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THE ANTAGONISMS BETWEEN HINDOOISM AND CHRISTIANITY.

THE church of Christ, in so far as she realizes her ideal, is an aggressive church. She finds one of the chief reasons of her existence in the commission to preach the Gospel to every creature. She is bound, therefore, to be a proselytizing church, and therein claims to have and urge upon men, not one of many true religions, but the one and only faith which is from beginning to end the doctrine of God. But if this be indeed her mission; if she is sent forth to attack and contend with hoary-headed systems which have for ages held the faith of millions among the different nations of mankind—it is plain that she ought to know what she is doing. There can be no wise missionary work without knowing with whom or what she has to contend. If through faint-heartedness we may not overrate the strength of our enemies, we can as little through a pious self-conceit affect to ignore or disdain it. The church cannot wisely afford to neglect the study of the erroneous systems of religion which she opposes, because of their supposed weakness and inferiority. As an important illustration of the work to be done in this direction, it is proposed in the present article to indicate in as brief and general manner as possible the doctrinal antagonisms between modern Hindooism and Christianity. Probably no false religion, except it be Buddhism, has equal claims on the consideration of the Christian philosopher or apologist. Whether we regard its inherent character, or the power which it has shown to command and retain the faith of a large part of the human family, it stands to-day as one of the

most notable and formidable antagonists of the church and kingdom of Christ. Such brief consideration of the Hindoo faith as may at this time be possible, may at least suffice to save some from that easy self-confidence which leads one to undervalue the strength of an antagonist, and is often the forerunner of discouragement at slow success, and sometimes even of utter defeat.

The inquiry as to what is modern Hindooism is not to be answered in a word. The religion of the Vedas cannot be said to exist. Modern Hindooism rests rather upon the Puránas than upon the Vedas. The Puránas themselves differ from one another in the most uncompromising manner on many of the most important matters of religion. There is no exaggeration in those words of the Mahábhárat :

“Contradictory are the Vedas ; contradictory are the Shástras ; contradictory all the doctrines of the holy sages.”

The difficulty of our inquiry is scarcely less if we would seek the answer through personal intercourse and conversation with the people of India. The very instincts of the Hindoo, his ideas as to the demands of courtesy, prompt him often to conceal his real opinions when he imagines that they might be repugnant to you, and to profess the most encouraging acquiescence in your statements of religious truth. Moreover, in so far as we do get at the real beliefs of the people, we find a most confusing diversity of opinion. The very naming of conflicting sects of Vaishnavas, Saivas, Kabírás, Sádhs, Sáktas, etc., is bewildering to the inquirer. The sacred books of the people are but little known by those who profess to rest their faith upon them. It is safe to say that if we except a portion of the Bhágavat Purána, the Ràmàyan—not the classic Sanskrit work of Valmiki, but the Hindà vernacular poem of Tulsì Dàs, which is not professedly reckoned a final authority in religion, has much more direct influence with the mass of the people in North India than all their reputed sacred books. But under the Ràmàyan, which recounts the adventures of Ràma, lies a philosophy, assumed where it is not argued, as the basis of all religion. And what is that philosophy? The Hindoos recognize six systems of philosophy, monistic and dualistic, as Shàstra or of canonical authority. Of these, after a conflict of

centuries, the Vedánta, a system of pure monism, has come to dominate the thinking of the great mass of the people. It is the Vedantic philosophy which has had the power to combine and cement into a kind of unity that confused conglomerate of creeds and cults which makes up the totality of modern Hindooism. In indicating, therefore, first of all, the fundamental principles of the Vedantic philosophy, as contrasted with the doctrine of Christianity, we shall have before us those doctrines which permeate and give vitality and strength to modern Hindooism.

1. First of all, then, the modern Hindoo, in strict accordance with the Vedánta, believes that God is one only. The unity of God is the key-note of his faith. Not only the learned, but the lowest and most ignorant among the people are agreed in this. One may go into any village, where on every side he will see the grossest idolatry, and ask the first man that he meets, how many gods there are, and he will have but one answer: "There is only one God." The Vedantic formula is ever on the lips of those who know no other Sanskrit, *Ekambrahmanam dvitīyaṁ nāsti*, "Brahma is one; there is no second." From these words we might at first suppose that Hindooism was at one with Christianity at least in its teaching as to the unity of God. This formula, however, expresses instead the most radical and irreconcilable antagonism of the two systems. For the Hindoo does not mean in such words to affirm that there is no second God, but that there is no second any thing! Brahma is one because he is all, and all that really is, is Brahma. If we inquire further as to the nature of the Supreme Being, the antagonism between the Hindoo and the Christian doctrine becomes still more apparent. For Brahma is said to exist from eternity to eternity as in his essential nature *nirguna, liti*, "without bonds;" by which seems to be intended precisely what certain of our occidental philosophers mean when they speak of God as being "unconditioned," or as "absolute." Of God, thus regarded, no predication can be made. He is pure essence, without attributes of any kind. To use a common expression, He is "invisible, imperceptible, formless, infinite and immutable essence;" which at once is, and was, and ever shall be, and beside which nothing else ever really was, or is, or is to

be. But God is also said to exist as at the same time *saguna*, "with bonds," or with attributes. That is, to render into western phraseology, God exists as conditioned in the universe, and is only to be known by ordinary men as such. To this effect Tulsì Dàs, the great poet of the people of North India, has expressed himself: "Both unconditioned and conditioned is Brahma's essential nature; ineffable, incomprehensible, without beginning and without his like."¹ And this is the doctrine of modern Hindooism as to the nature of the Supreme Being.

