

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *Bibliotheca Sacra* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_bib-sacra_01.php

THE
BIBLIOTHECA SACRA.

ARTICLE I.

THE BRAHMA SAMAJ.

BY REV. C. W. PARK, LATE OF BOMBAY, INDIA.

It is now about half a century since the religious public of England and America was made aware of a new movement in the religious life of India. A reformation of the current Hinduism was in progress. A man, in praise of whose character and talents too much could hardly be said, was directing it. Large results were looked for; but they did not come, and the interest in the movement declined as rapidly as it had risen. But some fifteen or sixteen years ago this interest suddenly revived. Hopes of an indigenous reform in India again rose high. The new society was once more talked of. Its leader had visited England. He had been patronized by church dignitaries. Important consequences were once more awaited. Missionary work in India was known to be slow, some said hopeless. The Indian mind responded sluggishly to the influences of external thought. The efforts of foreign philanthropists were long in bearing fruit. Here was a revolution free from the incubus of a foreign origin. It embraced not the lowest and most despised portions of the native community, as Christian influences in the hands of the missionaries had done, but the highest, the most intelligent, and the most influential minds. It was a movement, too, which though not all we would gladly have it, was yet in the right direction. Hearts that

were weary of waiting to see India turn to the gospel hailed with enthusiasm this new indication of awakening religious fervor, and looked eagerly to see the adherents of the Brahma Samaj take the one step forward which would bring them safe within the pale of the Christian church. They looked in vain.

And yet, no one can doubt that the Brahma Samaj presents one of the most interesting phenomena of modern religious history in India. If we regard it, apart from the character of the individuals who have been prominent in it, simply as a movement in which men in general have participated, it is one of no small interest. If we contemplate it in connection with the history of two or three leaders who have moulded its character and shaped its destiny thus far, its study becomes still more attractive. And if we look upon it as a reaction of some highly intelligent minds against the ancient beliefs and superstitions and customs of Hindustan its history becomes both instructive and fascinating.

The history of the Brahma Samaj is best studied in the lives of its most prominent members.

About the year 1774 there was born, in the town of Burdwan, some fifty or sixty miles northwest from Calcutta, of high and wealthy Brahman ancestry, a person called Ram Mahan Rai. All Hindus are by nature religious. Ram Mahan Rai was so in a pre-eminent degree. More than that, he was destined to occupy no inferior place among the religious reformers of Hindustan. The influences of his time determined largely the direction in which he was to work. Had he lived in earlier ages we should have found him with Gautama Buddha, heading a mighty reaction against the enslaving superstitions and priestcraft of Brahmanism. Later, he might have been a Nanak of the Panjab, trying, amid the rivalry and strife of Hindu and Muhammadan teachers, to impress upon his followers whatsoever was good in either faith, and thus becoming the founder of a new religion which should embrace the nobler elements of both. Or he might have had a history like that of Chaitanya of Bengal,

who, in the early part of the sixteenth century, preached throughout India the doctrine of saving faith in Vishnu, to the exclusion of all the other myriad deities of the Hindu pantheon. In days still nearer to our own he might have been the peer of Tukaram of Western India, the favorite poet of the Marathas, whose words, spoken two centuries ago, they hear but heed not, while in verse as scathing as that of the Hebrew prophets he rebukes the promiscuous idolatry and futile formalism of Hinduism, and teaches his people that the service of the one God and the practice of every-day virtues are more pleasing to Heaven than a vain ceremonial. Among these and other notable religious teachers of India, Ram Mahan Rai may well be numbered; while in manliness of character and purity of life he is worthy not merely to be ranked with these Indian saints and sages, but to stand high among the good men, the religious souls, the devout seekers after God, in every age and among all races of men. He was born at a time when western light was beginning, and only beginning, to pierce the oriental gloom of Hindustan; under the leading of these dim though kindly rays the lines of his reform were drawn; they took a new direction, one which previous movements of Indian thought had never traced. He was by birth a Brahman; but the influences of his education were peculiar for a person of that caste; yet in the circumstances of his lineage and training, by which he was remarkably fitted for his lifework, we can only admire the providence of God. According to the traditions of Brahmanism, he should have been early placed under the tuition of a learned man or *shastri*, to be thoroughly taught the sacred literature of the Brahmans and their religious mysteries. This plan of instruction was partially followed. He received at home the elements of a Hindu education, and later, studied Sanskrit at Benares. His father religiously trained him as a Hindu. He was solemnly girt with the sacred thread, which was found upon his body when he died. But his family had declined from the religious to the secular life; his grand-

father, and some of his more remote ancestors, had held office under certain Muhammadan princes; it was the purpose of the boy's father that he also should enter political life.¹ To fit himself, therefore, for service in a Muhammadan court, he took up studies which Brahmans seldom pursue. He had studied Persian at home in his early days; and while yet a lad was sent to Patna, not far off, to learn Arabic. His master put him through a course in logic and geometry, using for the purpose Arabic translations of Aristotle and Euclid. Critics of his writings have detected in his methods of thought the result of this early training. The fallacies of Hindu logic cannot long maintain their place in a mind thus disciplined. Contact with Muhammadanism, too, made him aware of a thing to which Brahmans of the old school are oblivious; and this was the fact that there were other religions in the world besides Hinduism, which

¹ The words in which Ram Mahan Rai himself has recorded for us his early history are well worth quoting here: "My ancestors were Brahmans of a high order, and from time immemorial were devoted to the religious duties of their race, down to my fifth progenitor, who about one hundred and forty years ago gave up spiritual exercises for worldly pursuits and aggrandizement. His descendants ever since have followed his example, and, according to the usual fate of courtiers, with various success, sometimes rising to honor, and sometimes falling; sometimes rich and sometimes poor; sometimes exulting in success, sometimes miserable through disappointment. But my maternal ancestors being of the sacerdotal order by profession as well as by birth, and of a family than which none holds a higher rank in that profession, have, up to the present day, uniformly adhered to a life of religious observances and devotion, preferring peace and tranquility of mind to the excitements of ambition and all the allurements of worldly grandeur. In conformity with the usage of my paternal race, and the wish of my father, I studied the Persian and Arabic languages; these being accomplishments indispensable to those who attached themselves to the courts of the Muhammadan princes; and, agreeably to the usage of my maternal relations, I devoted myself to the study of Sanskrit, and the theological works written in it, which contain the body of Hindu literature, law, and religion." — From Letter in the Athenaeum, Oct. 5, 1833. In order to a right understanding of this bit of autobiography, it must be remembered that, though all Brahmans belong to the priestly caste, they are not all by any means actually priests. A comparatively small number, as a matter of fact, really devote themselves to a religious life; the majority, in these degenerate days, following the example of Ram Mahan Rai's paternal ancestors, seek the alluring ways of worldly ambition, honor, and wealth.

were, perhaps, not unworthy of his notice.¹ Thus there was awakened within him a searching and critical spirit of religious inquiry; and if a Hindu once begins to think and to inquire, he very soon ceases to be a Hindu. He often relapses into secularism. But Ram Mahan Rai had too devout a soul for secularism; he must have a religion; and if he, why not his countrymen? If Hinduism was not good enough for him, how could it be good enough for them? So he became a reformer. His progress was gradual. He had early observed the diversity of opinion among the different sects of Hinduism. He had sought unsuccessfully from his father the grounds of his belief.² Unsatisfied, he turned to new investigations. At the age of sixteen he composed a paper, then suppressed (probably afterwards published), questioning the correctness of the current Hinduism. A "coolness," in his own euphemistic phrase, between his kindred and himself was the result of this outspoken paper. He found it convenient to absent himself for a time from home; he journeyed into Thibet to study Buddhism. He was seeking for truth; haply he might find it among the Thibetan followers of Gautama; instead he aroused their angry passions by denying the divinity of the Grand Llama. The enraged Buddhists seem to have made his life a burden to him. At any rate, the only pleasant recollections of his stay which he brought back with him were of the kindness

