

THE ANCIENT INDIAN CONCEPTION OF THE SOUL AND ITS FUTURE STATE.

I PROPOSE in this paper to deal with the beliefs of the ancient Indians regarding the soul and its future state as presented by Indian literature during a period of some fifteen centuries down to about 200 A. D. This period embraces the whole of Vedic and the early centuries of Sanskrit, or as it is often called classical Sanskrit, literature. I draw the line at 200 A. D., because by about that date the religious and philosophical ideas of the Indians had attained their full development; since then they have undergone no modifications of primary historical interest.

The literature of this period is specially important for the history of religion and philosophy for various reasons. It is, in the first place, distinguished by its originality. Naturally isolated by its gigantic mountain barrier on the north, the Indian peninsula, ever since the Aryan invasion, formed a world apart, and had by the fourth century B. C., when the Greeks invaded the north-west, fully worked out a national culture of its own unaffected by foreign influences. Secondly, the oldest Vedic writings present to us an earlier stage in the evolution of religious beliefs than any other literary monument of the world. Thirdly, Sanskrit literature registers a continuity of life and thought which is unique among the Aryan nations. The civilisation of all the European peoples was entirely transformed ages ago by the adoption of Christianity, and that of the Persians by the adoption of Muhammadanism. Modern India, on the other hand, can trace back its language and literature, its religious rites and beliefs, its philosophical ideas, its domestic and social customs, through an uninterrupted development of more than 3,000 years. Finally, the main content of Vedic literature is religious and philosophical; it is, moreover, very extensive, being more than equal to what survives of the litera-

ture of ancient Greece. Hence the sources at our disposal for the present inquiry are in a high degree original, early, continuous, and complete.

Among the sources supplied by ancient Indian literature, within the period I have indicated, six different strata may be distinguished. The earliest is that of the four Vedas; but of these only two are of importance for our purpose. The older of these two, the Rig-veda, which is a collection of metrical sacrificial hymns more than a thousand in number, contains several funeral and theosophical hymns. It is the earliest literary monument of India, for its most recent portions cannot be later than 1000 B. C.; it is at the same time our most important source for the evolution of religion in India. It represents the advanced religious ideas of the priestly class. The Atharva-veda, which assumed shape some centuries later, on the other hand, exhibits the lower beliefs current among the masses. Its chief content is witchcraft connected with domestic and social usages. At the same time it includes more theosophical hymns than the Rig-veda itself. For the history of civilisation it is on the whole more interesting and important even than the older Veda.

A second stage is represented by the Brāhmaṇas, prose theological treatises dealing for the most part with explanations of the sacrificial ritual. Dating from between 800 and 600 B. C., they supply comparatively little information about the subject with which we are now concerned.

Much more important in this respect are the theosophical treatises called Upanishads, for their main theme is the nature of soul. The oldest of them, written in prose, are pre-Buddhistic, as their main doctrines are presupposed by Buddhism; that is to say, they must have been composed by 600 B. C.

The fourth stratum of our authorities consists of the compendia called Gṛihya Sūtras. They deal with domestic and social usages, of which funeral rites form an important part. As they supply a complete picture of the life of the ancient Indian from birth to the grave, they are highly important anthropologically. They were composed in the period between 500 and 200 B. C.

A fifth stage is represented by the various systems of Indian

philosophy which assumed definite shape in the two centuries preceding and the two following the commencement of our era. They are largely concerned with the nature of soul.

Lastly, we have the first of the great Law-books, the Mānava Dharma Āstra, or Code of Manu, which was composed about 200 A. D. It contains both philosophical sections and an enumeration of various hells.

The moral Sūtras or compendia of Buddhism, written in Pāli, the eldest daughter of Sanskrit, some centuries before our era, belong to much the same period as the Gṛihya Sūtras ; but the data they furnish, at least with regard to the soul, are purely negative ¹.