2. Immediately consequent upon the foregoing is the next fundamental dogma of Hindoo philosophy, which concerns the nature of this apparent universe of spirit and matter. What is this world, and what are souls? To this, the above statements being granted, only one answer of course can be given. If God be the only real existence, then it follows that the soul and the world, as entities distinct from him, do not exist. What they appear to be, that they are not; and what they appear not to be, that only they are. First, take the case of the soul. I seem to myself to be a person, distinct from the world, from other human persons, and from God. But this is all a mistake. In reality, my soul, as also every other soul, is essential Deity. The common people everywhere speak of the soul as being "a part of God." And yet in the same breath they will affirm that God is *akhand*, "indivisible," whence it follows that each soul is the total Divine Essence; and that is precisely the strict Vedantic doctrine! So one may go into any Hindoo village and ask the first peasant that he meets, who God is, and he will to a certainty receive the answer, *Jo boltà hai, wahì hai*; "That which speaks, that same is he." Thus while Christianity assumes the truth of the testimony of consciousness as to personality, Hindooism pointedly denies it.

But granting all this as to the soul, what then is this visible and tangible world? It seems to be real; to be also something different and distinct from myself, and therefore not of the Divine Essence. To this question a Pundit will probably answer in a familiar Sanskrit line, *Brahma satyan jagan mithyà jivo brahmaiva náparah*, "Brahma exists truly, the world, falsely;

¹ *Ràmàyana, Bål Kànd.*

the soul is very Brahma, there is no other." The same idea is expressed in a beautiful song of South India, as follows :

" God may be seen spread out in space ; yet I,
 Who looked so long, quite failed to catch the sight.
 But now, by Sivam, I declare that all
 That is, is God ; yet what I see is not.
 It and the thousand evils of the world
 Are not of God or true. They *Mâyâ* are."¹

Here, of course, is a contradiction. The world is, and again it is not. This difficulty the pundits try to meet by distinguishing existence as of three kinds—viz., *ṣāramārthika*, *vyāvahārika*, and *prātibhāsika*, which terms may best be rendered respectively as "real," "practical," and "apparent." "Real" existence is affirmed of Brahma only, who is the very inner being of all being. "Apparent" existence is illustrated as follows : I see a rope on the ground, and mistake it for a snake ; the existence of that snake is said to be "apparent." It is plainly not a case of absolute non-existence, because there is really something there. But it is not real existence, because that which seems to be a snake is not a snake. Hence the snake exists, but only apparently. The third kind of existence is illustrated by the case of a man who dreams, e.g., that he is trading, and giving and receiving money. That money exists, say they, not assuredly, *ṣāramārthikam*, in reality ; nor yet *prātibhāsikam*, as in the case of the rope mistaken for a snake, for there is not in this case a reality objective to my own mind. Nevertheless that money exists *vyāvahārikam*, "practically" ; because in my dream I trade with it and it becomes to me an occasion of pain or pleasure as the case may be, like real money. As long as I sleep, that money is to me as if it were real money. So with the existence of the world. It has no existence apart from the Divine Essence, any more than the money of the dreamer has any existence apart from the mind of the dreamer. And yet because I use this world, and receive from it pleasure and pain ; for me it may be said to have a "practical" existence. Many, however, prefer to liken the state of the case to the existence of the snake in the other example given. For there is really something there which is

¹ "Folk Songs of South India," Gover., p. 156.

the occasion of the erroneous judgment, "This is a snake," tho indeed it is not a snake, but a rope. So, it is argued, is the case with the world. There is really something presented to my perception, which something, however, is not a world as something distinct from Brahma, but essential Brahma. Brahma does not indeed become a world, any more than the rope in the illustration becomes a snake. Yet the snake would not have appeared except the rope had been there. And so is the world to Brahma. Thus we have come upon other antagonisms between Christianity and Hindooism. Christianity assumes an essential dualism between matter and spirit, between souls and God. It assumes also that man is what he seems to be—a person. It teaches, moreover, that God is not in any sense the material cause or mere occasion of the existence of the world, but its efficient cause. All this Hindooism denies.

3. Granting, however, all the above positions, the question still remains, Why should the eternal Essence appear under the form of this present universe, rather than any other? Or, more particularly, why the existing distribution of sin and righteousness, joy and sorrow, rather than some other? Why am I what I am? Why do I do as I do and feel as I do, and not otherwise? Why, again, does the good man often suffer, and the bad man prosper in the world? To all these questions, every Hindoo, wise or ignorant, has one all-sufficient and ever ready answer, and that answer is, *karm!* *Karm* has settled every thing. All has been fixed and predetermined, but not as the Calvinist and the Mohammedan say, by God; for it is plain that the unconditioned Brahma, being without attributes and therefore without will, cannot predetermine any thing. All is due to *karm*. And what is *karm*? The word means "deeds" or "actions;" and when the Hindoo would explain all that is or happens by a reference to the predetermining power of *karm*, he indicates thereby, not any free determination in God, nor any blind power external to himself, but a law of subjective necessity; the necessity that actions performed by himself in a previous state of being should bring forth their legitimate and most inevitable result. All Hindoo thinkers agree that the whole universe, material and spiritual, and all that takes place in it, is the effect of actions done by souls as its meritorious

cause. That is to say, for example, I myself, in a former state of existence, whether as man, demi-god, demon, or beast, performed certain actions, good or bad ; and of whatsoever sort they were, they made it necessary for me to be born just when and where and as I have been, and live just the life that I have, in order to reap the fruit of those actions in reward or retribution. Thus this life, with all that is in it, all my perceptions, feelings, and actions, my joys and my sorrows, wealth and poverty, sickness and health, my right deeds and my crimes alike, like a given fruit from a given seed, are the necessary and inevitable result of actions performed in a former state of being, of which it is not pretended that ordinary men have or can have the slightest recollection. And herein we have the doctrine of transmigration of souls, together with its philosophical justification. It has found a sad expression in the following words of a song of South India :