¹ "It is probable that the training thus given his mind in acuteness and close reasoning, and the knowledge which he acquired of the Muhammadan religion from Musalmans whom he esteemed, contributed to cause that searching examination of the faith in which he was educated, which led him eventually to the important efforts he made to restore it to its early simplicity. . . . It is scarcely possible but that his mind must have been struck by the simplicity of the Muhammadan faith and worship; and at any rate it early revolted from the frivolous or disgusting rites and ceremonies of Hindu idolatry."—Dr. L. Carpenter's Review of the Labors, Opinions, and Character of Ram Mahan Rai, p. 101.

² This is most characteristic. The last thing which a Hindu will do is to give a reason of the faith that is in him. He falls back on custom. The tradition of the elders is his only and his sufficient plea. "Our ancestors have always worshipped these gods in this way; what else can we do? Are we wiser than they?" Beyond this he neither inquires nor explains.

of the women, who protected the homeless young wanderer, when his ill-advised zeal had made the more polemical men his enemies.

He remained some two or three years in Thibet, during which time he had undoubtedly sufficient opportunity for forming an opinion of popular Buddhism. We risk little in saying that this opinion was unfavorable. No signs appear in his after life of any appreciable influence exerted by it upon his character or thoughts. He doubtless saw, what any unbiassed observer would be pretty sure to see, that nothing could be hoped for, either in the way of speculative truth or of practical reform, from Thibetan Buddhism.

Returning to India, he was kindly received by his father. He resumed the study of language, especially Sanskrit, and of ancient Hinduism. He frequently discussed religious matters with his father, but hesitated to avow the scepticism which he felt. Yet he imagined that his father knew more than he cared to own of his son's opinions.

At the age of twenty-two he began the study of English. At first he tried to teach himself, and found he had a slow pupil; according to the testimony of an English friend, at the end of five years he "could merely speak it well enough to be understood upon the most common topics of discourse; but could not write it with any degree of correctness." The remarkable fluency and accuracy which he finally acquired were due to the assiduous application of after years.¹ Yet Bengalis are famous for the ease with which they learn our language, and for the general correctness, as well as the

¹ Ram Mahan Rai's linguistic ability found larger scope than the mere mastery of English. An English gentleman (Mr. Arnot), who had acted as his private secretary, says, "he was acquainted more or less with ten languages; Sanskrit, Arabic, Persian, Hindustani, Bengali, English, Hebrew, Greek, Latin, and French. The two first he knew critically, as a scholar; the third, fourth, fifth, and sixth he spoke and wrote fluently; in the [seventh and] eighth, perhaps, his studies or reading did not extend much beyond the originals of the Christian Scriptures; and in the latter two his knowledge was apparently more limited; though, to show his unwearied industry, it may be noticed that he had seriously resumed the study of French in the present year."—*Athenaeum*, Oct. 5, 1833.

particular pomposity, with which they use it. This one fault often makes their writings, even when composed with the most solemn intentions, ridiculous. The critical reader will notice traces of it even in the pages of our sober-minded scholar; and much more than traces in the writings of almost all educated natives of Hindustan. Would that they were the only writers who sin in this way!¹

It does not appear that Ram Mahan Rai made any plan of religious reform, certainly he announced none, until after the death of his father in 1803. Hindus have a morbid dread of offending their older relatives. Sometimes this trait appears in a most amiable light; sometimes it merely covers a certain weakness of intellectual conviction and a lack of moral power. To such weakness Ram Mahan Rai was not prone; but he evidently dreaded his father's anger. The reconciliation after his return from Thibet did not last long; and there is reason to believe that at his father's death the young reformer found himself disinherited.² But paternal opposition no longer hindered him, and even if disinherited, he apparently came into possession of the family wealth at the death of his two brothers, not many years later. He was undoubtedly a person of means, for, in order to disseminate his views, he printed a large number of books at his own expense, and distributed many of them gratuitously among his countrymen.³

¹ Dr. Johnson must be their favorite model. The fault alluded to is the natural result of early training. Oriental writers consider pomposity and bombast the chief beauties of style; they search for long words as for hid treasures. The experience of almost any young Indian missionary with his native teacher furnishes proof of this remark. The sermons produced when the ambitious young theologian and the sesquipedalian teacher combine their resources are often remarkable compositions.

² Ram Mahan Rai condenses into half a paragraph the painful history of the years preceding his father's death. "My continued controversies with the Brahmans on the subject of their idolatry and superstition, and my interference with their custom of burning widows, and other pernicious practices, revived and increased their animosity against me with renewed force; and, through their influence with my family, my father was again obliged to withdraw his countenance openly, though his limited pecuniary support was still continued to me." — Letter in the *Athenaeum*, quoted above.

³ His wealth was the fruit in part of his own labors; he was employed in a

His first book appeared shortly after his father's death. It was in Persian, with an Arabic preface. What could have induced him to publish it in a language for the most part unknown to the very persons whom he especially wanted to get at, it is hard to guess. Perhaps he considered it prudent to mask his first assault on long established usages — the current orthodoxy of Hinduism — under the convenient disguise of a half-known tongue. The title of this book was, *Against the Idolatry of all Nations*. It was read in spite of being in Persian, and excited such opposition that the author, in 1814, removed to Calcutta. Here he continued the study of English, took up Latin, and pursued mathematics. He bought a house in the eastern part of the city — one built in European fashion, and surrounded by a garden. In this house, as early as 1816, intelligent men of his race, "of rank and opulence," as Dr. Carpenter observes, were wont to meet for religious inquiry, and "united in a species of monotheistic worship." This was the beginning of the Brahma Samaj.

Ram Mahan Rai now entered upon the busiest portion of his life. He began to send forth from the press a stream of publications which ceased only when he left India. Translations and abridgments in several languages of ancient Sanskrit works, tracts and controversial replies, followed one another in rapid succession. First, translated by his own hand into the Bengali and Hindustani tongues, the two most widely-used vernaculars of Bengal, there appeared "Vyas' Vedant, or The Resolution of the Vedas." Copies of these translations, he tells us, he distributed free of cost as widely as possible among his countrymen.¹ Next came an abridgment of the work; and this, in its turn, was followed

political capacity by the Anglo-Indian Government during the years 1803-14. In this way he is said to have amassed a fortune, yielding him an annual income of 10,000 rupees, about \$5,000.

¹ We do not know how many copies he thus disposed of; but a statement of his own occurring in his "Second Defence of Hindu Theism," that he had, in the space of twelve months, distributed nearly five hundred copies of a later publication amongst all classes of Hindus, affords some indication of the extent of their circulation.

by an English translation of the abridgment, which appeared in 1816. It was published, the author says, with the hope of proving to his English friends "that the superstitious practices which deform the Hindu religion have nothing to do with the pure spirit of its dictates." After this appeared, in Bengali and English, a translation of several portions of Vedic literature. The first of them, issued also in 1816, was entitled, *A Translation of the Cenupanishad*, one of the Chapters of the Sama Veda; according to the Gloss of the celebrated Shancaracharya: establishing the Unity and sole Omnipotence of the Supreme Being: and that he alone is the Object of Worship.

