to be found, not only in India; they had long been possessed in great numbers by the libraries of Europe. But an attempt had scarcely, if at all, been made to lay hold of these and see if in the unmeasurable chaos of this mass of writings a firm ground for science could not be acquired.

The Sanskrit of the great epic poems, or of Kalidasa, was understood well enough; but of the dialect in which the most important parts of the *Veda* were written, no more was known than one familiar with the French of to-day would know of the language of the Troubadours. Without going deeply into the study it was easy to discern its inherent difficulties from the unwonted singularity of the text and its strange con-
tents, which, in part at least, were extremely complicated, and often involved in a maze of minor details. Would an earnest explorer of this territory, even in case he succeeded, be rewarded for his pains?

It was a band of young German scholars who bent their energies to this work. Most of them are still working in our midst—Max Müller, Roth, and Weber. Two others, whose names should not be omitted here, died a few years ago; these were Adalbert Kuhn and Benfey. There was no need of undertaking great expeditions, such as were those that set out for the investigation of Egyptian and Babylonian antiquity. Those monuments in whose colossal and strange forms fragments of a primeval age meet the eye, were wanting in India. The knowledge which was to be acquired was not contained in inscriptions, but in manuscripts.* Our scholars repaired to London for a greater or less length of time, and the work was begun among the store of manuscripts possessed by the East India House.

There was no lack of confidence. "It would be a disgrace," wrote Roth, "to the criticism and the ingenuity of our century which has deciphered the stone inscriptions of the Persian kings and the books of Zoroaster, if it did not succeed in reading in this enormous literature the intellectual history of the Hindu nation."

Much that Roth expected has been accomplished or is on the way towards accomplishment. Of much, that was hoped for at that time, we can now say that it was unattainable, and understand why. What has

* The royal library at Berlin also acquired and owns a rich collection of Sanskrit manuscripts, for which a foundation was laid by the purchase, at the command of Frederick William IV., of the Chambers manuscripts.
been attained, however, has given to the picture, which science formed of Hindu antiquity, an entirely different aspect. Unbounded in extent, this picture formerly seemed to lose itself in the nebulous depths of an immeasurable past. Now, determinate limits have been found, and the remotest initial point has been discovered for verifiable history. Authentic sources were disclosed, leading to the earliest age of Hindu civilization, from which, and regarding which, historical testimony in the usual sense of the word became accessible; and instead of the twilight, peopled with uncertain, shadowy giants, in which the epic poems made those times appear, the Veda opened to us a reality which we may hope to understand. Or, if in many instances, instead of the hoped for forms, it has afforded the eye but an empty space, even this was a step in advance. For then it was at least shown that the knowledge which was sought was not to be had; and that which had been given as such, had disclosed itself as an imaginative picture born of the caprice of a later legend maker.

The literature of epic poetry, apparently, could no longer lay claim to an incalculable antiquity; it sank back into a sort of Middle Ages, behind which the newly discovered, real antiquity loomed forth, studding the horizon of historical knowledge with significant forms. We shall now see how the task of understanding the Veda was accomplished, and shall describe at the same time what it was that had thus been acquired. We have here a newly disclosed literature of venerable antiquity, rich in marks of earnest effort, logically developed in sharply, nay rigidly, characterized forms; we have a newly discovered piece of history, forming the historical—or shall we say unhistorical?—beginnings...
of a people related to us by race, who at an early day set out in paths distinctly removed from the ways of all other peoples, and created their own strange forms of existence, bearing in them the germs of the misfortunes they have suffered.

By what means did we succeed in understanding the Veda?

Almost all the more important parts of the Vedic literature—for the Veda, like the Bible, is not a separate text, but a literature with wide ramifications—are preserved in numerous, and, for the most part, relatively modern manuscripts. Only rarely are they older than a few centuries; since in the destructive climate of India it could not be otherwise. The texts, however, of these later manuscripts descend from remote antiquity.

Before they came to be written in the present manuscripts, or written in manuscript form at all, they encountered, in the course of great periods of time, many and manifold misfortunes. It is the task of the philological inquirer to ascertain the character of these events—to determine the genetic history of the texts. It may be said that these texts in the shape they have been transmitted to us, resemble paintings by old masters, which bear unmistakable traces of alternate injuries and attempted restorations by competent and incompetent hands. What we want to know, so far as it lies in our power, is the form and general character in which they originally existed.

The period to which the origin of the old Vedic poems belongs, we cannot assign in years, nor yet in centuries. But we know that these poems existed, when there was not a city in India, but only hamlets
and castles; when the names of the powerful tribes which at a later time assumed the first rank among the nations of India were not even mentioned, no more so than in the Germany which Tacitus described were mentioned the names of Franks and Bavarians. It was the period of migrations, of endless, turbulent feuds among small unsettled tribes with their nobles and priests; people fought for pastures, and cows, and arable land. It was the period of conflict between the fair-skinned immigrants, who called themselves Arya, and the natives, the "dark people," the "unbelievers that propitiate not the Gods."