Turning to these sources themselves, we can now summarise historically the information they supply regarding the ancient Indian conception of the soul. In the Rig-veda 'soul' is synonymous with the animating principle ; and nearly all the names by which it is here denoted show that it was regarded as more or less identical with breath. One of these names is *prāṇa*, 'respiration,' another *asu*, 'spirit,' and the third *ātman*, 'breath.' This expression *ātman*, which later becomes the regular term for 'soul' or 'self,' still means nothing more in the Rig-veda than 'breath,' for it is often used as the express parallel of *vāta*, 'wind.' There is also a fourth term which is sometimes employed in a secondary sense to express 'soul.' This is *manas* (from *man*, 'to think,' and etymologically identical with the Greek *μένος*), the ordinary meaning of which is 'mind' as the seat of the mental operations. In some passages, however, where it is contrasted with 'body,' it clearly has the sense of 'soul.'

There are many passages, occurring mostly in the Atharva-veda, which show that life was held to be dependent on the continuance of 'soul' (*asu* or *manas*), and that death resulted from its permanent departure. Soul was further considered to be capable of separation from the body during unconsciousness. Thus in a whole hymn of the Rig-veda (x 58) the soul (*manas*) of one who is lying apparently dead is besought to return from the distance where it is wandering. The soul was regarded vaguely as dwelling somewhere inside the body. There is,

¹ Further information about these literary periods will be found in the present writer's *History of Sanskrit Literature* (Heinemann, 1900).

however, at least one passage in the Rig-veda (viii 95, 5) which locates it. Here the *manas* is described as speaking 'in the heart' (*hṛīdi*). But there is nothing in the Vedas to show what beliefs were held as to how the soul entered into or escaped from the body.

It is further clear from the Rig-veda that the soul was regarded as capable of continued existence after death. Thus the term *asunīti* or *asunīta*, 'spirit-leading,' is frequently used to describe the conduct by Agni, god of fire, of the souls of the dead on the path between this and the other world. There is no clear statement as to what was thought to be the nature or condition of the soul during this passage. It was, in any case, always believed to retain its personal identity; for the funeral texts never invoke the *asu* or *manas* of the deceased, but only the individual himself as 'father,' 'grandfather,' or other relative, as the case may be. But there can be no doubt whatever that, after the arrival of the soul in the next world, its continued existence was believed to be a corporeal one¹.

It should here be noted that the rite of cremation materially influenced the ancient Indian conception of the state of the soul after death. Though burial is a few times referred to in the Rig-veda, cremation was undoubtedly, even in the earliest Vedic period, the usual method of disposing of the dead. The later ritual of the Gṛihya Sūtras knew only this method, their rules allowing only children under two years of age and ascetics to be buried; and this custom, as is well known, still prevails among the Hindus of the present day.

The dead man was provided with ornaments and clothing for use in the next life. Traces even survive in the Rig-veda which show that his weapons and his wife were once burnt with the body of the dead husband; for his bow is removed from his hand, and his widow lies down beside the corpse before it is burnt on the pyre, though she is summoned to return to the world of the living, and to take the hand of her new husband, doubtless a brother of the deceased².

¹ The Vedic beliefs regarding the soul are more fully treated in the present writer's *Vedic Mythology* (Strassburg, 1897), § 72, where numerous references are given.

² There is hardly any mention of the cruel practice of widow-burning in the whole range of Vedic literature; but in Sanskrit works of the seventh century A.D.,

During the process of cremation Agni is in the Rig-veda besought to preserve the corpse intact and to burn the goat which is immolated at the same time; the god is also invoked to heal any injury that bird, beast, ant, or serpent may have inflicted on it.

An indication of the importance of the corpse in connexion with the future life is the fact that the loss of the dead man's bones, which, according to the Gṛihya Sūtras, were collected after cremation and buried, is stated in one of the Brāhmaṇas¹ to be a severe punishment.

After cremation the disembodied spirit is regarded as being conducted by Agni with the column of smoke to the sky. The Rig-veda gives us hardly any details of the passage to the other world, simply stating that the dead go by the path trodden by the fathers, along the heights by the way first found out by Yama, chief of the dead. It tells us, however, that on this road they have to pass the two broad-nosed, brindled, brown dogs of Yama that guard the path². The Rig-veda distinguishes the path of the fathers (*pitṛi-yāna*) from the path of the gods (*deva-yāna*), doubtless because the funeral-fire is different from the fire of sacrifice.

