III

INDIA

Contrast between India and China. — China and India adjoin each other. Nevertheless, between them intervenes more than the bulk of the Himalayas, "the Palace of Snow," as the Hindus call it. The two races are absolutely separate by natural character and disposition. On the one side a harsh, positive spirit, without horizon, has settled and prescribed the rules of a moral code; on the other are a disordered imagination, a faith ardent but without works, a useless asceticism which kills the flesh, and unbridled passions which satiate it; in short, man lost in the bosom of nature, and aspiring only to lose himself in the bosom of divinity. On both sides, a regular, changeless machine is the idea of government. With the former, this machine is set in motion by the learned, who devote all their attention to the life of the body; with the latter, it is set in motion by the priests, who issue their commands in the name of the gods. In the former case, any one can attain anything; in the latter, no one has the right or power to leave the caste in which he was born.

Primitive Populations: the Aryans. The Vedas. — India, which consists of the two great valleys of the Indus and the Ganges, Hindustan, and of a peninsula, the Deccan, was first peopled by a black race, of which the Gonds are the last remnants; then by the Turanian tribes, such as the Tamils and Telingas, a distant branch of the Mongolian race; and lastly by men with brown and reddish skin, who appear to have been the base of population along the shores of the Indian Ocean, and with whom Herodotus was acquainted in Gedrosia, under the name of Ethiopians. It was the Aryans, however, who gave India its place in history. These Aryans formed part of a large group of white people permanently established in the valleys of the Hindu-koosh, the Indian Caucasus, possessing the same degree of civilization with similar languages, habits, and beliefs. When

long centuries had crowded into this narrow place a too numerous population, had accentuated tribal differences, and aroused political and religious quarrels, then from this table-land, in four directions and at different epochs, streams of men poured forth who inundated half of Asia, India, and the whole of Europe. The Celts, Pelasgi, Iaones, or Ionians, flowed toward Asia Minor, Greece, Italy, and Gaul; the Iranians toward Media and Persia; the Germans and Slavs, from the Ural Mountains to the Rhine; as for the Aryans, they turned to the southeast and crossed the Indus. They subjected the region of the Five Rivers, or Punjaub, after a prolonged struggle, the memory of which has been preserved in the Vedas, the first of their sacred books and among the most ancient monuments of our race.

Fifteen centuries, perhaps, before Christ, the Aryans of the Punjaub conquered the fertile valley which the Ganges overflows with periodical inundations like the Nile, and advanced as far as its mouths, which mingle with those of the Brahmapootra, a river equally mighty, whose source is found upon the northern slope of the Palace of Snow. Checked on the east by the mountains and the mass of Mongolian nations of Indo-China, the Aryans fell to fighting among themselves. The Mahabharata, the great Indian epic, still tells in 250,000 verses the story of the terrible war between the Kurus and the Pandavas, which ended only on the appearance of the hero Krishna, the incarnation of the god Vishnu.

Delhi is the theatre of the principal events in the Mahabharata, whose heroes do not quit the valley of the Ganges. This Indian Iliad presents singular affinities with the Greek Iliad, in certain parts surpasses the latter in beauty, and is, like it, the work of centuries. Together with the Vedas it throws light upon the origin of many beliefs and symbols spread among the ancient populations of Greece, Italy, and Northern Europe. The Ramatana, another epic poem, relates to the conquest by the Aryans of the peninsula of Hindustan and of the great island of Ceylon, whither Rama, "of the divine bow," carried the Vedic religion. This time a single author, Valmik, narrates in 48,000 verses the exploits of the hero. The brilliancy and grandeur of his pictures and the touching grace of his poetry place him by the side of Virgil and Homer.

History of India. — Unfortunately, this poetic and relig-

ious race possesses no other history than that of its gods. The conquest by Darius of the countries on the right of the Indus gave Herodotus no information concerning the India of the Ganges. On the left bank Alexander found the two Porus and many kings and independent peoples. He wished to go to Patna, the capital of the great Prasian Empire, at the junction of the Jamna and the Ganges. A revolt among his soldiers stopped him on the banks of the Hyphases. An Indian of humble origin, named Tchandragoupta, expelled the governors whom the Macedonian hero left in the Punjaub. He overthrew the empire of the Prasians, and received the ambassadors of Seleucus Nicator. The Greek kings of Bactriana held a part of the valley of the Indus, where we still find their medals. Later on, regular commercial relations were established between Egypt and the Indian peninsula, where Roman merchants founded counting-houses. Every year they carried thither more than four million dollars in cash to purchase silks, pearls, perfumes, ivory, and spices. Thus, at the expense of the rest of the world, began that flow of precious metals to India whereby such enormous wealth has been accumulated in the hands of its princes.

Such treasures tempted the Mussulmans of Persia. Early in the eleventh century, a Turkish chieftain, Mahmoud the Gaznevid, carried into the midst of those inoffensive populations his iconoclastic rage, his cupidity, and his religion. The latter was adopted by a large number of the Hindus. The Turks were followed by the Mongols, whose chief reigned at Delhi until the last century under the name of Great Mogul. The discovery of the Cape of Good Hope and the arrival, in 1498, of Vasco da Gama at Calicut, placed India for the first time in direct relations with Europe. After the merchants of Lisbon came those of Amsterdam, France, and England. The English ended by seizing everything, and now reign from the Himalayas to Ceylon over 200,000,000 subjects.

