



Wisdom Traditions of East and West

The Religion of Ancient Egypt

The Religion of Chaldea

The Religion of India

The Religion of China

By Charles Johnston

Contents

The Religion of Ancient Egypt.....	5
The Religion of Chaldea.....	19
The Religion of India.....	35
The Religion of China.....	53

The Religion of Ancient Egypt

Theosophical Quarterly, January, 1906

INTRODUCTORY.

We must study religions from within, not from without. If we ourselves genuinely believe in spiritual life and spiritual law, and have some knowledge of the things of our immortality, we shall study to good purpose. If we are merely curious, without conviction, without faith, we but lose our time, and our work will be wholly valueless.

The world's religions are the grand, successive chapters of the world's Religion. If we come rightly to their study, we shall be repaid with ever-increasing light. We shall come to regard human history as a gradual revelation of divine life, and this world of ours as the anteroom of immortal realms.

There was a time when it was fashionable to hold that men came by their religious beliefs through fancy, making their gods from shadows and clouds, and hearing divine voices only in the lisp of leaves and the ripple of rain. We shall learn to set this light opinion aside, coming to the great truth that man's belief in the soul springs from the soul itself; that he has faith in divine beings, because there are divine beings that he has set his hope on immortality, because the soul is immortal.

The knowledge of the soul and its realities is a science, to be learned by experiment, as are all sciences. The great central thought of all religions, the thought of sacrifice, is to be understood only through

sacrifice. Humility and faith reveal their secrets only to humility and faith. We must pass in faith through sacrifice to knowledge, before we can speak with any certainty concerning religion.

The study of religions must be founded on facts, assembled with vigilance and untiring toil. But the facts it most imports us to gather are the facts of spiritual life. The field that must first be harvested is the field of our own souls. Holding as a clue the insight thus gained, we shall find our way safely through many a labyrinth of old-world faiths, where else we should meet nothing but bewilderment. And with this guide, we shall find among the ancient religions of the world many a land of promise, many an isle of the blest.

We shall come in time to divine in the great religions of the world an ordered revelation, and a veiled reminiscence, not complete in any land, yet with a certain unity in all; a memory going back to the spiritual dawn of mankind, in whose pure, quiet light move divine and august figures, each the guardian genius of a race; great ones, to whom the thought and love of later men goes back, drawing from their memory the faith in incarnate gods.

MOTHER EGYPT.

“The Egyptians,” wrote Herodotus, “were the first among mankind to teach the immortality of the soul.” This is not all the truth, for the knowledge of immortality is as old as man. Yet it is true that, among the august records of the past, as we now know them, Egypt stands first, the motherland of religious knowledge and of the Mysteries.

There is a certain stateliness and beauty in the land itself, which marks it as the fitting home of a great spiritual life. The rich ribbon of fertility, watered by the sacred Nile, is guarded on either side by the vast and silent desert, its wastes of rock and stone and sand shining under the sunlight, or veiled in the gloom of night. The long valley of the Nile, in its boundless fruitfulness, is a symbol of creative Nature; and the sacred river which brings it fertility, now flowing, now ebbing, is an image of the spiritual life that thrills through nature, coming from a secret source beyond the horizon.

The whole land is clothed in a veil of beauty, whether it be the rich greenness of the valley, the gold and grey of the bordering hills, or the

deep blue, changing to purple, of the overarching sky. The sunrise is a glory, noontide full of splendour, and evening veiled in marvellous gloom. Night also speaks of revelation. The stars tell their secrets more plainly than in northern lands. As the sun dies out of the cloudless sky, brief twilight wanes into darkness, and within an hour the stars are shining, growing to coloured gems of flame in the velvety dome of night. One-half of the whole starry sphere is thus seen, an hour after the sun has gone; and, as the night draws onward, the splendid dome of stars turns slowly on its almost level axis; till, when dawn draws near, another hemisphere of stars is already revealed. Thus comes it that, every night of the cloudless year, the whole glory of the sphere of stars is unveiled, save only on each night the narrow zone lit up by the evening and morning twilight; a zone equal to but one-twelfth of the whole celestial sphere.

Thus for those who watched in old Egypt it was easy to discern the mighty secrets of the visible heavens; to measure the movements of the moon, stealing backward among the stars, each hour moving a space equal to the width of her own disk; it was easy to note the place of the sun among the constellations, to follow his advance and withdrawal through the wide jewelled belt of the zodiac; as the dawn drew nigh, it was easy to mark the last moment when some bright star was lost in the sun's growing light; and, noting this from year to year, thus to gain the precise measure of the earth's rotation round the sun. The greater year of the pole's precession through the stars might also be measured, many successive generations adding their knowledge and handing it down.

The spirit of the day of splendid sunshine and colour, and the nights of solemn star-lit gloom breathes forth from the mighty pyramids and pillared temples of ancient Egypt. Full of grandeur and quiet reverence, nothing nobler has ever been conceived by the spirit of man, or built by human hand. These ancient shrines are penetrated through and through with the breath of consecration. The stones themselves seem to worship offering their testimony to the might and divinity of the over-shadowing Soul.

In the history of Egypt also, with its age-long dynasties of mighty kings, whose life and death are recorded in stately monuments, who

alone among the rulers of men bear always a divine name as well as a human name, who follow each other in stately sequence, like some holy procession along the Nile, we have once more embodied the same spirit of majesty and quiet power. Nor have we yet approached completeness in our view of that great procession of kings. Every decade of study reveals new centuries and new dynasties of Egyptian monarchs, stretching ever farther back into the darkness. Beyond the utmost landmark of yesterday, we now see clearly the outlines of older times and wider cycles; and the revelations of today are already opening the way for the greater revelations of tomorrow.