This was intended to be but the beginning of a long series of Vedic translations, whose object should be to prove to his people that the original faith of their fathers was monotheistic. Circumstances which we shall have occasion to record, interrupted the plan after the issue of three or four numbers. We need not trouble the reader with the names and other details of these tracts; several of the translations, however, were accompanied with prefaces, which in almost every case are interesting and important.¹ For in them he reveals the motives which actuated him in his work, and gives us a glimpse—a very satisfactory one, we may state—of his inner man. Himself a devout monotheist, he was seeking for a way to lead his race to a similar faith. His studies had made him familiar with many passages in Vedic literature apparently inculcating that faith in its purity. The difference, nay, the chasm, separating the profound philosophy, the apparent monotheism, of the Vedic and sub-Vedic writings—which are always, though often ignorantly, appealed to as both the *fons et origo* and the standard of Hinduism—from the gross polytheism, the barbarous and degrading austerities, the debasing superstitions, the tedious ritual, of the Hinduism which his parents and brothers practised,

¹ Any one who wishes to know the nature of modern Hinduism, and to see its actual outcome in the life and character of its adherents, would do well to get hold of these prefaces and read them. Several of them can be found in the Library of the Boston Athenaeum.

ever yawned before him. What better service was it in his power to render to his people, or how more easily could he turn them from a belief in many gods to a faith in one, than by proving to them through translations from their own venerated scriptures, that the creed of their ancestors and the most ancient teachings of their religion were monotheistic; and that, in their adherence to polytheism and idolatry, they were going contrary not only to the practice, but also to the most explicit teachings of the sages and saints of old? "My constant reflections," he says, in the preface to the abridgment of the Vedanta already alluded to, "on the inconvenient, or rather injurious, rites introduced by the peculiar practice of Hindu idolatry, which more than any other pagan worship destroys the texture of society, together with compassion for my countrymen, have compelled me to use every possible effort to awaken them from their dream of error; and by making them acquainted with their scriptures, enable them to contemplate, with true devotion, the unity and omnipresence of nature's God."

In the introduction to the translation of the Ishupanishad, which appeared in 1816, he gives expression to the grief with which he has for many years contemplated the error of his countrymen in their attachment to idolatry; and he tells us how he has been "stimulated to employ every means in his power to improve their minds, and lead them to the knowledge of a purer system of morality." With this hope he lays "before them genuine translations of parts of their scriptures, which inculcate not only the enlightened worship of one God, but the purest principles of morality." And he hopes that the minds of Hindus may be affected by this means, and that they may rise to "a complete perception and practice of that grand and comprehensive moral principle — do unto others as ye would be done by."¹ A comprehensive statement of his purpose in these translations occurs in the preface of a controversial paper published in 1817:

¹ This expression, written by him in 1816, is the first indication contained in his writings, so far as we know, that he had ever read the New Testament, or heard of Jesus Christ.

“I have urged in every work that I have hitherto published, that the doctrines of the unity of God are real Hinduism.”

His purpose was a noble one; yet there can be no doubt but that he had formed a mistaken notion of the drift and intent of the very writings to which he so confidently appealed. Hindu though he was, and thoroughly familiar with the Sanskrit as he must have been, it is yet the fact that Ram Mahan Rai did not understand the Vedas, and that he grievously misapprehended the fundamental doctrine of the Vedantic philosophy which is founded upon them. This may seem strange; in fact it is both true and natural. It must be remembered that European scholars had at that time only begun, under the leadership of Sir William Jones and Colebrook, those investigations of early Sanskrit literature which have already yielded so rich a fruit, and from which so much more may be confidently expected. Since the days of Ram Mahan Rai a flood of light has been turned upon subjects which were then hidden in profound darkness. He had no better guides than the old-fashioned *shastris*, or learned men of Hindustan, filled undoubtedly with vast stores of traditional erudition, but destitute of the first glimmer of really critical knowledge, either of the sacred books, which they could repeat by heart, or of the Sanskrit language in which they could, nevertheless, converse fluently. Hence it is not strange that Ram Mahan Rai received from his early teachers and studies an exaggerated notion of the excellence of the ancient Vedic faith. It has long been a question with Indian scholars if the Vedas be really monotheistic in their teaching; and the answer given by Max Müller, than whose opinion no one's will be more readily received, is that they are not exactly monotheistic, as we understand the word — that is, they do not inculcate worship of one God to the exclusion of all other gods at all times; but, to use a word coined by Max Müller, in the absence of any other to express the idea — they are *kathenotheistic*,¹

¹ “Whenever one of these individual gods is invoked (in the Veda), they are not conceived as limited by the powers of others, as superior or inferior in rank.

that is, they inculcate the worship of one god at a time, who is, while addressed by the worshipper, and in his thought at that moment, the one supreme God. Thus the same worshipper will sing hymns in praise of a circle of divinities in turn, and to each one of them will he successively ascribe the attributes of sole and exclusive deity. The same phenomenon is still noticeable in Indian worship. But the amount of critical knowledge seventy-five years ago was not sufficient to enable our philanthropic scholar to draw so fine a distinction as this between kathenotheism and monotheism proper. The undoubted fact that the Vedas do not recognize idol worship, and that the worship they teach is thus really, as well as apparently, much purer than that of current Hinduism, wholly deceived Ram Mahan Rai as to the true character of it, as it has deceived many others.

Strange, therefore, as the assertion may seem, we still say with confidence that Ram Mahan Rai did not understand his own sacred books, and that he mistook the character of the religion which they embody. In the same manner, also, and for the same reason, he failed to grasp the essential doctrine of the so-called Vedantic philosophy. For proof we appeal to the preface of his translation of the Ishupanishad, where the misunderstanding crops out plainly enough. So far from understanding the pantheism of the Vedanta, he did not even see that it was pantheistic at all. He mistook the pantheistic unity of God which it teaches, for a unity such as the Christian scriptures teach in opposition to the gross polytheism of heathenism. His own idea of God was correct and orthodox; he erred in reading the true and

Each god is to the mind of the suppliant as good as all gods. He is felt, at the time, as a real divinity, — as supreme and absolute, — without a suspicion of those limitations which, to our mind, a plurality of gods must entail on every single god. All the rest disappears for a moment from the vision of the poet, and he only who is to fulfil their desires stands in full light before the eyes of the worshippers. . . . It would be easy to find in the numerous hymns of the Veda, passages in which almost every important deity is represented as supreme and absolute. . . . If we must have a name for it, I should call it *Kathenotheism*." — Muller's Chips from a German Workshop, Vol. i. pp. 27, 28; see also Müller's Hibbert Lectures, pp. 285 ff.

elevated conception of his own mind into the Vedanta, instead of detecting there the pantheism of which it is really full.¹ Now the fundamental idea of the Vedantic philosophy, briefly stated, is that "God is all, and all is God;"² but, says Ram Mahan Rai, (preface to the *Ishupanishad*, p. xvii), "the fact is, that the Vedanta by declaring that 'God is everywhere and everything is in God,' means that nothing is absent from God and nothing bears real existence except by the volition of God, whose existence is the sole support of the conceived existence of the universe, which is acted upon by him in the same manner as a human body is by a soul. But God is at the same time quite different from what we see or feel." Exactly; the only trouble is that the Vedanta means nothing of the kind. In fact it would be difficult to express in so few words a more wholly false idea of this famous philosophy than that. Thus with conceptions radically wrong, though with the utmost sincerity, he undertook to lead his countrymen back from their present degraded and degrading Hinduism to the apparent monotheism and better faith of the earlier times.