The Atharva-veda gives a more detailed account of the journey to the other world. Here we are told that, invested with lustre like that of the gods, the spirit proceeds in a car or on wings; that it is wafted onward by the Maruts (or storm-gods), fanned by soft breezes and cooled by showers³.

It appears as a matter of course that the wife of a king should mount his funeral pyre. Later the custom became universal, and continued to be so till 1829, when it was abolished by the British government. It is highly probable that this practice was in India, as in other countries, originally limited to the families of kings, and only found a place in the official law of the Brahmans after it had gradually spread to other classes. Then the Brahmans, with that aptitude for absorbing all manner of outside elements into their system, themselves made an attempt to justify the practice by falsifying a passage of a funeral hymn of the Rig-veda by substituting the word *agneh*, 'of fire,' for *agre*, 'at first.' It is certain that the priests of the time of the Rig-veda did not recognise the practice; and that it is absolutely wrong to describe the custom of *sati* (literally 'virtuous woman') as an invention of the Brahmans.

¹ Çatapatha Brāhmaṇa, XI vi 3, 11; XIV vi 9, 28.

² In the Avesta a four-eyed yellow-eared dog keeps watch at the head of the Cinvat bridge, which is supposed to lead from this world to the next, and with his barking scares away the fiend from the souls of the holy ones, lest he should drag them to hell.

³ See *Vedic Mythology*, p. 166.

On arriving in the other world the spirit is united with its old body, which has been refined by the power of Agni, and is now free from all imperfections and frailties. Here the deceased man sees father, mother, and unites with wife and children. Such statements show that the personal identity of the deceased was thought to be fully preserved in the next life.

The abode which the dead obtain is described as situated in the midst of the sky, in the inmost recess of the sky, where is eternal light, in the third heaven, in the highest heaven, in the highest step of Vishnu, in the highest point of the sun ¹.

Here they meet with the fathers or ancestors, who revel with Yama; here they enjoy bliss with the gods, under a tree with abundant foliage. Here the sound of the flute and of songs is heard. Here Soma, ghee, and honey flow; here are ponds filled with ghee, and streams flowing with milk, honey, and wine. Here are bright many-coloured cows which yield all desires. Here prevail gladness, the fulfilment of all wishes, and abundant sensual joys. Here are neither rich nor poor, neither powerful nor oppressed. Here the dead are united with what they have sacrificed and given ². This heavenly abode is the reward of those who practise penance, of heroes who risk their lives in battle, but especially of those who bestow abundant gifts on priests. In short, heaven to the composers of the Vedas was a glorified world of material joys as pictured by the imagination, not of warriors, but of priests.

Those who have recently entered this heavenly abode are spoken of as pious men who enjoy bliss with the gods; while the term *pitarah*, or fathers, is applied rather to earlier ancestors. These ancestors are worshipped. Two hymns of the Rig-veda are specially dedicated to their praise, and the food offered to them is distinguished from that offered to the gods. In the Atharva-veda they are stated to be immortal, and many of the powers which distinguish the gods are attributed to them in both Vedas. There is, however, no evidence to show whether the immortality of the fathers was thought to be absolute, any more than that of the gods.

This future life of bliss in heaven is the reward of the righteous only. But what is the fate of the souls of the wicked? Very

¹ *Op. cit.* § 73, p. 167.

² *Op. cit.* p. 168.

little information on this point is to be found in the Rig-veda. A 'deep place' is said to have been produced for those who are evil, false, and untrue. The gods Indra and Soma are besought to dash the evil-doers into the abyss, into bottomless darkness, so that not even one of them may get out; and a poet prays that the demoness who malignantly wanders about may fall into the endless abysses, and that the enemy and robber may lie below all the three earths. The evidence of all the references to this subject in the Rig-veda¹ does not go beyond showing belief in a hell as an underground darkness. Such a belief, indeed, in all probability goes back to the period when the Iranians and Indians were still one people; for the Avesta also is acquainted with a dark abode as a place of punishment for the wicked.