“ How many births are past, I cannot tell ;
 How many yet to come, no man can say ;
 But this alone I know, and know full well,
 That pain and grief embitter all the way.”¹

I do not remember to have met a Hindoo who felt that there was any thing unreasonable in all this. On the contrary, it seems to them the one adequate explanation of the universe, and above all, of the so unequal distribution of happiness and misery. For, inconsistent tho it may be with his pantheism, the Hindoo still has a conscience, and feels that sin and suffering, and especially the suffering of the innocent, must be accounted for. It is accounted for, to his mind, on this hypothesis of the performance of deeds good and bad in a former state of being. Thus if that babe agonize in pain, the Hindoo says, *Pūrv jānam kà phal hai*, “ It is the fruit of a former birth ; ” “ No doubt it must have committed some great sin in a former life.” So, on the other hand, if that reprobate prosper in the world, this is thought to be just as plainly the reward of meritorious deeds performed in a former state of being. Thus the inequalities of life, and, above all, the sufferings of the innocent, seem to the Hindoo to demand the doctrine of *karm* as their only adequate explanation. Thus we have reached another of the

¹ “ Folk Songs of South India,” Gover., p. 38.

great contrasts between Hindooism and Christianity. The issue is deep and broad. It is the issue of necessity against freedom. Christianity affirms free agency both of God and man; Hindooism denies that there is such a thing as free agency either in God or in man. All is necessity. Instead of a world created by God as its efficient cause, Hindooism teaches that the world and all in it is the necessary effect of necessary action in the universal spirit. The world is, and is as it is, simply by a necessity of the Divine nature. To inquire further as to the reason of things were as if one should ask why a mango tree produces mangoes. The tree bears its fruit, not freely, but necessarily, after the predetermining nature of the tree. In like manner we bear fruit, not freely, but necessarily, after the predetermining nature of the actions of a previous life.

4. But this doctrine of *karm* brings us face to face with another issue between Hindooism and Christianity, if possible of still broader sweep and more momentous consequence. It is found in the Hindoo doctrine of *màyà*. Christianity affirms, in accordance indeed with the very dictates of human nature, the trustworthiness of the normal consciousness of man. This Hindooism dogmatically denies. To us it would seem that all the above doctrines might be at once met and answered by a simple reference to consciousness. Consciousness tells me in language most distinct and unmistakable that I am a person, distinct from all other persons, and therefore from God, as also from the objective world around me. It tells me, moreover, that I am free, and not a creature of necessity. That this is the testimony of consciousness the Hindoo will freely admit, as who will not? But he escapes the conclusion which this would seem to compel by denying the credibility of the witness. That we seem to ourselves to be free personal agents, for example, is said to be due to the influence of *màyà*. *Màyà* is "illusion." It is that illusion which, to use the Hindoo phrase, the Supreme Being "throws out" in becoming *saguna*, or "conditioned," in the universe. The ideas of personality, of the substantial and separate reality of the objective world, of a personal Creator of that world, of freedom and responsibility, all alike are begotten of *màyà* or illusion. If in attempting to meet this position we point to the actions of men, and show

how the very men who profess to hold this most extraordinary doctrine do not, and in fact cannot, act upon it, the villager will at once say, "True, true," and laugh, as if he thought it only very amusing that men should be so inconsistent; the pundit will probably refer his sceptical European friend to the old distinction between *sattà vyàvahàrikà* and *pàramàrthikà*, apparent and real existence, and argue after this fashion:—we do act in this world as if it were real, and it is reasonable that we should so act, because it *is* real, *vyàvahàrikam*, "practically." But that does not prove that the world is real *pàramàrthikam*. And this is the very power of *màyà*, that it causes us to mistake that which has only practical reality for that which is really real. The state of the case, as already intimated, is exactly like that of the dreamer, to whom all seems really real so long as he continues dreaming. But if the captive dream of freedom, it does not follow that he is really free; if, in great distress, the monarch dream that he is not a king, but a slave, he is yet, for all his dream, none the less a king. Just so if in this dream of life I seem to myself to be free, that does not prove that I am really free; if I fancy that I am any thing less than essential Brahma, this cannot alter the fact of my veritable identity with him!

5. And now, led on by an inexorable logic, we confront another of the great antagonisms between the Hindoo and the Christian systems. Christianity affirms and Hindooism denies the reality of an eternal and necessary distinction between sin and righteousness. Hindoo thinkers frankly admit this consequence of their principles, and what is more, in many fearful instances attempt in nudity and licentiousness to give their views on this subject an outward, visible, and loathsome expression. That sin has a "practical" existence, as also righteousness, that sin tends to misery, and may bring the sinner to hell for a season; and that virtue tends to happiness, and may bring the virtuous man to heaven, also only for a season—is by all admitted. This must all be conceded for the satisfaction of conscience, which, in India as elsewhere, tells of sin and warns of retribution. Nevertheless, inasmuch as Brahma is the only real existence and I am myself Brahma, it follows that sin and righteousness exist only in my conceptions,