We respect the courage and zeal of the reformer's heart; we regret the mistake of his mind. And that mistake was twofold. He erred, as we have seen, in his view of what the Vedic writings really teach about God; he erred again in supposing that by making his people Vedists he would be doing them any real and lasting good. Could he but have perceived it, it was a hopeless, an impossible, task from the very first. The Brahma Samaj has since perceived it, and has succeeded just to the extent that it has acted on the perception. The fact is, and to us now it is almost self-evident, the Hinduism of to-day has come from the pure

¹ This fault was pointed out at the time, though in connection with another of Ram Mahan Rai's works. A writer in the *Missionary Register* (Church of England), reviewing his translation of the Vedanta, says, "the piece discovers little else than a discernment of the folly of the vulgar belief of his country; and a subtle, but unsuccessful attempt to put a good meaning on the absurd statements of its more ancient and refined creed." — Quoted by Miss Carpenter from the *Missionary Register* for Sept. 1816.

² See the *Bibliotheca Sacra*, July 1882, p. 587.

Vedism of thirty centuries ago by a process as direct and inevitable as that which brings a crocodile out of its mother's egg. It is not strange that Ram Mahan Rai failed to perceive this fact. He contemplated the Vedic faith by itself alone, apart from its historic development; and he no more realized from this inspection of it what the consequent development must be of the germ within, than a boy simply by looking at a crocodile's egg would be able to describe the vicious character of the reptile which would be produced from it. Now the true way to reform the crocodile is not to thrust him again into the egg and hatch him over again, as Ram Mahan Rai tried to do with Hinduism, but to introduce some new principle of life into his corrupt and depraved nature. So is it with Hinduism. If a reformer undertakes to force his people back to the original condition or thoughts of their ancestors, and set the process of development going again from the old sources and on the former lines, he must expect to get the same result. The nature of the seed has not changed at all, and will give rise to just the same tree, or animal, or religion, the second time that it did the first. If, then, our mistaken reformer had succeeded in his effort to re-establish the early Vedic faith, his success would have been failure; for what he really wanted to do was to win Hindus to a belief in and worship of one personal God. It was only because he misunderstood Vedism that he sought to use Vedism as a means to his end.

It would naturally be supposed that his use of the old standards of Hinduism and his repeated appeals to Vedantic philosophy as the basis of his own measures would have commended his cause to the minds and hearts of all Hindus. Probably it was with this expectation that he endeavored to pillar the society which he established on the ancient scriptures. If so, he was disappointed. The effect on the people at large was precisely contrary to what might have been anticipated, and which doubtless he did anticipate. The clouds of persecution soon gathered over the head of the bold innovator. His father had felt doubts as to his

orthodoxy; with the other members of the family those doubts had become certainty. The entire Brahmanical community was interested in putting down so dangerous a revolutionist. In one of his prefaces, he writes: "I, however, in the beginning of my pursuits, met with the greatest opposition from their self-interested leaders, the Brahmans, and was deserted by my nearest relations; and I consequently felt extremely melancholy." Truly a man's foes shall be they of his own household. His father had disinherited him; but his father was dead. Now his mother¹ turned against him, and that too with bitterness.² But the opposition which

¹ The later history of this woman is interesting. "In his early days," writes Dr. Lant Carpenter in his Review of the Labors, etc., of Ram Mohun Roy, "his mother was a woman of fine understanding; but, through the influence of superstitious bigotry, she had been among his most bitter opponents. He, however, manifested a warm and affectionate attachment towards her; and it was with a glistening eye that he told us she had 'repented' of her conduct towards him. Though convinced that his doctrines were true, she could not throw off the shackles of idolatrous customs. 'Rammohun,' she said to him, before she set out on her last pilgrimage to Jaggannath, where she died, 'you are right; but I am a weak woman, and am grown too old to give up these observances, which are a comfort to me.' She maintained them with the most self-denying devotion. She would not allow a female servant to accompany her, or any other provision to be made for her comfort or even support for her journey; and when at Jaggannath, she engaged in sweeping the temple of the idol. There she spent the remainder of her life — nearly a year if not more; and there she died." The words of this woman to her son, above quoted, are most characteristic of Hindus. They will assent to the most uncompromising statements of the futility of Hindu formalism, they will even on occasion quote proverbs, which are really popular verdicts against the entire system of pilgrimages and austerities by which their religion assures them salvation is to be gained, and still continue practising the very things whose futility they are apparently so willing to concede, if not profoundly convinced of. It is custom rather than conviction that binds the Hindu to his Hinduism. The words of Ram Mahan Rai's mother are almost the identical words which the writer himself has heard in many a case from the mouth of common, sometimes even of intelligent Hindus, in excuse for their persistent practice of idolatry and a confessedly useless ritual.

² It is a fact, and not a singular fact, that the most virulent opposition to converts in India, as well as the most effective, comes from the mothers. The annals of all our mission stations could supply abundant instances of this. Yet the opposition of the mother is more apt than that of the father to pass off with time. A young Brahman was converted about twenty-five years ago in Western India; he remained for many years in the same town as his parents;

assailed him was by no means confined to members of his own family. He mentions, in the extract quoted above, that of self-interested Brahmans. They publicly charged him with "rashness, self-conceit, arrogance, and impiety." Every effort was made to turn him out of caste. Legal proceedings were begun against him. His nephews were among the instigators, and an English lawyer is said (though, we judge, on inadequate, at least uncertain, grounds) to have been retained against him during the earlier progress of the case. These proceedings are thought by Dr. Carpenter to have continued for several years. The object of them was in great part, undoubtedly, to annoy him, but ostensibly and ultimately to deprive him of caste, and thus of his patrimonial inheritance, and so of the means to carry on his reform. But "through his profound acquaintance with Hindu law," says Dr. Carpenter, "he baffled the efforts of his interested enemies, and proved in the courts of justice that he had not forfeited his rights." The expense to which he was subjected, however, was of course great.