The Castes: Brahmans, Kshatriyas, and Sudras. — Thus, nearly ten centuries ago, this intelligent and gentle race lost its independence, but it preserved its social organization, religion, and literature. The great god Brahma, say the sacred books, divided the people into four castes: the Brahmans, or priests, who sprang from his head; the Kshatriyas, or warriors, who came from his arms; the Vaisyas, or laborers and merchants, who issued from his belly and thighs; and the Sudras, or artisans, who came from his feet. The first three, or "the regenerated," who represent the Aryan conquerors, are the ruling castes. Marriage is prohibited between them and the lowest caste, which also includes the descendants of the aborigines, or the vanquished first inhabitants. The children born of forbidden unions, and all violators of religious laws are the parias or impure. They cannot inhabit the cities, bathe in the Ganges, or read the Vedas. To touch them occasions defilement. The Brahmans alone had the right to read and expound the Holy Scriptures or the revealed book. As all science and all wisdom were contained therein, they were both priests, physicians, judges, and poets. Interpreters of the will of heaven, they reigned by virtue of religious terror. Thus they were able to surround the rajahs or kings, chosen from the warrior caste, with the thousand prescriptions of a ceremonial which the laws of Manu have preserved for us.

Not without terrible struggles did the Kshatriyas submit to this sacerdotal supremacy. Legends have preserved the memory of their resistance. The final triumph of the priests does not appear to have been complete until after the ninth century before Christ. India then received the organization, which in its principal features it still retains, and which we find in the book of the laws of Manu. The last compilation of these laws, certainly prior to the Buddhist reform in the sixth century before Christ, carries back this religious, political, and civil code to a far distant antiquity.

Political Organizations and Religion. — The laws of Manu remind one of the Pentateuch of Moses. They undertake to set forth as by divine revelation the origin of the world; the institution of priests; certain precepts for the individual, the family, and the town; the duties of the prince and of the castes; the civil and military organization, and penal and religious laws. Everything is summed up in two rules: for society, the subordination of castes; for the individual, physical and moral purity. The Vedic gods are preserved therein, but are subordinated to Brahmi, the being absolute and eternal, impersonal and sexless, whence, nevertheless, emanates Brahma, the active principle of the universe, which in turn produces Paramatma, the soul of

the world. He, uniting with Manas, or the intellectual principle, gives origin to all beings, who deviate less from Brahma, their supreme source, in proportion as they possess more wisdom.

Thus heaven and earth, with all the powers and beings therein, are the product of a series of successive emanations. In this immense chain, each being has the rank which his intellectual or moral value has assigned him. Thus, below the absolute Being appears the Indian Trimurti: Brahma, who creates the worlds; Vishnu, who regulates them; and Siva, who destroys in order to regenerate them; then the Devas or gods, symbolical representations of the forces of nature; then man; still lower, the inferior creatures, real or imaginary, such as the Nagas and the Raxasas, with changing forms. By means of learning and of the rigorous observance of religious practices, especially by austerities which subdue the flesh, and ecstasy which annihilates personality and empties the individual soul into the soul of the world, man may equal the gods, command nature, and deserve at death annihilation in the bosom of Brahma. They whose asceticism and piety have not sufficed to secure such supernatural power and such annihilation in God are recompensed for their vulgar merits, after Yama, the god of death, has touched them, by entrance into the Svarga, and into the seven and twenty places of delight. The guilty are hurled into Naraka, which is divided into twenty-one parts, according to the diversity of tortures undergone there.

But the effect of good, as of bad works, is worn out by time. Heaven and hell cast back into life the souls which they have received. These souls reënter existence in different conditions, which are always determined, nevertheless, by the law of rise and descent in the scale of being according to their merit and demerit. This is metempsychosis, a doctrine which subjected to successive transmigrations all organized nature from the plant up to man. At the time fixed for the completion of a cycle everything was engulfed in Brahma, but speedily another creation emerged from him, and a new cycle began. The soul of the righteous alone was exempt from these painful rebirths, since his perfections had won for him the privilege of absorption into the eternal essence. This was the reward awaited by the priests who had traversed a series of previous existences in such a manner as to deserve a final rebirth in the superior caste, whence they were to pass into the bosom of Brahma.

This original conception of the transmigration of the soul, at once profound and simple, forced a vast system of expiation and reward, wherein evil and misery were explained by sin, and good fortune and power by virtue. Unfortunately this doctrine rendered legitimate a hierarchy of beings. It ratified the unalterable distinction of castes, and the contempt of the high for the low. It confirmed the constitution of a theocracy which, the better to defend its power, made purity consist, not in real virtue, but in the observance of innumerable rites, the performance of which the priest superintended and regulated.