and the distinction between them is only imagined under the power of illusion, while the heaven or the hell to which they are severally supposed to conduct us, is only a dream within a dream. In point of fact, it is argued that in reality both sin and righteousness are alike evil. For, according to Hindoo assumptions, every action, good or bad, necessitates a future birth and life in which the fruit of that action may be reaped. But personal existence, all agree, is an evil. Its continuance under any form is not to be desired. Therefore that which makes it necessary must also be an evil, even that righteous act which makes it necessary for me to be born again into the world that I may reap its reward. Thus the distinction of right and wrong is not inherent and absolute, but accidental and relative to this present life. The murder or uncleanness which is wrong for me may be right for another person. No idea is more familiar to the common people in India than this. If, for example, the missionary object to the deity of Krishna, the accounts of his unspeakable licentiousness, acts so vile that no man would be justified, even in the eyes of a Hindoo, in repeating them, the disputant will probably refer to a passage in the Bhàgavat Puràna wherein the worshipper of Krishna is commanded not to imitate the deeds to the accounts of which he listens. What was right for Krishna may be, nay, *is*, wrong for us; and to confirm this doctrine the Hindoo, if in North India, will probably quote from the Ràmàyan the words, familiar to every Hindì-speaking Hindoo, *Sàmarathi kahan nahin dosha Gusàin*, "To the mighty, O Gusàin, is no sin"—*i.e.*, in western phraseology, "might makes right." The same doctrine as to the nature of sin and virtue is expressed in a song of South India as follows :

" To them that fully know the heavenly truth,
 There is no good or ill ; nor any thing
 To be desired, unclean, or purely clean.

Where God is seen, there can be nought but God.
 His heart can have no place for fear or shame ;
 For caste, uncleanness, hate, or wandering thought,
 Impure or pure, are all alike to him."¹

6. Thus in the next place, while Christianity affirms the great truth of human responsibility, the Hindoo is logically

¹ " Folk Songs of Southern India," Gover., p. 166.

obliged to deny that there is any such thing. Like self-consciousness, responsibility is an illusion. This follows, first, from the denial of a personal God. Grant for an instant the correctness of the Hindoo conception of the Supreme Being, and it is plain that in the nature of the case there can be no such thing as responsibility. That impersonal essence cannot take cognizance of sin and righteousness. Said an old woman in a country village in India to the writer, "What have we to do with God? Our business is with the *devīs* and *devatās* (gods and goddesses)." If that which speaks in me be God, there is no place left for responsibility. And again, even apart from that, if there were a personal God, yet if sin and righteousness be only the fictions of *māyā*, then nothing remains to be responsible for. And even when, over-constrained by the testimony of conscience, the Hindoo will speak as if moral good and evil were to be rewarded and punished by a personal God, still that doctrine of *karm* remains, and is no less fatal to the idea of responsibility. For if I am not free, if all my actions are determined by a law of physical necessity entirely beyond my control, then assuredly I am not responsible for them. Let it be observed again that these are not merely logical consequences attached to the system by an antagonist, which the people will refuse to admit. The Hindoos themselves, both in their authoritative books and in their common talk, argue this very conclusion. In the Purānas, again, and again those guilty of the most flagitious crimes are comforted by Krishna, for example, on this express ground, that whereas all was fixed by their *karm*, and man therefore has no power over that which is to be, therefore in the crime they were guilty of no fault. And so also among the people one wearies of hearing this constant excuse for almost every thing which ought not to be, "What can we do? It was in our *karm*."

7. And now, finally, we come to the last element in the fundamental dogmatic of modern Hindooism—namely, the doctrine concerning salvation, its nature, and the means of its attainment. All among the Hindoos agree that salvation is or should be the great end of life. This sounds well; but what is the nature of this salvation? This will at once appear by a reference to what has been already set forth. This world and

all that is in it is the result of a succession of actions by souls, all which actions are the inevitable consequence of a necessary, self-originated activity in the Divine essence, whereby, to use the Hindoo phrase, Brahm, *lilà karke*, "in sport," evolved his *màyà* or illusory power, producing thereby the semblance of a world. In consequence of this we are all in bondage to this *màyà*. Hence arises the notion of personality and of the objective reality of the world. From this, again, arise desire and aversion, which are the immediate causes of all joy and sorrow, sin and virtue. Salvation must therefore consist in the emancipation of the soul from the bondage of illusion, and consequent realization of the soul's essential identity with God and the unreality of all else than God. But this means simply the cessation of personal existence; and inasmuch as it is by our repeated births that such an existence is continued, salvation must needs consist in deliverance from further transmigrations. Thus as both good works and bad are alike the occasions of births, it follows that salvation from sin is not the end of religion any more than salvation from righteousness. Liberation from conscious existence is "the chief end of man." Again, since according to the theory man is held in this bondage of illusion by "false conception" (*avidyà*) or ignorance, it is plain that knowledge must be the means of salvation from the power of that illusion. And this is precisely the orthodox Hindoo doctrine as to the means of liberation. It is reached by means of knowledge; and that not by knowledge in general, but, specifically, knowledge of the soul's identity with the universal Brahma. This attained, man is then supposed to cease from desire and aversion, as their objects are perceived to have no real existence. Thus at last also he ceases to act, and the cause of transmigration being removed, the weary course is ended and personality is lost in God. But it is granted that the attainment of this transcendental knowledge and consequent liberation at death is exceedingly difficult and rare. In the great majority of cases man leaves this life only to enter on another. Hence, in perfect consistency with the above, the Hindoo believes in lesser and subordinate salvations, more after the analogy of the Christian doctrine. For tho a man may have to pass through ten thousand births before attaining final

liberation, yet of what sort those births shall be, whether into a worse or better state than the present—this is determined, not by knowledge, but by personal merit. Thus the Bràhman saves his philosophy, and yet concedes somewhat to conscience. For altho according to the prevailing philosophy all works are in a sense evil, in that they necessitate another conscious life hereafter, yet crimes are evil in a sense in which other works are not, in that they bring on a painful retribution in the life to come. By an evil course of life a man may be compelled to descend in the scale of being, and by so much his final liberation be deferred. From being a Bràhman he may become a Shùdra, a leper, a hog, or a dog; he may even be enthralled in a tree or a stone, or reappear in one of “the seven dark hells.” Thus the Hindoo finds a place in his system for that praise of virtue and deprecation of vice to which conscience incites, but which at first sight is so utterly inconsistent with his philosophy. Thus, moreover, he finds a place for all the endless rites and ceremonies of popular Hindooism, its almsgivings, its manifold pilgrimages and cruel austerities. They are all means to salvation, not immediate, but mediate. They are supposed to help to clarify the perceptions of the soul, or to prepare the way for a more favorable birth hereafter, and so in a manner hasten the final liberation through the disenthraling knowledge.