A few words here will suffice to show at once the animus and occasion of the Brahmanical opposition to Ram Mahan Rai, as well as the principles by which he himself was actuated. He appeared as a reformer not of Hinduism, but of the present Hinduism; he did not work against the religion of his countrymen, but against its modern perversion and degradation. His first effort was to lead the people back to the religion of their ancestors, not away from it. Usage, immemorial tradition, custom,—these are the most sacred authorities and sources of all religion and duty. Our reformer did not seek to contravene and subvert these, but to show the people what the original and most authoritative tradition

but his father has never spoken to him since his baptism. The young man's mother, however, though equally bitter and determined in her opposition at first, has since so far relented as to receive secret visits from him at her house, and even to give him water from the drinking vessels used by the other members of the family; a thing which, if known, would secure her prompt exclusion from caste, and probably entail a fine, certainly an expensive process of purification, upon the entire family.

and usage and custom really were.¹ Yet to do this was implicitly to cast aspersions upon all recent custom; for if recent custom and remote custom are at variance, — and they very frequently are, — the Hindu of to-day follows recent custom. Present Hinduism is supported by the consensus of later, not of earlier, opinion; it appeals chiefly to the authority of the last eight or ten hundred years. It is professedly derived from the Vedas, which were written thirty centuries ago; it is really founded upon the Puranas, which were written ten centuries ago. The Psalms of David and the *Acta Sanctorum* are not more unlike; but the Brahmans and the religious teachers of the present time are committed to the maintenance of Hinduism as it is. By this craft they have their wealth. To show the divergence between modern practice and ancient principle is treason. Their own interests are so involved in the superstitions, the alms-giving, the pilgrimages, the temple gifts, the offerings, the feeding of Brahmans, and other profitable exercises, that they would about as soon see their people all turn Christians as relapse into Vedism.² Now Ram Mahan Rai was a foe to the present customs of their land and people. It mattered nothing that his reform was inspired by a knowledge of their most ancient books. It was an opposition, for all that, to the religion of the people as they then understood and practised it. As such the Brahmans met it with a counter-opposition. Their antagonism was even more bitter than that with which they would have responded to the efforts of Christian missionaries. For, they would have argued, missionaries of another religion

¹ We quote here Ram Mahan Rai's own words: "The ground which I took in all my controversies was not that of opposition to Brahmanism, but to a perversion of it; and I endeavored to show that the idolatry of the Brahmans was contrary to the practice of their ancestors, and the principles of the ancient books and authorities which they profess to revere and obey." — Letter in the Athenaeum, already referred to.

² There is in India at the present time a reformer by the name of Dayananda Saraswati Swami. He is trying over again Ram Mahan Rai's experiment of converting Hindus to the original Vedism. No missionary of the gospel has provoked a fiercer Brahmanical opposition, or come any nearer to real persecution than he.

in opposing us are acting according to the teachings of their own faith, and so are doing right; it is their religious duty to oppose us. But this man is doing violence to his own religion; he is contradicting every principle of action which he ought to hold sacred; he is a traitor arising within the camp. And so they hated him with a greater hatred than they did the Christians, for the same reason and in the same way that Americans hate Benedict Arnold, but respect Lord Cornwallis.¹

This explains the nature and the reason of the opposition which our reformer encountered. It is easy to see, also, why he was so anxious to maintain his caste standing. His biographers state that he was quite careful to avoid everything which his eager and unscrupulous enemies could have made lawful ground of exclusion from caste. The success with which he did this can be inferred from the miscarriage of the legal proceedings begun against him. He never laid aside the sacred thread wherewith, at the age of eight years, according to the religious customs of his people, he had been solemnly invested. Most likely he observed the minute rules regarding food, dress, intercourse with low-caste persons, and many other little things, departure from which involves caste censure or degradation.² He subjected himself to this

¹ Ram Mahan Rai bore his troubles with great fortitude. "By taking the path which conscience and sincerity direct," wrote the high-minded man, "I, born a Brahman, have exposed myself to the complainings and reproaches even of some of my relations, whose prejudices are strong, and whose temporal advantage depends upon the present system. But these, however accumulated, I can tranquilly bear; trusting that a day will arrive when my humble endeavors will be viewed with justice — perhaps acknowledged with gratitude. At any rate, whatever men may say, I cannot be deprived of this consolation: my motives are acceptable to that Being, who beholds in secret and compensates openly." — Preface to English Translation of Abridgment of the Vedanta (1816), p. iii. When leaving Calcutta, in 1830, he charged his sons to forget the part which their cousins had taken in the lawsuits against himself.

² He continued this careful observance of caste rules, which in his heart he must have thoroughly despised, even in England. "He retained his rank, and to the very last he was habitually careful while in our country to avoid everything that could be construed into an act exposing him to loss of caste, and he was constantly attended upon by a Brahman, who would of course report infringements of regulations. . . . His motive in this was not any lingering attachment

petty tyranny not because he believed in its necessity, or respected its authority, but for nobler reasons. To the Brahmans he became a Brahman, that he might gain the Brahmans. Members of that caste, again, are the recognized and lawful religious teachers of the people. They alone have access to the Vedas. From time immemorial have they been the depositaries of all religious lore and authority. They only are the ultimate judges in all cases of religious dispute. Pius IX. himself was not less liable to err than they, when they speak *ex cathedra*. Therefore, thought Ram Mahan Rai, if my words and teachings can but go to the people stamped with the seal of my Brahmanic origin and influence, they will go with power. A Brahman has spoken; and a Brahman must be believed. So, as the means of a wide acceptance among his countrymen, and a hearty faith in what he said, he jealously maintained his caste, and preserved the sanctity of his Brahmanism. Again we may doubt his wisdom and the propriety of his means; but we respect the man, and admire his pure and lofty aims.

The earliest investigations of this Indian scholar had embraced Hinduism, Muhammadanism, and Buddhism. No one of these brought rest to his devout and inquiring mind. In what way or at what time he first became acquainted with Christianity we cannot say. It was certainly long before the year 1817; for in that year an edition of his "Abridgment of the Vedanta" was brought out in London, in the preface to which Ram Mahan Rai writes as follows:

"The consequence of my long and uninterrupted researches into religious truth has been, that I have found the doctrines of Christ more conducive to moral principles, and better adapted for the use of rational beings, than any other which have come to my knowledge; and have also found Hindus in general more superstitious and miserable, both in performance of

to the superstitions of his country, or to early associations, but a desire to avoid everything which might impair his usefulness among his countrymen, or diminish the influence of his teachings."—Miss Carpenter's *Last Days in England of Rammohun Roy* (1866), p. 67.

their religious rites and in their domestic concerns, than the rest of the known nations of the earth.”¹

This is by no means the only evidence that Christianity had aroused this profoundly religious soul to a new and better experience. His whole after life bears witness to the power of Jesus Christ. There was the model of his character. The precepts of Jesus were his rule of action, and the spirit of Christ that with which he strove to be filled himself. It was from Christian sources that was drawn the life-blood of his new reform. The study of the Bible had first opened his eyes to that view of the person and character of the one God, which straightway he persuaded himself, and tried to persuade others, was found in the Upanishads of the Vedas.² He took up the study of Christianity thoroughly and wisely. Perplexed by the diversity of current theological teaching, he went at once to the original authorities. He engaged a Jewish Rabbi to teach him Hebrew; and with the assistance of Rev. Mr. Adam of the Baptist mission at Calcutta, he studied Greek.³ Thus he read the Bible in the original—a thing which no native Christian then could do, and only a handful now. His mind was deeply stirred. Translations from the Sanskrit were in time discontinued, and the efforts to reform Hinduism on the lines of ancient Vedism were gradually abandoned. We find him instead, though not professing to be a Christian, yet declaring, in 1816 to a clergyman, that he preferred Christianity to all other religions, and would certainly embrace it, were it not for the doctrine of the Trinity; we find him soon after, in January,

¹ Quoted in Dr. Carpenter's Review of the Labors, etc., of Rammohun Roy, p. 105.

² “The light which he obtained from these studies (of the Christian Scriptures) enabled him to recognize the doctrine which pervaded the ancient theological writings of his nation—the existence of one God, the maker and preserver of the universe.”—Biography prefixed to “Precepts of Jesus” (London ed., 1834), p. ix.