As yet the thought and belief of the Hindus did not seek the divine in those formless depths in which later ages conceived the idea of the eternal and hidden Brahma. Wherever in nature the brightest pictures met the eye and the mightiest tones struck the ear, there were their Gods—the luminous arch of heaven, the red hues of dawn, the thundering storm-god and his followers, the winds. The Vedic Aryans had not yet reached their later abode on the two powerful sister streams, the Ganges and the Yumna; the Sindhu (Indus) was still for them the "Mother Stream," of which one of the oldest poets of the Rig Veda says:*

``From earth along the reach of Heaven riseth the sound;
   Ceaseless the roar of her waters, the bright one.
   As floods of thundering rain, poured from the darkened cloud-bosom,
   So rushes the Sindu, like the steer, the bellowing one."

The poetry of the Rig Veda dates from the time of those wanderings and struggles that took place on the Indus and its tributary streams. Certain families exercised the functions of priestly offices, and

*Hundreds of Vedic melodies have been handed down to us in a form the interpretation of which can be subject to no real doubt. As it appears, they are the oldest but unfortunately the poorest memorials of musical antiquity.
possessed the acquisitions of an artificially connected speech together with a simple form of chant using but few tones. These families created Vedic poetry, and transmitted the art to their posterity. The songs of the Rig Veda, which are almost all sacrificial songs, were not really what we call popular poetry. We do not hear in them the language that pours forth from the soul of a nation, as it communes in poetical rhythm with itself. It was a poetry that wanted mainly the proper hearers—the masses of the people who spoke through the mouth of the poet. Their hearers were God Agni, God Indra, or Goddess Dawn; and the poet was not he whom the passionate impulses of his own soul or his own love of song and legend impelled to sing, but he was mainly one who belonged to a poet-family—one of the families of men who in the course of time became united as a caste and erected ever more insuperable barriers between their sacred existence and the profane reality of daily life. For the gods such a poet only "could frame a worthy poem, as an experienced, skillful wheelwright makes a wagon,"—a poem which would be rewarded by the rich princely lords of the sacrifice, with steeds and kine, with golden ornaments and female slaves from the spoils of war. "Thy blessing," says a Vedic poet to a God,*

" Rests with the givers,
With the victors, the many valiant heroes,
Who make gifts to us of clothing, kine, and horses;
May they rejoice in the splendor and plenty of divine bounty.

Let all things waste that they have won
Who, without rewarding, would profit by our hymns to heaven.
The godless ones, that boast their fortune,
The transgressors—cast them from the light of day."

It has been fatal for all thought and poetry in India, that a second world, filled with strangely fantastic

* Rig Veda V. 42, 8-9.
shapes, was established at an early day beside the real world. This was the place of sacrifice with its three sacred fires and the schools in which the virtuosos of the sacrificial art were educated—a sphere of strangest activity and the playground of a subtle, empty mummerly, whose enervating power over the spirit of an entire nation we can scarcely comprehend in its full extent. The poetry of the Rig Veda shows us this process of disease at an early stage; but it is there, and much of that which constitutes the essence of the Rig Veda, is rooted in it.

In the foreground stands the sacrifice, and throughout, only the sacrifice. "By sacrifice the Gods made sacrifice; these regulations were the first," it is said in a verse which is thrice repeated in the Rig Veda. The praise of the God for whom the sacrificial offerings were intended, his power, his victories, and the prayers for possessions which were hoped for in return for human offerings—the prosperity of flocks and posterity, long life, destruction of enemies, the hated and the godless—such is the subject-matter of the multitudinous repetitions that recur throughout the hymns of the Rig Veda. Still, among these verse-making sacrificers there was not an utter absence of real poets. And thus among the stereotyped implorations and songs of praise we find here and there a great and beautiful picture—the wonder of the poet's soul at the bright marvels of nature or the deep expression of an earnest inner life. A poet from the priestly family of the Bharadvajas sings of the goddess Ushas, the dawn:

*The Indian word Ushas is related to the Greek Eos, the Latin Aurora.
"We see thee, thou lovely one; far, far, thou shinest.
To heaven's heights thy brilliant light-beams dart.
In beauteous splendor shimmering, unveilest thou thy bosom,
Radiant with heaven's sheen, celestial queen of dawn!

"The red bulls draw their chariot,
Where in thy splendor thou o'erspread'st the heavens;
Thou drivest away night; as a hero, a bow-man,
As a swift charioteer frighteneth his enemies.