Now, while of course it is not pretended that all the people of India are metaphysicians, or would be able to sketch out this system or any other for themselves any more than people in other lands, yet it is, we believe, strictly true that the pantheistic philosophy we have briefly indicated, has as thoroughly leavened the people and as universally pervades all their thinking on religious subjects as, *e.g.*, the principles of Presbyterianism have leavened the thinking of the people of Scotland. It is the often unconscious assumption of the truth of these false principles which is assuredly the chief, and to any but the strongest faith, the insuperable obstacle to the progress of Christianity in India.

8. But altho this Vedantic pantheism is the most central and vital thing in modern Hindooism, it is not by any means the whole of it. The ideal which the Vedànta sets before men,

in a life of abstraction and rapt contemplation of the soul's identity with Brahma, is quite too far above the practical daily life of the most of men. Man is weak, and conscious of dependence ; conscience, too, even in India, ever and anon lifts up her voice in testimony of a personal God above the world, to whom man must give account. Man has thus everywhere the instinct of prayer. But, according to Hindooism, the really perfect man, he who has learned that mystic formula, *Aham-brahman*, "I am Brahma"—he, in the very nature of the case, cannot pray. He has risen far above that low, earthly region where men in the bondage of ignorance busy themselves with the illusory distinctions of good and evil, and weary themselves in seeking to propitiate by various rites of worship, imaginary gods. But the multitude have not reached, and, it is admitted, cannot reach this supermundane elevation. Man looks for a God who shall have somewhat at least in common with himself ; who shall have capacities of knowing, feeling, and willing ; a God who shall be accessible to his cries and not indifferent to his wants ; in a word, a God who shall be a *person*. Thus at first sight Brahmanism, with its impersonal Deity, in the presence of this crying want of the human soul, would seem to be without a resource. How can the Brâhman keep his philosophy, and yet hold out to the demand of the soul of man a personal God? But just here appears the marvellous dower of Hindooism in adapting itself to the wants and instincts of the multitude. First of all, then, to the multitude of weak and sinful men, seeking some one to worship and some one to help, Hindooism says, not merely, "*altho* God is one," but "*because* God is one, ye may worship what ye will." For since Brahma is the only being, it follows that all worship, of whatsoever thing or person, and with whatsoever intent directed, really terminates on him. Starting with this broad principle, whereby all idolatry, if the premise be admitted, is philosophically justified, the Brâhman goes on to develop what is probably the most elaborate system of polytheism and demon-worship that the world has ever seen, and finds a place in its pantheon for no less, according to the popular saying, than 330,000,000 different deities !

At the head of this system of deities and sub-deities stands

the famous *Trimúrtti*, or Triad, of Brahmà, Vishnu, and Shiva. But why three? At first, as has been so often remarked, we seem to have the exact counterpart of the Christian doctrine of the Trinity. But while we need never fear to acknowledge truth because it is found in a false system of religion, in this case the apparent analogy will not bear a close examination. In the Christian doctrine of the Trinity, the three equal persons of the Trinity are set forth as existing in certain relations of precedence and subordination, and as severally distinguished by certain properties peculiar to each. In the Hindoo Triad, the three are entirely independent each of the other, and are distinguished by no such peculiar properties. And it is more fatal still to the fancied analogy, that according to the Christian system the Godhead is manifested exclusively in the three persons of the Trinity; whereas, according to the Hindoo doctrine, the Deity is manifested, not exclusively in the three members of the Triad, but in a degree greater or less in all persons whatsoever, and in the Triad only in the most eminent degree. The explanation of the Triad is to be sought, not in the region of Christian theology, but in philosophy. It is apparently as follows. All divine energy in the universe is comprehended under the three heads of origination, preservation, and destruction. The three members of the Triad severally represent these three conceptions. Hence in the *Bhágavat Purána* the Deity is represented as using the following words: "As Brahmà,¹ I create; as Vishnu, I preserve; as Shiva, I destroy." And yet, on the other hand, as creation, preservation, and destruction may be philosophically conceived as one and the self-same act under different aspects, we find that each of these three functions, in the various sacred books of the Hindoos, is ascribed to each of the three members of the Triad. However this may be in any case, practically, in the three individuals of the Triad, God is presented to the people in the garb of personality. The unconscious Brahma indeed is not to be reached by the cries of men; he is essentially inaccessible to motives of any kind. But Brahmà, Vishnu, and Shiva are

¹ It should be noted that Brahma and Brahmà are not the same. Brahma (in Sansk neuter) denotes the impersonal, universal being; Brahmà (masc.) the first member of the Triad, as in the context.

accessible to motives, often indeed to very base motives. Yet as persons they seem to satisfy in some poor way the demand of the soul for a personal object of worship; and these the Vedantist offers to the people as a substitute for the true and living God, and even himself joins with the multitude in their adoration and service. The three members of the Triad have each their female counterpart or Sakti; and to these—chiefly Vishnu and Shiva, with their Saktis—the practical worship of the great mass of the Hindoos in these days is directed. Either one of these, according to the cult of the worshipper, is regarded as invested with all divine attributes; and all that exists is regarded as a manifestation of one of these three, as each one of the Triad is in fact only a mode under which men apprehend the *nirguna* Brahma. Thus, in a sublime passage in the Bhàgavad Gîta, Vishnu, incarnate in Krishna, is represented as using such words as the following:

“ I am the cause of the whole universe ;
 Through me it is created and dissolved ;
 On me all things within it hang suspended,
 Like pearls upon a string. . . .”¹

To which Arjuna responds in adoration, addressing him as

“ The ancient One, supreme Receptacle
 Of all that is and is not, knowing all,
 And to be known by all. Immensely vast,
 Thou comprehendest all. Thou art the all.
 To thee earth’s greatest heroes must return,
 Blending once more with thy resplendent essence,
 Like mighty rivers rushing to the ocean.”²

All this being so, Hindooism teaches that he who would seek the boon of liberation, but is not equal to the way of knowledge, or immediate intuition of the Divine being, may yet attain this blessing mediately through the worship of Vishnu, the “ way of devotion,” or of Shiva, the “ way of works.” As regards the worship of these two deities, while Shiva’s temples, containing always the phallic symbol of the ling, are indeed more common than temples to any form of Vishnu, he certainly holds no such place in the affections of the

¹ “ Indian Wisdom,” Monier Williams, p. 144.

² “ Indian Wisdom,” M. Williams, p. 148.

people. And the reason is not difficult to see. Shiva is a stern and terrible God, "hard to appease, quick to be angry." His delight is to dance in the field of battle among the heaps of the slain, adorned with a necklace of skulls and covered with the ashes of the dead. Or, again, he is the awful prince of all ascetics, remaining fixed in one position for ages in rapt contemplation, awaking from his reverie only to blast to death with a glance of fire the rash disturber of his meditations. No such God could be loved, and he is not. Vishnu, on the other hand, is a God whose usual character is mild and gentle, as befits the preserver of the world. This alone would secure him a larger measure of devotion. But there is a far more potent reason than this for the place which he holds in the modern Hindoo pantheon. That reason is to be found in the celebrated doctrine of the *avatàrs*, *lit*, "descents" or incarnations of Vishnu, whereby from time to time through the ages he is supposed to have appeared for the good of men. Here we have at first sight another striking analogy, but in reality another notable contrast with the Christian system of doctrine. Man longs not only for a God who shall be personal, but a God who shall be incarnate. That longing Hindooism has sought to meet in this doctrine of the *avatàrs* of Vishnu. In this we have the chief reason for the popularity of the second member of the Triad. The incarnations of Vishnu are commonly said to be ten in number, of which nine are past, and one is yet to come. Of all these, those of Ràma and Krishna hold by far the highest place in the esteem of the people. No vernacular books are so universally read and valued by the people in North India as the Ràmàyan of Tulsì Dàs, and the Prem Sàgar, the former of which describes the life of Ràm, and the latter of which—a translation of the Bhàgavat Puràna—sets forth the incarnation and the life of Krishna. Thus if it is by its philosophy that Hindooism holds the hearts of men, it is chiefly by its doctrine of the incarnations that it holds their affections. Let it be remembered, however, that these incarnations are explained in the strictest accord with the Vedantic philosophy. The Hindoo doctrine, therefore, as to incarnation only presents a superficial analogy with the Christian doctrine of the incarnation of Christ.

According to Christian faith, the incarnation of our Lord was sole and peculiar. Neither before, nor since, nor in time to come does Christianity know any thing of any other manifestation of God in the flesh. But the incarnation of Ràma, for example, was not so. Ràma was only one out of ten incarnations. Besides, according to the Hindoo conception, the difference between Ràma and Krishna and any other man is a difference not in essential nature, but in degree. In a greater or less degree all men, nay, all living things, and even things inanimate, are only bodily forms of the universal deity. The *avatàrs*, therefore, are only incarnations *par excellence*. The Hindoo incarnations differ still further from that of our Lord in their intent. Christ, we are taught, came to save sinners. But everywhere it is asserted that Vishnu only became incarnate to destroy sinners and to help the good. Thus the Hindoo doctrine touching incarnation resembles the Christian only in the most external and superficial manner. But it is one of the strongholds of the system. If it does not reach to the depths of man's need, it does attract the multitude, who demand a God in an embodied form. Moreover, the several incarnations are adapted to the various tastes of men. In the case of Ràma and his wife Sità, we have human characters of more than ordinary beauty. On the other hand, Krishna, as set forth in the Bhàgavat Puràna, is the incarnation of violence, licentiousness, and all iniquity, and as such stands a God after the very heart of licentious and evil men. And yet, on the contrary, in the Krishna of the Bhàgavad Gità we see a character of quite another kind, the type of a lofty and sublime intellectuality. In a word, from among its various *avatàrs* Hindooism is able to furnish every man not only a god incarnate, but with a god after his own heart. Add to all the above the unrestricted permission by the Hindoo religion of every manner of demon and fetish worship, and it is evident that we have reached almost the utmost possible extreme of contrast and antagonism between it and the religion of Christ.