The conception of hell is already more definite in the Atharva-veda, which speaks of it as the house below, the abode of female goblins and sorceresses, and gives it the specific name of *nāraka-loka*, the infernal world, as contrasted with *svarga-loka*, the celestial world, the realm of Yama. From this time onwards *Naraka* is the regular name of hell in Sanskrit literature. This hell is several times in the Atharva-veda described as 'lowest darkness,' 'black darkness,' and 'blind darkness.' In one hymn (V 19) of this Veda some reference is even made to the torments of hell. Thus one of its verses states that 'they who spat upon a Brahman, who desired tribute from him, sit in the middle of a pool of blood, chewing hair.' There is also a passage in the Yajur-veda in which murderers are described as being consigned to hell.

The view of the Vedas, then, is briefly this. The soul is regarded as the animating principle, sometimes with the added faculties of emotion and thought, and is located in the heart. It is capable of separation from the body, but does not long remain in this condition of separation. After death it is united with a glorified double of the terrestrial body in the height of heaven, where it enjoys a life of unending bliss as a reward of virtue. With regard to the souls of the wicked after death, the belief of the earliest Veda was very indefinite, not going beyond the idea of confinement in a dark underground abode; but this belief became somewhat more developed in the later Vedas.

¹ *Op. cit.* § 75, p. 169, 170.

Coming to our second literary period, we find that the theory about the soul is still much the same as in the Vedic stage which has just been described, but shows certain developments with regard to the future life, thus forming a transition to the views held in the next stage. Among these developments it may be noted that the Brāhmaṇas begin to distinguish between the world of the gods (*svarga-loka*) and the world of the fathers (*pitri-loka*); that here the reward of performing sacrifice correctly comes to be described as union or identity of nature with Prajāpati or Brahmā, the chief of the gods; and that the torments of hell have become more definite; men, for instance, being described as having their limbs hewn off one by one, or as being devoured by others as an exact requital for deeds done during life on earth. But what is much more important than all this, the doctrine now for the first time begins to be stated that after death, all, both good and bad, are born again in the next world, and are recompensed according to their deeds. Thus the *Çatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, or 'Brāhmaṇa of the hundred paths,' states that every one is born again after death, and is weighed in a balance, receiving reward or punishment according as his works are good or bad. The same Brāhmaṇa states that as a reward for knowing a certain mystery a man is born again in this world. Here we have the beginnings of the doctrine of transmigration dependent on retribution, which is fully developed in the next period, that of the Upanishads.

This momentous doctrine entirely changed the complexion of Indian thought, and has prevailed in India ever since. The aim of life to the Indian was no longer, as in the age of the Vedas, the attainment of earthly happiness and afterwards bliss in the abode of Yama, by sacrificing correctly to the gods; its aim was now release from the chain of mundane existences by the absorption of the individual soul in the world-soul through correct knowledge. It is noteworthy that this release or salvation (called *moksha* by the Brahmans and *nirvāṇa* by the Buddhists), which became the object of all the religious and philosophical systems of India from about 600 B. C., is always dependent on some form of knowledge, *not* on faith. In the Upanishads we have, in fact, a new religion, virtually opposed to the ritual or practical religion which had hitherto prevailed, for knowledge

is now everything and ceremonial practice nothing. In place of the optimistic polytheism of the Vedas, we have now in the Upanishads a pessimistic pantheism. The chief god of the Brāhmaṇas, Prajāpati, the Creator, has become *brahma*, the embodiment of holiness, which is now regarded as the soul (*ātman*) of the universe. The material universe, being only a manifestation of it, is an illusion (*māyā*), for Brahma is the only reality. Here is a description of the world-soul from the Bṛihadāraṇyaka Upanishad, a work which cannot have been written later than about 600 B. C.

‘It is not large, and not minute; not short, not long; without blood, without fat; without shadow, without darkness; without wind, without ether; not adhesive, not tangible; without smell, without taste; without eyes, ears, voice, or mind; without heat, breath, or mouth; without personal or family name; unaging, undying, without fear, immortal, dustless, not uncovered or covered; with nothing before, nothing behind, nothing within. It consumes no one, and is consumed by no one. It is the unseen seer, the unheard hearer, the unthought thinker, the unknown knower. There is no other seer, no other hearer, no other thinker, no other knower. That is the Eternal in which space is woven and which is interwoven in it.’ Here, for the first time in the history of human thought, we find the absolute grasped and proclaimed.