"A beautiful path has been made for thee in the mountain.
Thou unconquerable one, thou risest from out the waters.
So bring thou us treasures to revive us on
Our further course, queenly daughter of heaven."

Another poet sings of Parjanya, the rain God:

"Like the driver who forward whips his steeds,
So he urges onward his messengers, the clouds.
From afar the thunder-tone of the lion arises
When the God makes rain pour from the clouds.

"Parjanya's lightnings dart, the winds blow;
The floods pour from heaven; up spring grass and plants.
To all that lives and moves a quickening is imparted,
When the God scatters his seeds on the earth.

"At his command the earth bows deeply down;
At his command hoofed creatures come to life;
At his command bloom forth the bright flowers:
May Parjanya grant us strong defence!

"A flood of rain hast thou sent; now cease;
Thou didst make penetrable the desert wastes.
For us thou hast caused plants to grow for food,
And the prayer of men thou hast fulfilled."

But we must turn from the description of Vedic poetry to examine the fortune that this production encountered on its way from distant antiquity to the present time, from the sacrificial places on the Indus to the workshops of the English and German philologists. Here a conspicuous fact is to be dwelt upon,

* Rig Veda VI. 64. The hymn following is V. 83.
† This God also reappears among the kindred peoples of Europe, as Fiorgynn in the northern mythology, and among the Lithuanians and Prussians as the God Perkunas, of whom an old chronicle says: "Perkunas was the third idol; and him the people besought for storms, so that during his time they had rain and fair weather and suffered not from the thunder and the lightning."
which belongs to the strangest phenomena of Indian history, so rich in strange events. The hymns of the Rig Veda, as well as the hymns of the other Vedas, have been composed, collected, and transmitted to succeeding ages. There has been incorporated in them a very large sacerdotal prose literature, developed throughout the older and later divisions, and treating of the art and symbolism of sacrifice. There have also arisen heretical sects, like the Buddhists, who denied the authority of the Veda, and instead of its teachings reverenced as a sacred text the code of ordinances proclaimed by Buddha. And all this has taken place without the art of writing.

In the Vedic ages writing was not known. At the time when Buddhism arose it was indeed known—the Indians probably learned to write from Semites—but it was used only for inditing short communications in practical life, not for writing books. We have very sure and characteristic information as to the rôle which the art of writing played, or rather did not play, in the church life of the Buddhists at a comparatively late age, say about 400 B.C. The sacred text of this sect affords a picture, executed even in its minutest features, of life in the houses and parks which the brethren inhabited. We can see the Buddhist monks pursue their daily life from morning to night; we can see them in their wanderings and during their rest, in solitude and in intercourse with other monks, or laymen; we know the equipment of the places occupied by them, their furniture, and the contents of their store-rooms. But nowhere do we hear that they read their sacred texts or copied them; nowhere, that in the dwellings of the monks such things as writing utensils or manuscripts were found.
The memory of the spiritual brethren, "rich in hearing,"—what we to-day call a well-read man was then called one rich in hearing,—took the place of a cloister library; and if the knowledge of some indispensable text,—as, e. g., the formula of confession which had to be recited at the full and new moon in the assembly of the brethren,—was in danger of being lost among a body of priests, they acted on the dictum laid down in an old Buddhistic ordinance: "By these monks a monk shall immediately be sent to a neighboring parish. He must be thus instructed: 'Go, Brother, and when thou hast learned by heart the formula of confession, the complete one or the abbreviated one, come back to us.'"

It must be admitted that under such circumstances all the conditions for the existence of books, and the relations between books and reader—if it be allowed me for the sake of brevity to use these expressions—must have been of a very different nature than in an age of writing or one of printing. A book could then exist only on condition that a body of men existed among whom it was taught and learned and transmitted from generation to generation. A book could be known only at the price of learning it by heart, or of having some one at hand who had thus learned it. Texts of a content which only claimed a passing notice, could not as a rule exist. This was fatal for historical writing and generally speaking for all profane literature. Above all, the existing texts were subjected to the disfigurements that errors of memory, carelessness, or attempts at improvement on the part of the transmitters must have imported into them.

Under conditions such as have been described above, the poetry of the Rig Veda has been handed
down from generation to generation through many centuries. Separate poems were brought into the collection in the course of oral compilation and transmission. The collection was re-corrected on repeated occasions and was brought to greater completeness; again only by oral compilation and transmission. It is conceivable enough that thus the original structure yes, even the existence itself of special hymns was often injured, effaced, or destroyed. Remodeling destroyed their form. The lines of division between hymns standing side by side would often be forgotten and numbers of them would be merged into an apparent unity. Modern, and easily intelligible terms drove out the obsolete phrases and the ancient word-forms—often the most valuable remains for the investigator, whom they help to explain the history of the language, just as the scientist deduces from fossil remains the history of organic life.