Buddhism. — This theocracy, the most powerful which the world has ever known, was shaken in the sixth century before our era by the preaching of Gautama, surnamed Buddha, or the Wise. His father was the rajah of a country near Nepaul. He was born in a royal palace, but at the age of twenty-nine abandoned his family, wealth, and rank to seek truth in the desert. Seven years later he returned from his wanderings. To mixed crowds, regardless of individual position or origin, he began to preach, but only by parables. He moved his hearers profoundly. This popular teaching was in itself a revolt against the Brahmans, who forbade teaching of doctrines to the Sudras. Although it was presented only as a reformation, the new doctrine went much farther. Gautama was destroying Brahmanism by substituting the equality of all men before the moral law for the principle of caste, and by substituting virtues which consist in the practice of the good, for the spurious virtues exacted by a ritual. The promises of salvation, of union with the divine essence, made to the Brahman alone, he replaced by the recognized capacity of all men by their merits to win Nirvana, or deliverance. In short, he broke up priestly heredity by calling to the priesthood the poor and the beggars who devoted themselves to a religious life.

Buddha established for men six perfections: knowledge, which must, above all, apply itself to distinguishing between the true and the false; energy, which makes us war against our chief enemies, the pleasures of sense; purity, which demonstrates victory; patience in enduring imaginary ills; charity, the bond of society; alms, the necessary consequence of charity. "I am come," he said, "to give to the

ignorant wisdom, and wisdom is knowledge, virtue, alms. The perfect man is nothing unless he comforts the afflicted and succors the miserable. My doctrine is a doctrine of pity. The prosperous find it difficult, and pride themselves on their birth; but the way of salvation is open to all those who annihilate their passions as an elephant overturns a hut of reeds."

These words, this so pure moral code, were astounding novelties. "This law of grace," opposed to a law of terror, made rapid progress among the lower castes, and even among the Kshatriyas, who had to endure the haughty domination of the Brahmans. Thus, despite the hatred of the priests against the reformer, Gautama was able to continue his apostolic work in peace until the age of eighty, without ever appealing to force, because he respected established order, and taught that men should render to princes that which was their due. When he died, his disciples collected his discourses, and convoked the first Buddhist council. Five hundred monks were present. After seven months of discussion they formulated their religious ceremonies and doctrine, which were stated with precision in a second council held in the fifth century, and in a third council about one hundred and fifty years before Christ.

The ritual is extremely simple. The temple contains the image of Gautama, who is honored and respected as the wisest of men, but who receives no adoration. There are no sacrifices or superstitious practices; at least there were none at the time when Buddhism had not yet been corrupted by the idolatrous traditions of the peoples among whom it spread and degenerated. In matter of dogma there was no separation from the ancient church. It even added to the Vedic divinities new but purer gods. It preserved the theory of rebirths, which, according to the Brahmanic doctrine, were for the mass of the faithful only periodical returns to misery and despair; but it gave to all men the means of escaping from these evils by the individual's own merit without the providential intervention of the gods.

The Western religions submit human personality during life to the action of Providence, and eternally preserve that personality after death by the resurrection of the body. In the pantheistic religions of the East, on the contrary, since all beings are of the same substance, they end by absorption into the bosom of the absolute Being, which is the

metaphysical bond of the universe. Buddhism did, it is true, recognize man's power to accomplish his own salvation; but the soul, for it, as for Brahmanism, was a temporary emanation from the infinite substance. Consequently, it solved the problem of the future life by the return of this particle of light to its home, by the absorption of the part in the great Whole.

The Hindu has at once less and more ambition than the Jew, the Mussulman, and the Christian. The latter hope to live again after death, and behold God face to face; the former consents to lose all individual existence on condition of becoming God himself.

We lay emphasis upon this moral history of India, because, in the first place, its political history is not known; and because, in the second, that country has been the main reservoir of philosophical and religious ideas, which, starting thence, have taken their course in different directions. The Brahmans, like the priests of Egypt, could well say to the Greeks: "You are children." Who would affirm that no echo of those great collisions of ideas of which India was the theatre, of those philosophical and religious controversies, of that peculiar organization of Buddhist churches which were animated by an ardent proselyting spirit, did not reach the commercial cities of the Asiatic coast, where Hellenic civilization had its awakening, and even as far as that great city of Alexandria whither the Ptolemies caused the books of the nations to be brought and translated?

Against Buddhism the most terrible persecution finally arose. "Let the Buddhists be exterminated," cried the Brahmans, "from the bridge of Rama (Ceylon) to the snow-whitened Himalayas! Whoever spares the child or the old man, shall himself be put to death." Persecution was successful in India, which returned to the Brahmans; but Buddhism spread into Thibet, which is its stronghold to-day, and into Mongolia, China, Indo-China, and Ceylon. In those countries it still numbers multitudes of believers, very few of whom, it is true, know and practise the pure doctrine of Gautama.

From this brief history it is evident that, if India has acted little, she has thought much. Let us add that the country is covered with imposing monuments of great elegance, of which we as yet are acquainted only with a small part. In thought, poetry, and art, India has developed three of the glories of Greece.