The fundamental doctrine of the Upanishads is the identity of the individual soul with this universal soul; it is summed up in the celebrated formula *tat tvam asi*, ‘that art thou.’ Salvation here is obtained by correct knowledge of this identity.

Hand in hand with this doctrine goes that of transmigration. The theory of the Brāhmaṇas does not go beyond the notion of repeated births and deaths in the next world. It is transformed to the doctrine of transmigration in the Upanishads by supposing rebirth to take place in this world. According to this theory every individual passes after death into a series of new existences in heavens and hells, or in the bodies of men, animals, and plants on earth, where it is rewarded or punished in strict accordance with its *karma* or action committed in a former life. This doctrine was already so firmly established in the sixth century B. C., that Buddha received it without question into his

religious system; and it is the universal belief of the Hindus at the present day. There is perhaps nothing more remarkable in the history of the human mind than that a strange doctrine like this, never philosophically demonstrated, should have been regarded as self-evident for 2,500 years by every philosophical school or religious sect in India excepting only the materialists.

As the doctrine of transmigration is entirely absent from the Vedas and the early Brāhmaṇas, it seems probable that the Indian Aryans borrowed the idea in a rudimentary form from the aborigines; but they certainly deserve the credit of having elaborated out of this rudimentary idea the theory of an unbroken chain of existences intimately connected with the moral principle of requital. The immovable hold it acquired on Indian thought is doubtless due to the satisfactory explanation it offered of the misfortune or prosperity which is often clearly caused by no action done in this life. Indeed, the Indian doctrine of transmigration, fantastic though it may appear to us, has the twofold merit of satisfying the requirement of justice in the moral government of the world, and at the same time of inculcating a valuable ethical principle which makes every man the architect of his own fate. For as every bad deed done in this existence must be expiated, so every good deed will be rewarded in the next life.

We may now summarise the statements of the Upanishads respecting the soul while in the body and after death. In the living body in its ordinary state the soul dwells in the interior of the heart. In the older Upanishads the soul is described as being in size like a grain of barley or of rice, in the later ones, as of the size of a thumb. It is in shape like a man, being also called the dwarf. Thus it is a kind of inner mannikin, a psychical Tom Thumb. Its appearance is also compared with various objects, such as a flame, a white lotus, a flash of lightning, a light without smoke. It is described as consisting of consciousness, mind, the vital airs, eye and ear, the elements, desire, and anger. In other passages the soul is said to be made of mind only, or of consciousness only, but even then it is said to rise out of the elements¹.

¹ Cp. Rhys Davids, 'The Theory of "Soul" in the Upanishads,' *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 1899, pp. 71-87.

In dream sleep the soul is, in the Upanishads, held to be away from the body. 'Therefore they say: Let no one wake a man brusquely; for that is a matter difficult to be cured for him, if the soul find not its way back to him¹.' During the dream, the soul, leaving the body in charge of the vital airs, wanders at its will, builds up a world according to its fancy, till at last, tired out, it returns, like a falcon which, after roaming about in the sky, flaps its wings and is wafted to its nest.

During dreamless deep sleep the soul is said to pervade the whole body, to the very hairs and nails, by means of the 72,000 arteries.

There is no distinct statement in the Upanishads as to the time or manner of the entrance of the soul into the body, the views held on this point being hazy. But there are passages which show that the soul was supposed to have existed before birth in some other body, and to have been inserted at the origin of things into its first body downwards through the suture in the top of the skull into the heart; or, as one passage has it, through the tips of the feet upwards through the belly into the head. There is also a curious speculation on the transfer of the soul at the time of generation.

As to the manner of the soul's exit after death, the statements are just as vague and contradictory as those about its entrance.