Especially fatal was it for the old and true form of the Vedic hymns that they have been stretched upon the Procrustean bed of grammatical analysis. Earlier and more strongly than in any other nation of antiquity, was interest and pleasure taken in India in scientifically dissecting language. Closely examining the separate sounds of speech and their underlying modifications, they employed exceptional ingenuity and discrimination in constructing a system from which, when it became known in Europe, the science of our century found ample reason to learn much that was marvellous. The ingenuity and penetration of the students of Vedic literature has been burdened like a curse with that genuinely Hindu trait, subtlety; the joy—which at times seems to border on maliciousness—of stretching and forcing things into an artistic
garment, of building up labyrinths of fine points, in whose involved courses the skilled and cunning student ostentatiously thought himself able to find his way. Thus, in this grammatical science, understanding and misunderstanding of the real truth are mingled in inexplicable confusion. That under the hands of such linguistic theorists the precious wealth of the old Vedic hymns has not remained inviolate, is easily comprehended. In some cases, isolated details of the traditions of prior epochs were caught and clung to with felicitous acumen; in others, no hesitation was had in wiping out of existence entire domains of old and genuine phenomena to suit half-correct theories, so that the most patient ingenuity of modern science will only be able to restore in part what has been lost.

Finally, however, the caprice under which the hymns of the old singers must have suffered, had its end. The more people accustomed themselves to see in these poems not merely beautiful and efficacious prayers but a sacred revelation of the divine, the higher did their transmitted form—even when this is, or seems to be, of necessity, so irregular—rise in the respect of theologians, and the more careful must they have been to describe and preserve this form with all its dissimilarities.

We possess a remarkable work—it is composed in verse like many Hindu treatises and hand-books—in which a grammarian, Čaunaka, who must probably be placed about the time 400 B. C., has given a deep and unusually well-planned survey of the vocal peculiarities of the Rig Veda text. The study of Čaunaka's work affords us the proof that from that time on the Vedic hymns, protected by the united care of gram-
matical and religious respect for letters, have suffered no further appreciable corruptions. The most important manuscripts of the Rig Veda which we know, may be two thousand years later than this hand-book of Çaunaka's, but they bear all tests in a remarkable way if we compare them with it.

The Rig Veda, indeed, which that Hindu scholar found, was not unlike a ruin. And it was hardly possible by the help of Hindu scholarship to transmit it to posterity in a better condition than it was received. But still the conscientious diligence of the Hindu linguists and divines accomplished something: for the last two thousand years it has preserved these venerable fragments from the dangers of further decay. They lie there, untouched, just as they were in the days of Çaunaka. And the investigation of our day, which has already succeeded in bringing forth from many a field of ruins the living features of a by-gone existence, is at work among them, now with the bold grasp of confident divination, now in the quiet uniformity of slowly advancing deliberation, to deduce whatever it may of the real forms of those old priestly poems.

III.

We may say, that the greatest undertakings planned and the most important results achieved in the field of Sanskrit research, are linked with the names of German investigators. If we add that this could not easily be otherwise, it is not from national vanity; we should but express the actual facts of the case, based upon the development of the science. It was natural that
the first movements toward the founding of Hindu research, the first attempts to grasp the vastly accumulated material and find provisional forms for it, should have been the work of Englishmen, men who spent a good part of their lives in India, and were there brought in constant contact with native Sanskrit scholars. But not less natural was it that the honor of instituting further progress and gaining a deeper insight should be accorded to Germans. The two fields of knowledge by which, especially, life and power were imparted to Hindu investigations were and are essentially German. These are comparative grammar, which we may say was founded by Bopp, and that profound and potent science, or perhaps more correctly expressed art, of philology, which was practiced by Gottfried Hermann, and likewise by Karl Lachmann, a man imbued with the proud spirit of Lessing, full of acute and purposeful ability, exact and truthful in small matters as in great. Representatives of this philology, moved to antipathy by many characteristic features of the Hindu spirit, and not the least influenced by the assertion that Latin and Greek grammar has this or that to learn from the Sanskrit, might meet the new science of India with reserve or more than reserve. Still this could in no wise alter the truth that the study of Hindu texts, the investigation of Hindu literary remains, could be learned from no better teachers than from those masters who had succeeded in improving and interpreting the classical texts with unerring certainty and excellence of method.