³ His influence on his teacher was greater than that of the teacher on him; for Mr. Adam soon announced himself a Unitarian. The news of this conversion was received with great satisfaction by the Unitarians in England, among whom it excited expectations which the event hardly justified.

1817, informing the same person "that he was now in the way of ascertaining whether the doctrine of the Trinity is or is not the doctrine of the New Testament; for that he and twenty other learned Brahmans had determined to sit down and study the Gospels with the greatest possible attention and impartiality, in order to discover their real meaning; and he did not think it possible that twenty serious and impartial inquirers, who sought after nothing but truth, and who earnestly implored divine illumination and direction, would be suffered to fall into an erroneous conclusion."¹ In short, he became a Unitarian; not, indeed, by a formal profession of his faith as such, which he never made, either then or thereafter; but in everything save in name and form he was claimed as a Unitarian by those familiar with him.² Yet his notions were tinged with the results of his earlier studies, and felt the influence of the Oriental doctrines which he had imbibed from the pages of Vyas and Muhammad. The Gospels of Jesus had, we may be sure, the first place in his heart; yet he could not be unmindful that both in the Upanishads, in Manu, and in the Quran, he had found what he considered worthy statements of monotheistic doctrine. So he declined to unite himself formally with the Unitarians; he stood on a broader ground; he "maintained the unity of God in which the sacred books of Hindus, Musalmans, Jews, and Christians agreed." He sought to be eclectic; and made Manu and Moses, Jesus Christ and Muhammad the prophets of the faith he preached. Yet in spite of such professions, whatever was vital in his own experience was Christian. He turned to the Gospels because (to quote his own words) he was "disgusted with the puerile and unsociable system of Hindu idolatry, and dissatisfied at the cruelty allowed by Musalmanism against non-Musalman";³

¹ Miss Carpenter's *Last Days in England of Rammohun Roy*, p. 29.

² See account in the *Athenaeum*, Oct. 5, 1833, — "Thenceforward the Rajah gave his whole support to the views of this sect" — the Unitarian. See also the *Monthly Repository*, xvii. p. 684, — "He has been led by reading and thinking to quit Hinduism in his search after truth, and to embrace Christianity according to the Unitarian scheme."

³ *Second Appeal* (ed. 1834), p. 22.

and that which drew him to Christianity was "nothing but the sublimity of the precepts of Jesus," which "excited his veneration for the Author of this religion."¹

Having been thus profoundly affected himself by the character and precepts of Jesus Christ, it is not strange that he tried to make his countrymen feel the force of the same influences. This effort resulted in the publication, in 1820, of a book which we may safely characterize as, all things considered, the most remarkable volume ever published in modern India. And yet it was nothing but an abridgment of the four Gospels. It bore the title, "The Precepts of Jesus, the Guide to Peace and Happiness." The book contained all the discourses of Jesus, in the words of our Authorized Version, and nothing more, save a short preface commending the words of our Lord to the attention, the admiration, and the obedience of the editor's countrymen. There is no word of comment; the editor even made no attempt by means of running titles, indexes, or divisions of any kind whatever, to indicate to the reader where any particular precept or discourse could be found. This, however, is quite in accordance with the ideas about editing entertained by natives of India. The extracts are simply strung together according to the order in which the English Bible gives them. They begin with the Sermon on the Mount, as found in Matthew, and end with a portion of the fifteenth chapter of John. No account of the crucifixion is given, or any miracle of our Lord, since these are not embraced in his discourses. The significant feature of the publication is not at all the skill or want of skill with which it was edited, or the effect it produced on the people,—which was slight,—or the wisdom of putting forth the sayings of our Lord in this manner, but in the design and intent of Ram Mahan Rai himself. Here was a native of India, a Brahman of the Brahmans, nursed in Hinduism, familiar with other Oriental religions, deeply read in Vedic lore, spontaneously turning to Christianity—attracted, indeed, by the "sublimity" of the teachings of its

¹ Second Appeal (ed. 1834), p. 77.

founder and the veneration which they had inspired in his mind—for the means of elevating his nation, and bringing them to the worship of the one true God.¹ India had never offered such a tribute to Jesus Christ before.

The book as originally published was accompanied by two translations in the same volume—the one Sanskrit, and the other Bengali. Little can be said as to the success of the book; there is no evidence that it had any. No effect upon the Hindu community at large can be traced to it. It may have been helpful to those who were associated with the reformer in his plans, and in the new style of worship which he was beginning to practise; but even of this there is nothing that can be quoted as proof. The most striking and only tangible effect of the book was of a different and less agreeable nature than that desired by the publisher. It attracted the attention and aroused the ire of the Baptist missionaries at Serampore. They were men whose exalted character, high attainments, and earnest labors have won for them a place secure and high among Indian philanthropists. Unfortunately they failed to discern the purity of Ram Mahan Rai's intentions. They failed to see, as so many good men in like cases have, that loving sympathy with a sincere inquirer, and a kind appreciation of the imperfect truth to which he had thus far attained, would avail much to attract him to their larger truth, and to bind him in friendship to themselves; while hostile dialectics and bitter words and abusive criticism would only drive him into the ranks of their foes, and deepen his belief in error by thrusting upon him the work of defending it. They assailed his publication with unbecoming asperity; they spoke of its editor, both unkindly and untruly,

¹ His preface is remarkable; we quote a few lines: "This simple code of religion and morality is so admirably calculated to elevate men's ideas to high and liberal notions of one God, who has equally subjected all living creatures, without distinction of caste, rank, or wealth, to change, disappointment, pain, and death, and has equally admitted all to be partakers of the bountiful mercies which he has lavished over nature, and is also so well fitted to regulate the conduct of the human race in the discharge of their various duties to God, to themselves, and to society, that I cannot but hope the best effects from its promulgation in the present form."—p. vii.

as a heathen. They objected to his book as mutilating the Gospels, and especially because it omitted the accounts of the miracles and death of our Lord. But the preface had given the reason for leaving out these narratives. It was not that the compiler did not believe them — for he did believe them — but, in his own words, “historical and some other passages are liable to the doubts and disputes of freethinkers and anti-Christians, especially miraculous relations, which are much less wonderful than the fabricated tales handed down to the natives of Asia, and consequently would be apt at least to carry little weight with them. On the contrary, moral doctrines, tending evidently to the maintenance of the peace and harmony of mankind at large, are beyond the reach of metaphysical perversion, and intelligible alike to the learned and the unlearned.”¹

Now, perhaps these arguments are not conclusive, but they are certainly weighty. Instead of contemptuous rejection they were worthy of respectful consideration, and the spirit with which they were put forward was evidently that of sincerity and reverence. To the unfortunate strictures of the Serampore missionaries Ram Mahan Rai replied, in a pamphlet entitled *An Appeal to the Christian Public in Defence of the “Precepts of Jesus.”* Silence under such circumstances may be wise; but it is hardly to be expected of any one, and least of all from a Bengali. A long controversy ensued. The Appeal was answered from Serampore; that called forth the Second Appeal; and the reply to that provoked a Final Appeal. Thus his own part of the argument was increased to five hundred goodly octavo pages. It is unnecessary to go into the details of the subject here. Those who are curious can read the original documents for themselves; we doubt if they read to edification.² We can only,

¹ Preface to *Precepts*, p. vi.