The statements as to the way in which the soul transmigrates are also somewhat conflicting. The most important and detailed account is that given in the two oldest Upanishads. Here we are told that the forest ascetic possessed of correct spiritual knowledge, after death enters 'the path of the gods' (*devayāna*), which leads to absorption in Brahma. The householder, on the other hand, who has performed sacrifice and good works, goes by the 'path of the fathers' (*pitṛiyāna*) to the moon, where he remains till the consequences of his actions are exhausted. He then returns to earth, being first born again as a plant, and afterwards as a man of one of the three highest castes. Here we have a double retribution, first in the next world, then by transmigration in this. The former is due to a survival of the old Vedic belief about the future life. The wicked are described as born again as outcasts, or birds, beasts, and reptiles².

¹ Bṛihadāraṇyaka Upanishad, IV iii 14.

² Cp. the present writer's *Sanskrit Literature*, pp. 224-5.

The Gṛihya sūtras, our fourth literary stratum, are largely concerned with funeral rites. From them we learn what were the popular beliefs regarding the condition of the soul during the period immediately following death. The soul is here represented as remaining separated from the Manes for a whole year as a *preta* or ghost. After the lapse of that period the *preta* was admitted to the circle of the fathers by a special funeral rite. A monument was then erected, the bones being taken out of the urn and buried. The Gṛihya sūtras describe various offerings to the Fathers or Manes, taking place at fixed periods, such as that on the day of new moon. These rites of ancestor-worship still play an important part in India, well-to-do families in Bengal spending not less than 5,000 to 6,000 rupees on their first *Ṣrāddha*¹.

We now come to the fifth stage, the philosophical systems. The two most important are the Vedānta and the Sāṅkhya. The Vedānta is nothing else than the doctrines of the Upanishads methodically arranged. In this system individual souls are regarded as not really existent, being identical with Brahma, which is the only existent entity. Just as much as all other phenomena of the material world, they are an illusion, the ultimate cause of which is *avidyā*, a species of innate ignorance. The theory of the transmigration of the soul is here more elaborate than in the Upanishads. The soul may rise by gradations of merit from plants and insects through gods up to Brahma, when it obtains salvation by recognising that it is identical with Brahma. The cycle of transmigration is held to have had no beginning and is not brought to an end by the cataclysm at the end of a cosmic age; but starts again on the renewal of the world. Thus there is a never-ending series of cosmic as well as individual cycles of transmigration.

The dualistic Sāṅkhya philosophy denies the existence of a supreme soul altogether. It only acknowledges matter on the one hand and an infinite number of individual souls on the other. These souls possess no attributes or qualities and can only be described negatively. There being no qualitative difference between souls, the principle of personality and identity is here supplied by the subtle or internal body, which, formed chiefly

¹ Cp. *Sanskrit Literature*, p. 257.

of the inner organs and the senses, surrounds and is made conscious by the soul. This internal body accompanies the soul on its wanderings from one body to another, whether the latter be that of a god, a man, an animal, or a tree. When salvation is obtained the internal body is dissolved into its material elements, and the soul, becoming finally isolated, continues to exist individually, but in absolute unconsciousness. Saving knowledge here consists in recognising the absolute difference between soul and matter. It is interesting to note that according to the doctrine of the Sāṅkhya, all mental operations, such as perception, thinking, willing, are not performed by the soul, but are merely mechanical processes of the internal organs, i.e. of matter.

The heterodox system of Buddhism was in all probability based on the oldest form of the Sāṅkhya doctrine. Like the Sāṅkhya it denied the existence of a supreme soul, substituting a void (*śūnya*) for the world-soul, destitute of all attributes, of the Upanishads. Strange to say Buddhism acknowledged the lower ephemeral gods of Brahmanism, holding them, like the other systems, to be subject to the law of transmigration, and, unless they obtained saving knowledge, to be on a lower level than the man who had obtained such knowledge. Buddhism went further than the Sāṅkhya in denying the existence not only of the world-soul, but of the individual soul also. At the same time Buddha accepted the theory of transmigration, for which the existence of the individual soul seems a necessary postulate. For what was there to migrate from one body to another, if there were no soul? Buddha got over the difficulty by his doctrine of *Karma*, which he makes the connecting link between a former and a subsequent birth. According to this doctrine, as soon as a sentient being (man, animal, or god) dies, a new being is produced according to the *Karma*, the desert or merit, of the being who had died.