It was a Leipsic disciple of Hermann and Haupt who, at the instigation of Burnouf, in 1845, in Paris, conceived the plan of publishing the Rig Veda with the commentary of its Hindu expounder, the abbot Sa-
yana, who flourished in the 14th century after Christ. This was the great work of Max Müller, the first of those fundamental undertakings on which Vedic philology rests. It was necessary above all to know how the Brahmins themselves translated the hymns of their forefathers, which were preserved in the Rig Veda, from the Vedic language into current Sanskrit, and how they solved the problems which the grammar of the Veda presented, by the means their own grammatical system offers. Herein lay the indispensable foundation of all further investigation. It was necessary to weigh the Hindu traditions concerning the explanation of the Veda, which erred in underestimation as well as overestimation, and to test the consequences of both errors, in order finally to learn the art of scientifically estimating them. This constitutes the great importance of Max Müller's work extending through a quarter of a century (1849–1874). To complete was easy, but to begin was exceedingly difficult; for most of the grammatical and theological texts which formed the basis for Sayana's deductions, were, when Max Müller began the work, books sealed with seven seals.

A few years after the first volume of Max Müller's Rig Veda appeared, two other scholars united in a work of still greater magnitude. It has long since become to all Sanskritists the most indispensable tool for their labors. I refer to the Sanskrit dictionary, compiled under the commission of the Academy of St. Petersburg, Russia, by Roth and Böhtlingk. It was intended to make a dictionary for a language the greatest and most important part of whose texts were still not in print. The work was similar to that which the Grimm Brothers began at the same time
for the German language. Roth undertook the Vedic literature, the foundation of the whole; Böhtlingk the later periods. Friendly investigators, and especially Weber, helped them by bringing into use the known and accessible texts or manuscripts that were serviceable to them. The most important thing was, that the Veda had now for the first time—setting aside a few previous studies—to be gone through with a view to lexicography. The explanations which the Hindus themselves were wont to give of the words of the Vedic language were regarded as a valuable aid for understanding it. But the matter did not rest here. "We do not hold it," said the two compilers in their preface, "to be our task to acquire that understanding of the Veda which was current in India some centuries ago; but we seek the sense which the poets themselves gave to their hymns and maxims." They undertook "to get at the sense from the texts themselves, by collating all the passages related in word or meaning." In this way they hoped to re-establish the meaning of each word, not as a colorless conception, but in its individuality and therefore in its strength and beauty. The Veda was thus to re-acquire its living sense, the full wealth of its expression. The thought of the earliest antiquity was to appear to us in new forms full of life and reality.

The execution of this work, carried on with tenacious industry and brilliant success for four and twenty years (1852–1875), did not fall short of the magnitude of the plan originally conceived. In minor points we find it easy to point out numerous deficiencies and errors. The two compilers well knew that without that spirit of boldness which does not stand in fear of unavoidable errors, it were better never to undertake
their task. In face, however, of the great value of that which they have accomplished, all faults sink into insignificance.

What a chasm separates their work from that of their predecessor, Wilson!* In Wilson's work there is little more than a fair enumeration of the meanings which Hindu traditions assigned to the words; for his dictionary the Veda scarcely exists, if it does so at all. Here in the work of Roth and Böhtlingk on the other hand, is brought to light the immense wealth, replete with oriental splendor, of the richest of all languages; the history of each word, and likewise the fortunes that have befallen it in the different periods of the literature and have determined its meaning, are brought before our eyes. The difference between the two great periods in which the development of Hindu research falls, could not be incorporated more clearly than in these two dictionaries. In the one instance are found the beginnings, which English science, resting immediately on the shoulders of the Indian pandits, has made; in the other is the continuation of English work conducted by strict philological methods to a breadth and depth incomparably beyond those beginnings, and at the head of this undertaking stand German scholars.

To Müller's great edition of the Rig Veda and to the St. Petersburg Dictionary further investigations have been added in great abundance, and these have more and more extended the limits of our knowledge of the Veda. Already a new generation of laborers have taken their places beside the original pioneers in these once so impassable regions. As a whole, or in its separate parts, the Rig Veda has been repeatedly

*Wilson's dictionary appeared in 1819; a second edition in 1832.
translated. Its stock of words and inflections has been studied and overhauled from ever new points of view and with ever new questions in mind. To many a picturesque word of the strong, harsh Vedic language its full weight has thus been given back.

The principles and practices according to which the old collectors and revisers of the Veda text proceeded, are now being examined by us with a view to being able to determine what came into their hands as tradition and what they themselves imported into the traditions. The readings of the passages quoted from the Rig Veda in the other Vedas are being collected, in order to trace in them the remains of the genuine and oldest textual form. The religion and mythology of the Veda have been described; the national life of the Vedic tribes has been portrayed in all its phases. The texts afford the data for such a portraiture of these features that it has justly been said that the description given surpasses in clearness and accuracy Tacitus's account of the national life of the Germans.* Finally an attempt has been made—or rather an attempt will have to be made, for even at this time the work is in its beginnings—to discover amid the masses of Vedic prayers and sacrificial hymns something which must be an especially welcome find to scientific curiosity—the beginning of the Indian Epic.†