Having thus considered the philosophic basis of modern Hindooism and the practical cultus which has been erected upon it, it only remains, in order to complete the contrast

between the two religions, to refer as briefly as possible to the social institution of caste, which completes the structure. The general facts regarding caste are so well known as to make it unnecessary to enter into any great detail of statement on the subject. The original words, *jāti* and *varana*, which are commonly used in the languages of India to denote the caste distinction, both point to an idea which is central to the doctrine concerning caste, that caste is in the blood and birth. Originally four in number, the various castes have been by various causes divided and subdivided, until we now find, under the four general heads of Bràhman, Kshatriya, Vaishya, and Shùdra, about eight hundred sub-castes, the members of which cannot intermarry, eat or drink together. Among all these, as is well known, the Bràhmans in their various divisions reign supreme. The Bràhman is supposed to be the highest manifestation of God on earth. He is commonly addressed by the deluded people as *devtà*, "god": to perform for him a menial service is a high honor; to drink the water in which he has washed his feet is deemed an exalted privilege. He may be a robber or a murderer, but he is none the less to be held in the highest reverence. One in India may see a low-caste man fall down and worship at the feet even of a Bràhman in chains! From before birth till after death, every orthodox Hindoo must pay substantial tribute to this privileged class. Their commands are to be implicitly obeyed. The Bhàgavat Puràna commands all men to "endure even the offences of Bràhmans." To break caste by intermarriage, or even by eating or drinking with one of a different caste, whatever his rank or social position in other respects may be, is in the eyes of most Hindoos a far more serious offence than lying, stealing, or even murder. To use a Bible phrase, "it is confusion." For the offender is reserved the extreme penalty of an ostracism which cuts him off even from the members of his own immediate family. He can only be restored by submitting to penalties so heavy as to deter thousands, who might for various reasons be glad to escape from the restrictions of caste for a season, from ever making the attempt. The never-failing philosophy is brought in to the support of a social arrangement which antedates the philosophy. For what is all this but a conspic-

uous illustration and confirmation of the doctrine as to the power of *karm* in the distribution of good and evil, high and low rank, in this life? If there were no truth in the doctrine of antecedent works and their predetermining power, whence these distinctions?

Such are the general outlines of the system of modern Hindooism. While men in India differ indeed endlessly in matters of detail, in three things the immense majority of Hindoos are quite unanimous. Above all people they are thoroughgoing and amazingly consistent pantheists. In perfect harmony therewith, their religious cultus is polytheistic, while at the same time they can admit every form of religious faith and practice, from a pure speculative atheism to those most debased forms of demon and fetish worship which prevail among the lower classes. Finally, in the social system erected on this foundation, all modern Hindoos, excepting a few reformers and certain heterodox sects, regulate all practical life by the rules of caste. But while these three elements are everywhere found in the religion of the people, they are not all equally essential to the integrity and permanence of the system. It were quite conceivable and possible that under those influences from the west which are at present so powerfully operating in India, polytheism and even caste should at last fall, and yet Hindooism in its most inward character, as a philosophic system opposed to Christianity, remain unshaken. Many a man, indeed, in India to-day worships no idol, and is none the less regarded as an orthodox Hindoo. On some religious occasions all men are released for a season from the laws of caste in respect to eating and drinking, and their caste as a general principle and fact is not thereby touched. The central and vital thing in Hindooism is the pantheistic philosophy which has been set forth. This is the very citadel of the fortress, and until Christianity has met and conquered that, she cannot be said to have conquered Hindooism. One thing should be from this discussion sufficiently clear. Hindooism and Christianity cannot both be true. They are not merely, as many would have it, different presentations of the same essential divine truth. They are not merely different

phases of one universal religion. Words have often misled men, and so it has been in this matter. The Hindoo and the Christian may both talk, as they do, of the unity of God, of an incarnation, of a Saviour, of a salvation, of heaven and a hell; they may even speak of a new birth, and unite in affirming that the knowledge of God is the necessary means of salvation: but not in a single instance do these terms denote the same conceptions, but, on the contrary, ideas mutually exclusive. If the Christian definition of such terms be the true definition, the Hindoo's is false; if the Hindoo is right, then we are wrong. It were well, in these days of mistaken charity especially, if this matter were better understood. But if the fact of the antagonism of the two religions be granted, then it must be admitted at once that in Hindooism, Christianity has no ordinary antagonist. As well-instructed Christians, we cannot afford to stand aloof in self-satisfied complacency and contemn Hindooism as a mere congeries of degrading and obsolescent superstitions. Not in Athens, Ephesus, or Rome did Paul find a religion of such power as that which to-day confronts the missionary in India. The religions of Greece and Rome have been born and lived out their day since the Hindoo religion had its first beginnings, and yet Hindooism lives on, and it would be hard to show that in those vital and essential features which have been indicated it presents any notable sign of decay. The Christian, therefore, instead of regarding such a system with indolent or contemptuous indifference, should rather address himself to the study of it with peculiar interest, to learn if possible the secret of its so enduring strength. It is not very hard to discover.

First, as remarked above, Hindooism alone, regarded as one of the polytheistic religions of the world, is able to justify and establish that polytheism upon a firm philosophic basis. It may not indeed be the highest conceivable type of outward religion, but for any who may choose it, if all be God, it is not unreasonable. Of peculiar strength also is the Hindoo opposition to the Christian doctrine of salvation by a vicarious sacrifice. In Christian lands the difficulty with most unbelieving theists is to see the necessity of the atonement in order to the remission of sin. They cannot see why God may not reasonably be expected to release men

from the penalties of sin upon repentance, by an act of sovereign pardon. Atonement seems to be a superfluity. To the mind of the Hindoo the case seems quite different. The idea of any such sovereign exemption of man from the consequences of his own sins is entirely foreign to his thinking. His objection to the doctrine of the atonement is not that it is not needed, but that it is in the nature of the case impossible. According to the doctrine of *karm*, every man must suffer for himself the fruit of the things done in the body. Herein Hindooism has a great advantage over many forms of western unbelief, in that, so far from ignoring or denying the testimony of conscience as to the inexorable demands of the law of the universe for the punishment of sin, it rather reaffirms it with the most solemn and tremendous emphasis.

“Tulsî, the body of man is the field and the will of man is the farmer ;
Sin and righteousness the two seeds ; as thou sowest so thou reapest at last !”