² The discussion shortly developed into a long argument on the divinity of Christ. The original issues were wholly lost sight of after the first few pages. Ram Mahan Rai's arguments afford excellent evidence of the thoroughness and diligence with which he had pursued his studies, as well as valuable indications of his own religious growth and experience. His pages bristle with Greek and

in passing, express our regret at the uncharitable and unseemly bigotry which, under the respectable guise of fidelity to truth, so mars the character and injures the usefulness of some such excellent men as the Serampore missionaries. How often has the church had occasion to bewail the mistaken zeal, the unchristian bitterness, and the intemperate violence of her own defenders! Is the Christian intellect impervious to the great moral truth inculcated in the good old fable of the traveller, the sun, and the north wind? ¹

Hebrew quotations, which he marshals with the skill of a theological veteran. His position is exactly that of the early Unitarians. He appeals to the Bible as the infallible standard of truth, with an implicit confidence in its words, which could hardly be surpassed by the most devout believer in verbal inspiration. The exegetical skill and learning which he displays are remarkable, considering the education which he had had, though, as we hardly need remark, the scholar of to-day would not turn to his pages for new light on the subject under discussion. Neither, we fear, would one gain much satisfaction from the orthodox party. Evidently the latter had found in his Indian antagonist a foeman worthy of his steel. The great pity is that the steel was bared in the first place. The controversy, as Ram Mahan Rai pathetically remarks in his preface to the *Final Appeal*, had occasioned a "coolness" towards him, "in the demeanor of some whose friendship I hold very dear," and it also occupied his attention so wholly as to prevent him, for the space of three years, from continuing the publications which he had designed for the benefit of his countrymen. Still his conscience, as he declared, fully sustained him in his efforts to defend what he considered truth. In our opinion his time, and that of the Serampore missionary, might have been passed to far greater advantage in some other way. The chief effect of the controversy, so far as we can see, was to cause great joy among English Unitarians at the sudden uprising of this new champion in so unexpected a quarter. So convinced was Ram Mahan Rai, both of his own controversial ability, and the chances of usefulness which public discussion on the Trinity afforded, that he challenged the missionaries to enter into an argument with him, to be conducted by short monthly papers (twelve or sixteen pages each in length), one on each side of the question, which Ram Mahan Rai offered to print and circulate at his own expense. His plan was to take up each month a separate book of the Bible, and see what it taught on the subject of the debate. Happily the missionaries had the wisdom to decline the challenge.

¹ The postscript of a letter written by Ram Mahan Rai to Rev. Mr. Rees, a Unitarian clergyman of England in 1824, gives a good indication of his own feelings towards his antagonists, — feelings which he was careful not to express in a more public manner: "From a pamphlet published by a neighbor of mine, you will perceive to what a degree of ridicule the Trinitarian preachers have brought the religion they profess among the enlightened natives of India. I hope to God these missionaries may at length have their eyes opened to see their own errors." — *Monthly Repository*, xix. 682.

The Final Appeal was issued in 1823. Useless as the controversy was in directly furthering the object which lay nearest to the reformer's heart, it must yet have exercised no small influence on his own religious experience by compelling his attention to dwell so long and so exclusively on the Christian Scriptures. The Appeals bear unconscious witness to the closeness of his study. Evidently the Bible had supplanted Vyas and Manu. He nowhere explicitly abandons them; but they are now tacitly ignored. A mightier than they had cast them out. Ram Mahan Rai had outrun Vedism. He drew daily nearer to Christianity; yet he persistently maintained his caste observances, and declined repeated invitations of missionaries to be baptized.¹ He doubtless felt that he could more powerfully influence his countrymen by remaining as he was, visibly one of them. In the case of one who had dared and done and suffered so much, it were alike unnecessary and ungenerous to suggest any lower motive for his decision; but doctrinal considerations would have prevented him from joining any other than the Unitarian church.

In the year 1830 Ram Mahan Rai sailed for England. It had long been his dearly cherished purpose to take this voyage. He wanted to study for himself, upon the spot, the civilization of a Christian land, and to see what he could gain from contact with it which he might persuade India to accept. He had at one time hoped to make arrangements for studying at Oxford or Cambridge, in order that he might return to Bengal with a more thorough scholarly equipment. Many things conspired to hinder his departure for England. He himself tells us that he waited until the movement to which he had devoted his life should be so far advanced as to render his absence possible without detriment to it. There were also other reasons for delay; but all obstacles were at last removed. Sailing in 1830, he landed at Liverpool

¹ No less a person than the English Bishop of Calcutta, at that time Dr. Middleton, was one of those urging baptism upon him. Bishop Middleton more than once invited Ram Mahan Rai to meet him for religious conversation, and the reformer cherished a sincere esteem for the bishop's character.

in April 1831. The details of his life in England are not necessary to our present purpose. It was not a long life ; for after a few months of activity he was seized with fever, and died at Bristol, September 27, 1833.

It is to this English visit that we owe our best impressions and our fullest knowledge of his religious character. He became acquainted in England with many who were profoundly interested in him, and cherished a deep sympathy for the work in India which he had begun ; they have left on record their opinion of him, and it is pleasant to notice the respect and admiration which he everywhere excited. It was impossible to be much in his company, said one, without feeling assured that he had not only received religion into his head, but that it pervaded his heart. Love to God and man, to truth and righteousness, says Dr. Carpenter, was the ruling disposition of his heart, and the law of his life. In short, all who came in contact with him were impressed by the purity and nobility of his character, and his entire devotion to philanthropic objects. His devoutness of life was equally noticeable. The perusal of Scripture was his constant practice. He led a prayerful life, and during his last illness was observed to be much engaged in secret prayer. Though a Unitarian in belief, he refrained, even in England, from connecting himself with any church of that denomination, but declared to a friend that his "heart was with the Unitarians." He cherished a sincere belief in the authority of the Bible, and we have seen him appealing to it, as to an authoritative standard, in theological controversy. He believed in the miracles of our Lord ; in prophecy and its fulfilment ; and in the resurrection from the dead, as proved by that of the Saviour. On this last point the evidence of the heartiness and warmth of his belief is very gratifying. As to his general religious views, Dr. Jerrard, the principal of Bristol College, had a conversation with him shortly before his death, as did also the famous John Foster ; and the impression which these conversations left on their minds was summed up by the former in the following words :

1. "The Rajah Ram Mahan Rai expressed his belief in the divine authority of Jesus Christ, as an inspired teacher of righteousness and an accredited messenger from God.

2. "He explicitly declared that he believed in the miracles of Christ generally, and particularly in his resurrection, which he said was the foundation of the Christian faith, and the great fact on which he rested his own hopes of a resurrection."

"You may term him what you please," says Dr. Carpenter, in his address after his death, "I have no hesitation in saying that he was a Christian." We do not see how any one can dispute it.

The question will now be asked — and to its answer we will devote a few paragraphs — what was the result of this good man's life and labors? Did he see in any degree the fulfilment of his hopes? Were his countrymen profoundly affected by his influence; or was he only an earnest though not a judicious or a skilful laborer, building in the dark, he knew not how, and accomplishing results, if at all, rather by blundering upon them through what some would call good luck, than as the fruit of wise and well-directed effort? Certainly it would be no reason for censuring the man were the latter true. He was a pioneer; he had no guides. His were the first footsteps in the wide and untried fields of Indian reform. He certainly succeeded in founding a society which still exists; and of late has filled a wider angle in men's vision than ever before. The Brahma Samaj is due to Ram Mahan Rai's sowing; though the tender plant has been nurtured by other hands.