Salvation, according to the logical view in Buddhism, can only mean annihilation. But Buddha himself refused to decide the question whether *nirvāṇa* is complete extinction or an unending state of unconscious bliss. The latter view was doubtless a concession to the Vedāntic conception of Brahma, in which the individual soul is merged on attaining salvation.

In connexion with Buddhism it may be mentioned that, according to its cosmogony, the abodes of living beings are divided into thirty-one worlds. The lowest of these are the hells or places of punishment (*naraka*). In the old system of the Northern Buddhists there are eight hot hells and eight cold ones, all having special names. In the later northern works and in the Pāli canon of the Southern Buddhists there are still more hells.

The heretical school of the Chārvākas went one step further than even the Buddhists. They denied not only the existence of a supreme soul and of the individual soul, but also the doctrine of transmigration which was accepted by every other school in India. To them matter was the only reality. Soul they regarded as nothing but the body with the attribute of intelligence. They hold that it comes into being when the body is formed by the combination of the elements, just as the power of intoxication arises from the mixture of certain ingredients. They were very severe on the religion of the Brahmans. The Vedas, they said, were only the incoherent rhapsodies of knaves and were tainted with the three faults of falsehood, self-contradiction, and tautology ; Vedic teachers were impostors, whose doctrines were mutually destructive ; and the ritual of the Brahmans was useful only as a means of livelihood. If, they ask, an animal sacrificed reaches heaven, why does the sacrificer not rather offer his own father ? 'While life remains,' they say, 'let a man live happily, let him feed on ghee, even though he run into debt ; when once the body becomes ashes, how can it ever return again ¹ ?'

The views set forth in the earliest of the Law-books, the Code of Manu, on the subject of the soul, are mainly based on the doctrines of the leading philosophical systems. The many stages the soul passes through in transmigration are here described in great detail ; and the torments of hell occupy a position of some importance as deterring from crime. No fewer than twenty-one terrible hells are enumerated as in store for evil-doers. The torments of some of them furnish curious analogies to the notions prevailing in the European Middle Ages. Only one of Manu's hells need be mentioned here as an instance, the *Asi-pattra-vana*, the forest of trees with sword-leaves.

¹ *Op. cit.*, p. 407.

Looking back over the ground we have covered, we can hardly fail to be struck by the rapidity with which the Indian mind developed the ideas on the subject of soul with which it started.

To begin with, we have the chaotic polytheism of the Rig-veda. Then in the Brāhmaṇas we have a chief god, Prajāpati. By about 600 B.C. we have already substituted for this creator¹ a supreme soul without any attributes, Brahma, the highest possible abstraction. By 500 B.C. the existence even of this absolute being is denied by the founder of Buddhism.

Secondly, with regard to the human soul, the Indian mind travelled, within the same period, from the primitive views of the Rig-veda to the Sāṅkhya conception of *individual* souls without attributes. The existence even of these was denied by Buddha.

Thirdly, from the material Rig-vedic conception of the life hereafter being one of physical pleasure in heaven, we come, within the same time, to the highly abstract view of the Upanishads, according to which the soul loses its individual existence by being merged in the supreme soul which is destitute of qualities. Buddha goes a step further, and assumes complete extinction.

Fourthly, from the simple vague Rig-vedic conception of hell as an underground darkness, we arrive by the end of the second century of our era at the elaborate system of sixteen or more hells in Buddhism and the twenty-one Brahmanic hells of Manu.

Lastly, from the simple Rig-vedic idea of a permanent abode in heaven as a reward, and in darkness as a punishment, we reach, by 600 B.C., the complicated system of requital and salvation as worked out in the theory of transmigration, which has dominated Indian thought ever since.

It has, of course, only been possible here to treat the subject quite cursorily, for a whole volume would be required to deal with it in an adequate manner. But enough has perhaps been said to show that a study of the ancient Indian conception of the soul during life and after death occupies a highly important place in the history of religious evolution.

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¹ Though Prajāpati remains in the subordinate position of a Demiurge.

² On Indian hells compare Leon Feer, 'L'enfer indien,' in *Journal Asiatique*, 1893 and 1895.