With this great law of our moral nature the Christian doctrine of the atonement seems to be in visible conflict, and thus to the Hindoo commonly the gospel of a salvation by a vicarious death appears to stand self-condemned at the bar of the universe.

Again, to men conscious of sin and apprehensive of a coming retribution, any system will stand commended which minifies or denies responsibility. This, as we have seen, Hindooism does, on the basis of three propositions—*viz.*, that there is no essential distinction between the soul and God ; that there is no such thing as free agency ; and consequently no necessary and permanent distinction between sin and righteousness. Such doctrines cannot indeed heal, but they are most effectual to narcotize the conscience. They dull and ease the acuter pangs of remorse, and deaden the sense of need of a Saviour. A system which, like Hindooism, is as an opiate to the pain of sin must needs stand strong in the faith of its votaries. Also, again, the doctrine of *mâyâ*, or illusion, does much to make the Hindoo position inexpugnable. To deny or doubt the affirmations of consciousness—*e.g.*, as to freedom, personality, responsibility—were to render the very foundations of human knowledge more uncertain than sand. With

us here is the ultimate appeal in all argument and an end of all strife. But the Hindoo, by denying the dicta of consciousness, and affirming this doctrine of illusion, places himself at once beyond the reach of argument. Every missionary knows to his sorrow how at the last his adversary will always bring forth *mâyà* as a sufficient answer to any argument and an adequate solution of every difficulty. From this panoply of illusion the keenest arguments glance off like feather shafts from a coat of mail. Still further, it is impossible that a man who has been brought to doubt the testimony of his own consciousness should be otherwise than indifferent to the truth. If the doctrine of *mâyà* be admitted, the distinction between truth and error vanishes into thin air. If all is error, then there is no room for truth. Truth is but a mere phantom which is not worth the chasing. All things are equally true, or equally false, as you please to take it. Hence, argues the Hindoo always, all religions are alike true, and from God. Christianity is true; so also is Hindooism and Mohammedanism and every other religion. There is only the difference of a name; and if this be so, why should a man forsake the cult of his fathers, only to bring trouble and ruin on himself? It is plain that no temper of mind could well be more unfavorable to the reception of the truth than this. To a man who has come under the deadly influence of this doctrine of *mâyà*, all argument on whatsoever subject becomes a mere logomachy. It is like the play of fencers, which has no other object than to display the agility and skill of the fencer. As yet another consequence of these same general principles and another element of the enduring strength of Hindooism, we must not overlook the marvellous assimilative power of the system. Logically and historically, it has proven itself able to incorporate into itself every manner of religious ideas and principles and adapt itself to men of every possible taste and capacity. To the philosophic intellect it presents one of the most elaborate systems of philosophy that the human mind has ever wrought out. To the mystic, seeking for union with God, it holds forth an ineffable and essential union with the Deity as the sure result of a life of pious abstraction and meditation. To the ascetic it holds forth the Deity as revealed in Shiva as the

very ideal ascetic, and at the same time the Mahàdeva or great God of men ; at once an awful model for imitation, and a mighty power by the propitiation of whom through austerities man may at last lift himself up to God. To those desiring morality and uprightness it shows the Deity in the form of Ràma Chandra, or the Krishna of the Bhàgavad Gîta, whose wise counsels have, not without reason, been sometimes compared to those of the Gospels. To the carnal and licentious it offers as a Deity the Krishna of the Bhàgavat Puràna, whose licentious sports with the cowherdesses are celebrated with song and dance throughout India ; or if any one would seek a still lower depth, yet within the limits of Hindooism, we have it in the nameless worship of the Sakti or female principle, a glorification of impurity as the most immediate means of salvation. Even for the wild fetish and demon-worshipping aboriginal tribes of the country, for the Gond and for the Mair of Ràjputànà, Hindooism has found a place. If they will but cease to eat the flesh of the cow and recognize the supremacy of the Bràhman, they may keep all that they care for in their own primitive religions, and even thereby rise in a future state of being somewhat nearer to the Deity, even to Brahmanhood itself. Finally, any dissatisfied soul would yet escape from the iron bondage of Hindooism into the larger liberty of the truth, yet around him on every side, like a deep moat without a bridge, lies the ordinance of caste. To change his religion is to renounce caste, and this touches him in every point of his outer and inner life. It means to renounce home and friends, even the nearest ; to give up in most cases even the means of a livelihood ; for the high-caste man it means to sink at one step from a position of honor in society to that of a social outcast. Thus by its institution of caste Hindooism has enlisted on its side all man's honorable pride, all his family and social affections, the very instinct of self-preservation which makes a man seek for a maintenance. Nay, for the Bràhman, caste is a part or often the whole of that by which he has his daily bread or amasses wealth. Thus the entire Brahmanical caste must needs regard the levelling truth of Christianity as Demetrius regarded the preaching of Paul at Ephesus. By this craft he has his wealth. He has no

objection, indeed, that any of his clients should worship Christ in his heart so long as he does not see that by any overt act his own supremacy is likely to be endangered. Then, tolerant hitherto, he is tolerant no longer; and to the apostate who has left his own for another religion he knows to show no mercy.

Is it a wonder that Hindooism has not yielded at once to Christianity? And can the church of Christ reasonably expect to accomplish any great success against Hindooism till she undertake the evangelization of that people with a zeal, faith, and vigor in some proportion to the almost incomparable difficulty of the work? And yet, great as is the difficulty, all in India is not antagonism. Even in those dreary desolations of pantheism one may hear oftentimes voices lifted up for the true and living God, witnessing more or less distinctly to the great truths which Christianity clearly reveals. God has not left himself without a witness, and herein have we hope.

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