As to any results in his own lifetime, it is very hard to speak with confidence. It has always been hard, even in these days of government returns and minute statistics, to learn the actual numerical following of the Samaj. Seventy-five years ago no effort was made; and we are left simply to the guesses of unofficial observers and critics. The father of the Samaj himself seldom speaks definitely about its size; he tells us of "several," and of "many," and of a "large

number," who embraced his views. For instance, in the letter to the Athenaeum, from which we have already quoted so much, he writes: "I refrained from carrying this intention (of visiting England) into effect until my friends, who coincided in my sentiments, should be increased in number and strength. My expectations having at length been realized, in November 1830, I embarked for England." This indicates some degree of size and stability in his society, yet we cannot help wishing that he had been a trifle more explicit as to the size of his "expectations."

Of his early success he wrote in the same letter: "Notwithstanding the violence of the opposition and resistance to my opinions, several highly respectable persons, both among my own relations and others, began to adopt the same sentiments."

In 1816 he says: "It is with no ordinary feeling of satisfaction that I have already seen many respectable persons of my countrymen, to the great disappointment of their interested spiritual guides, rise superior to their original prejudices, and inquire into the truths of religion."¹ This is all we have from him.

Examining some of the statements made by others of his success, we find an enthusiastic writer in the *Missionary Register* of the Church of England stating, in 1816, that his followers were estimated at nearly five hundred. This looks like an exaggeration; more sober estimates simply say "several." In 1818 a European observer, and an editor of a Calcutta newspaper, wrote that Ram Mahan Rai first gained over a dozen of his countrymen, "all distinguished for their rank and opulence," and they helped him to "found a sect," which at that time, numbered, he thought, about a thousand. This was evidently a guess; for in 1825, Sismondi says, "His flock is small, but increases continually."²

Yet, even if the actual number of enrolled followers was not large, — and in the absence of more definite information

¹ Introduction to the Translation of the *Cena Upanishad*, p. iii.

² *Monthly Repository*, xx. p. 67.

than any of that now given, which, we may add, is all that we have been able to discover, we can only infer that it was not, — he started streams of influence and exerted a power on the intelligent portion of his countrymen which was destined to bear fruit after he had gone. He once modestly expressed the hope that a day would come when his humble endeavors would be “viewed with justice — perhaps acknowledged with gratitude.” That day has come. Ram Mahan Rai is held in high and grateful esteem by all thinking men of his own land.¹ There may be honest doubt as to whether the Brahma Samaj is destined to prolonged life and abundant usefulness; yet no one can study its history without conceiving an admiration for the courage and purity and sincerity of its founder, who, according to the best of his ability and the light that was given to him, did what he could.

It must not be supposed, because we have spoken of Ram Mahan Rai only as a religious reformer, that he was not interested in general philanthropy. We have confined our review of his life to one aspect of his character, as was necessary for the purposes of this article, and to one department of his labors, which was, indeed, the most extensive and the most important. A more complete notice of his life than ours can be, which seeks to describe him only in his relations to a certain religious movement, would recount the

¹ Yet all efforts to commemorate in any fitting manner his life and character have ended in failure. A few years since some members of the Brahma Samaj, thinking rightly that the republication of his works would constitute the most appropriate memorial of him, formed a plan for the purpose. A prospectus was issued, and subscribers solicited. But nothing ever came of it. With all their reverence for the past, Hindus are singularly destitute of the historic faculty. Antiquity in a general way is deeply revered; but all monuments of antiquity are allowed to crumble to dust and be forgotten without an effort to preserve them, or a thought of their interest and value. Similarly, the idea of any visible memorial to a historic character is wholly foreign to the Indian mind. They do not build tombs even, to mark the resting-place of their illustrious dead; in fact, their dead are burned, and not buried. If, as is the case in very rare exceptions, the body of some great saint is buried, and a sort of rude tomb erected, it is soon allowed to fall into disgraceful ruin. Nothing can exceed the calm indifference with which the people of India allow their national heroes to “melt into the infinite azure of the past.” Their attitude towards the past is most paradoxical; they both worship and forget it.

wide scope and diverse nature of his beneficent labors. We can only briefly allude to some of the things he did ; but the mere enumeration will illustrate the width of his sympathies, and the practical character of his multiform benevolence. At a very early period he began to oppose the cruelties enjoined by modern Hinduism in the name of religion. This opposition was continued throughout his life. "The celebrated Hindu reformer, Ram Mahan Rai," says a paragraph quoted in the *Monthly Repository* in 1822,¹ "has held monthly public meetings at Calcutta, for the purpose of freely discussing the tenets of his religion, and exposing the cruelties practised under it." Especially did the burning of widows excite his indignation ; and in at least three publications, one of them dated 1818, he argued against it.² It was this interference with the rite of *Sati* which did much to arouse the early enmity of the Brahmans. The complete abolition of this outrageous custom was due in part to his persistent endeavors. The present legal status of Indian women also demanded his attention ; and he published a treatise comparing their condition under modern Hindu law with the privileges they enjoyed in former times. He pitied the ignorance of the children ; to relieve it, he founded schools in Calcutta, and put himself to much expense to keep them up. In some of these schools English was taught. For a number of years he carried on a weekly journal in Persian. The object and character of this paper we have not seen anywhere distinctly stated. Perhaps it was partly religious. It was suspended in 1823, when its editor "became discouraged by the press laws" — then much more rigorous than they are now. This fact would hint at a pretty decided political bias in his Persian weekly. The experience with his paper made him a firm friend of the liberty of the native press, which he advocated in an able memorial to the privy council ; and but a few days before the patriot reformer was laid to rest

¹ Vol. xvii. p. 584.

² As usual, he appealed to the original records of Hinduism, and undertook to show (what is undoubtedly true) that the practice of burning widows is not enjoined by the earlier writings.

in his English grave, Lord Metcalf (then Governor General) had the courage and the statesmanship to unloose the shackles which fettered the free expression of thought.¹ Ram Mahan Rai was a careful student of all public questions, particularly those affecting the welfare of his native land; during his stay in England he gave valuable evidence before a committee of the House of Commons, which was then considering the question of granting a new charter to the East India Company; he also wrote on topics connected with Indian administration. One of his papers described the working of the high court of Calcutta; another contained a powerful argument against the government monopoly of Indian salt; nor were his patriotic and sensible views on other subjects concealed. Though his English visit was not planned with reference to any political duty, he yet consented to act as agent in England for the princes of Delhi,—the impotent and degenerate descendants of Tamerlane, of Akbar, and Aurangzib, — who considered that they had a claim against the East India Company, and were very glad to avail themselves of his services in urging it. They gave him by firman the complimentary title of Raja. The company declined to admit the validity either of his title or of his office, though the British government recognized both. If Ram Mahan Rai's political services and abundant labors in the field of general philanthropy are not widely remembered to-day, the reason is not that they were either few or feeble, but that they are eclipsed by his more important work in the direction of religious reform.

¹ The feeble government of Lord Lytton sought to reimpose the hard conditions of censorship. But so great was the general indignation, that the Native Press Act of 1878, though passed, remained almost wholly a dead letter, during the remaining years of that Viceroy's vicious and servile rule. It was repealed as soon as it could be with decency when the government of England and India passed, in 1880, from Beaconsfield's unscrupulous clique, into stronger and nobler hands.

(To be continued.)