There could be no doubt that in so poetical a period the pleasure of romancing produced abundant fruit. Short narratives, short hymns must then have

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† The remarks here made on the beginnings of the Indian Epic rest on conceptions which I have before briefly sought to establish. Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländ. Gesellsch., 1885, p. 52, et seq.
existed, enclosed, as it were, in narrow frames. Thus, in general, are the beginnings of epic poetry shaped, before poetic ability rises and ventures to narrate in wider scope and with more complicated structure the fate of men and heroes. It seemed, however, as though those beginnings of the Indian epic were lost. But they were preserved, though to be sure in a peculiarly fragmentary form. In the Rig Veda there is many a medley of apparently disconnected verses in which we have thought to discover the accumulated sweepings of poetic workshops. In fact we have here the fragmentary remains of epic narratives. These verses were once inserted in a prose framework; the narrative part of the Epic being in prose, and the speeches and counter-speeches in verse, just as, often, in Grimm’s fairy-tales when the poor daughter of the king or the powerful dwarf has to speak an especially weighty or touching word, a rhyme or two appears.

Now, only the verses were memorized in their fixed original form by the Vedic tale-tellers. The prose, each new narrator would render with fresh words; until finally its original subject-matter fell into almost total oblivion, and the verses alone survived, appearing sometimes as a series of dialogues sufficiently long and full of meaning to enable us to gain an understanding of the whole, and then again as unrecognizable fragments no more admitting an inference as to their proper place and connection in the story of which they form a part than—to keep the same comparison—a couple of rhymes in one of Grimm’s fairy-tales would enable us to restore the whole tale.

It may be permitted for the sake of making clear what has been said, to cite her a passage from one of
those old narratives whose connection, at least as a whole, may be conjecturally determined.* The scene is between gods and demons, its subject is the great battle which was fought in heaven, the thunder fight, which for the strife-loving spirit of that age was the pattern of their own victories. Vritra, the envious fiend, kept the waters of the clouds in captivity, that they might not pour down upon the earth; but God Indra smote the demon with his thunderbolt and let the liberated waters flow. Indra—this must have been said in the lost prose introduction to the narrative—felt, as he entered the battle, too weak for his terrible opponent. The gods, faint-hearted, withdrew from his side. Only one offered himself as an ally, Vâyu (the wind),† the swiftest of the gods, but he demanded as a reward for his fidelity, part of the sacrificial draught of Soma, which men offer to Indra. Vâyu speaks:

"Tis I. I come to thee the foremost, as is meet;
Behind me march in full array, the Gods.
Givest thou me, O Indra, but a share of sacrifice,
And thou shalt do, with my alliance, 'valiant deeds of might.'"

Indra accepted the alliance:

"Of the honied draught I give thee the first portion;
Thine shall it be; for thee shall be pressed the Soma.
Thou shalt stand as friend at my right hand;
Then shall we slay the serried hosts of our foe.'"

Then a new person appears, a human singer. We know not whether a definite one among the great saints of that early time, the prophets of the later generation of singers, was thought of or not. He wished to praise Indra; but can Indra now be praised? The hostile demon is not yet conquered; doubts as to

* Rig Veda 8,100. I omit a few verses of obscure meaning, and say nothing of difficulties, for which this is not the place to give a solution.
† He is also called Vâta. This name has been identified—though the correctness of this is highly questionable—with the German name Woden.
Indra and his might come to the singer. He says to his people:

"A song of praise bring ye who long for a blessing,
If truth be truth, sing ye the praise of Indra."

"There is no Indra," then said many a one,
"Who saw him? Who is he whom we shall praise?"

Then Indra himself gives answer to the weak-hearted:

"Here stand I before thee, look hither, O Singer
In lofty strength I tower above all beings.
The laws of sacred order make me strong;
I, the smiter, smite the worlds."

The confidence of the pious in their God is restored, his hymn of praise is sounded. And now Indra enters the conflict. The falcon has brought him the Soma, and in the intoxication of the ambrosial drink, the victorious one hurls his thunderbolt at the demon. Like a tree smitten by lightning, falls the enemy. Now the waters may flow forth from their prisons:

"Now hasten forth! Scatter thyself freely!
He who detained thee is no more.
Deep into the side of Vitra has been hurled
The dreaded thunderbolt of Indra.

"Swift as thought sped the Falcon along;
Pierced into the citadel, the brazen.
And up to heaven, to the thunderer,
The soaring falcon bore the Soma.

"In the sea the thunderbolt rests,
Deep engulfed in the watery billows.
The flowing and ever-constant waters
To him bring generous gifts."

I pass over the difficult conclusion of the poem—the creation of language by Indra after the battle with Vitra. One fourth of the languages that exist on earth, Indra formed into clear and intelligible speech; these are the languages of men. The other three fourths, however, have remained indistinct and incompre-
hensible; these are the languages that quadrupeds and birds and all insects speak.

This is one of the early narratives of the Hindus concerning the deeds of their gods and heroes. We must not endeavor here, to restore the lost portions written in prose which served to connect the strophes. To make the modern reader clear as to the connection of the verses, another method of expression must be chosen than that peculiar to the narrators of the Vedic epoch. As it appears, they were content with recounting the necessary facts, or rather with recalling them to their hearers, in short and scanty sentences.

The verses set in the narrative are not wanting, however, in flights of poetic eloquence—as the poem of Indra's battle will have shown. Without the finer shades of human soul-life, it is true, yet in earnest simple greatness, like mountains or old gigantic trees, the heroic figures of these ancient sagas stand forth. What takes place among them is similar, nay more than similar, to that which takes place in nature. For as yet the primitive natural significance of those gods has hardly been veiled by the human vesture which they wear, and in the narratives of their deeds the great pictures of nature's life with its wonders and terrors are everywhere present. The duty of bringing together and interpreting such fragments of this most ancient Epic activity, Vedic investigators must reckon among their most fruitful though perhaps not their easiest tasks.

iv.

At this stage of our inquiry, the question arises, What do we know of the history of India in the age which produced the Vedas? Where does the pos-
sibility here begin of fixing events chronologically? In that part of the province of history in which this precision is lacking, can any determinate lines of another sort be drawn?

Of a history of ancient India in the sense in which we speak of the history of Rome, or in the manner in which the history of the Israelitic nation is recounted in the Old Testament, the Vedas afford us no testimony. A succession of events clearly united with one another, the presence of energetic personalities, whose aspirations and achievements we can understand, momentous struggles for the institution and security of civil government—these are things of which nothing is told to us. We may add that these are things which seem to have existed in Ancient India less than in any other civilized nation. The more we know of the history of this people the more it appears like an incoherent mass of chance occurrences. These occurrences are wanting in that firm bearing and significant sense which the power of a willing and conscious national purpose imparts to its doings. Only in the history of thought, and especially of religious thought, do we tread, in India, upon solid ground. Of a history in any other sense we can here scarcely speak. And a people who has no history, has of course no written historical works.

In those eras in which, among soundly organized nations, interest in the past and its connection with the struggles and sufferings of the present awakes, when the Herodotuses and Fabiuses, the narrators of that which has happened, are wont to arise, the literary activity of India was absorbed in theological and philosophical speculation. In all occurrences was seen but one aspect, namely, that they were tran-
sitory; and everything transitory was recognized, we may not say as a simile, yet as something absolutely worthless, an unfortunate nothing, from which the sage was bound to divert his thoughts.

We can thus easily see how fully we must renounce our hopes of an exact result, when the question is raised as to the time to which the little we know of the outer vicissitudes of the ancient Hindu tribes must be assigned, and, especially, as to the time in which the great literary remains of the Veda and the changes which it wrought in the Hindu world of thought belong. The basis that might serve toward definitely answering these questions of chronology—lists of kings with statements of the duration of each reign—is wholly wanting for the Vedic period. Of early times at least no such lists have been handed down to us; there are no traces indeed that such ever existed. The later catalogues, however, which have been fabricated in the shops of the Indian compilers, can today no more be taken into consideration as the basis of earnest research, than the statements of the Roman chroniclers as to how many years King Romulus and King Numa reigned. How unusual it was in the Vedic times for the Hindus to ask the "when" of events, is shown very clearly by the fact, that no expression was in current use by which any year but the present was distinguishable from any other year.

The result of this for us, and likewise, of course, for the science of Ancient India, is that those long centuries were and are practically synonymous with immeasurable time. The standard by which we are accustomed to compute the distance of historical antecedence in our thoughts or imaginations, fail us in this richly developed civilization as completely as in the
prehistoric domains of the stone age, — in the first feeble glimmerings of human existence. In fact, as prehistoric research tries to compute the duration of the past ages which have given to the earth's surface its form, so as to determine approximately the age of the human remains embedded in the strata of the earth; so, in a similar way, the investigation of the Hindu Vedas, in its attempts to compute the age of the Veda, has sought refuge in the gradual changes that have imperceptibly taken place in the course of centuries, in that great time-measurer, the starry heavens.

There was found in a work, classed as one of the Vedas, an astronomical statement which has served as a basis for such computations. The result attained was that this particular work dated from the year 1181 B. C. (according to another reckoning 1391 B. C.). Unfortunately, the belief that in this way certain data are to be acquired had to vanish quickly enough. It was soon found out that the Vedic statement is not sufficient to afford any tenable basis for astronomical computations. Thus it remains that for the times of the Vedas there is no fixed chronological date. And to any one who knows of what things the Hindu authors were wont to speak, and of what not, it will be tolerably certain, that even the richest and most unexpected discoveries of new texts, though they may vastly extend our knowledge in other respects, will in this respect make no changes whatever.

There are two great events in the history of India with which this darkness begins to be dispelled—the one approximately, and the other accurately, referable to an ascertainable point of time. These are the advent of Buddha and the contact of the Hindus with
the Greeks under Alexander the Great and his successors.

That it was the old Buddhistic communities in India that first began the work of gathering up the connected traditions within historical memory, seems certain. At least this corresponds with the apparent and accepted course of events. To Vedic and Brahmanical philosophy all earthly fortunes were absolutely worthless—a vanity of vanities; and over against them stood the significant stillness of the Eternal, undisturbed by any change. But for the followers of Buddha, there was a point at which this Eternal entered the world of temporal things, and thus there was for them a piece of history which maintained its place beside or rather directly within their religious teachings. This was the history of the advent of Buddha and the life of the communities founded by him.

There is a firm recollection of the assemblies in which the most honored and learned leaders of the communities, and great bands of monks coming together from far and wide, determined weighty points of doctrine and ritual. The kings under whom these councils were held are named, and the predecessors of these kings are mentioned even as far back as the pious King Bimbisara, the contemporary and zealous protector of Buddha. Of the series of kings which in this way have been fixed by the chronicles of the Buddhistic order, two figures are especially prominent—Tschantragupta (i.e., the one protected by the Moon) and his grandson Asoka (the Painless). Tschantragupta is a personality well known to Greek and Roman historians. They call him Sandrokyptos, and relate that after the death of Alexander
the Great (in the year 323 B.C.), he successfully opposed the power of the Greeks on their invasion into India, and lifted himself from a humble position to that of ruler of a wide kingdom. *Asoka*, on the other hand, is not mentioned by the Greeks; but in one of his inscriptions—by him were made the oldest inscriptions discovered in India, and these have been found on walls and pillars in the most distant parts of the peninsula—he himself speaks of Antijoka, king of the Iona (Ionians, i.e., Greeks), Antikina, Alikasandara, and other Greek monarchs.*

Here at last a place is reached where the historical investigator of India reaches firm ground. Events whose years and centuries—as though they occurred on another planet—are not commensurable with those of the earth, meet at this point with spheres of events which we know and are able to measure. If we reckon back from the fixed dates of Tschandragupta and Asoka to Buddha—and we have no grounds for regarding the statements of time which we find respecting Buddhistic chronology as not at least approximately correct—we find the year of the great teacher’s death to be about 480 B.C. His work therefore falls in the time at which the Greeks fought their battles for freedom from Persian rule, and the fundamental lines of a republican constitution were drawn in Rome.

Buddha’s life, however, marks the extreme limit at which we may find even approximate dates. Beyond this, through the long centuries which must have

*Antijoka is Antiochas Theos; Antikina, Antigonos Gonatos; Alikasandara, of course, not Alexander the Great, but Alexander of Epirus, son of Pyrrhus, the enemy of the Romans. All these princes reigned about the middle of the third century B.C. Of Alexander the Great in India no traces have been found, with the exception of a coin which bears his picture and his name.
elapsed from the beginning of the Rig Veda epoch to that of Buddha, the question still remains: What was the succession of events—the few events of which we may speak? What the order in which the great strata of literary remains were formed? We observe the relation which one text bears to the others which appear to have previously existed; we follow the gradual changes which the language has suffered, the blotting out of old words and forms and the appearance of new ones; we count the long and short syllables of the verses so as to learn the imperceptible but strictly regular course by which their rhythms have been freed from old laws of construction and subjected to new forms; moving in a parallel direction with these linguistic and metrical changes we note the changes of religious ideas, and of the contents as well as the external forms of intellectual and spiritual life. Thus we learn in the chaos of this literature ever more surely to distinguish the old from the new, and understand the course of development which has run through both.

Many a path, it is true, in which research hoped to press forward, has been shown to be delusive and worthless; problems have had to be given up, changed, and presented in different forms. But in its last results the work has not been in vain. For, in respect to the Veda in particular, and the antiquities of India in general, we have learned to recognize the principal directions in which the tendencies of historical growth are to be traced.

From the second century of Hindu research we can scarcely expect discoveries similar to those which the first has brought: such a sudden uprising of unusual, broad, fruitful fields of historical knowledge. But we may still hope that the future of our science will
bring results of another sort no less rich—the explanation of hitherto inexplicable phenomena, the transformation of that which is half known into that which is fully known.