THE LATER AND EARLIER KINGS.

Menes, who united the provinces of Egypt into a single empire many millenniums ago, was recently thought to be a myth, a fanciful figure of tradition. He now stands out, a fully historic person, whose acts and conquests are well known to us, whose very burial-place, with the tomb of his queen, every visitor may see. The reign of this conqueror Menes is now held to have been seven thousand years ago, and we may take it as a landmark in our view of Egyptian history. After Menes came thirty-one dynasties of native Egyptian kings. Early in that "dynastic" period were built the greatest pyramids, and the most splendid carvings were wrought out of the stubborn rocks. The beauty and grandeur of workmanship of the earliest dynasties has never been equalled by any later race of men.

Nearly five thousand years, it is held, were filled by the thirty-one Egyptian dynasties. Then, three centuries before our era, came invasion of Alexander of Macedon, whose officer, Ptolemy, founded a Greek dynasty, numbered the thirty-second. That dynasty perished with Cleopatra, and Egypt passed under Roman sway.

Seven thousand years ago, conquering Menes gathered together the provinces of Egypt, and formed them into the dual kingdom, the "two lands," of Upper and Lower Egypt. His first capital was at Thinis, called by the Greeks Abydos, far up the Nile. Advancing his power northward, he brought Lower Egypt of the delta also under his rule, and founded Menefer, the "city of Menes," called Memphis by the Greeks, close to the head of the delta, where the Nile separates into

seven streams spread out like a fan toward the sea.

Seven millenniums of human history lead us back to Menes. Beyond Menes rise the figures of older kings, dim and majestic, and extending to a far remoter past. Ten kings who preceded Menes are already admitted to be fully historic, and they but bring us to the closing epoch of a great prehistoric civilization, which culminated not less than a thousand years earlier. Even here, we do not approach the beginning of Egypt, whether for sacred tradition or modern research. For we know today that the race of these ten earlier kings who preceded Menes was an invading race, coming by way of Koptos from the shore of the Red Sea; and finding a far older race already in possession of the great Nile valley. That earlier race, fair of complexion, skilled in the arts of life, workers in ivory and ebony, had its kin, perhaps, along the southern Mediterranean, towards Algeria and Mount Atlas, and certain tribes belonging to the same family are still hidden in the inner oases of the vast Sahara. Within a generation, it may well be, the history of that pre-dynastic race will be well-known to us; yet, when its secrets are penetrated, its periods measured and estimated, we shall still be far from the beginning. For even this race on its coming found not an empty land, but an older race and an already degenerate culture along the valley of the sacred river. That older race has its kindred, perhaps, among the Hottentots of southern Africa today; yet they once were numerous and powerful, and held a larger territory in Egypt than any later comers.

Egypt is now a rainless land. Years pass, along the upper reaches of the river, without a rainstorm or even a shower. Where Thinis stood, there may be rain once in four or five years. But in the days of that earlier race, of which we have just spoken, Egypt was a land of torrent rains, of wild storms and floods, drenching what is now the desert, which then may have been fertile land. How long ago this was, we can only guess. Perhaps it was when the wild sand wastes of the vast Sahara were still covered by the waters of an inland sea, till some great cataclysm raised and sank the ocean bed. But however long the ages that divide us from that great convulsion, we know that long before it Egypt was peopled by numerous tribes. Their knives and axes of flint still strew the desert hills beyond the fertile valley of the Nile; and many of these flint knives are worn and rounded by the waters of

torrents that ceased to flow millenniums ago. Flint knives of the days of Menes have been found, still sharp and keen-edged, yet changed by time to a light orange colour. Other flint knives of the far older race have, by time's passage, been stained deep brown or black, so vastly more ancient are they than the days of Menes, now known to be seven thousand years ago.

THE BIRTH AND DEATH OF OSIRIS.

Thus far does modern research conduct us. We learn a like story from ancient sacred tradition. Before Menes, said that tradition, were ten kings of Thinis, whose reigns are now admittedly historic. These ten king were preceded by dynasties of heroes and demigods. And before these came two dynasties of divine kings. To the earlier of these, say the traditions of Egypt, belonged the great king Hasiri, whom the Greeks called Osiris.

Osiris is to be classed with certain great ones, of whom Krishna and Gautama Buddha may stand as types. They were, in one sense, men incarnate upon earth, and living as men among men. But they were, in a larger sense, divine and representative beings, the course of whose lives was symbolical, typifying the great laws of spiritual life. In all these lives there are two elements: a mission and a sacrifice. The teaching of Gautama is but the outcome of the Great Renunciation. The death of Krishna rounds and completes the disclosure of divine secrets to Arjuna. And so it was with Osiris, who belongs to a far earlier age, to the dim dawn of Egyptian tradition. It is true that the Buddha was regarded, and rightly regarded, as the visible presentment of the divine Avalokiteshvara, the Heavenly Host. Yet it is not less true that as prince Siddhartha, he lived in the city of Kapila, renouncing his kingdom to follow wisdom, and teaching his disciples in the bamboo garden. So it is true that Krishna was the avatar of Vishnu, who, in three strides, traversed the heavens, and who, with Brahma and Shiva, completed the holy Triad. But it is also true that Krishna was the prince of Dvaraka, the friend and charioteer of Arjuna.

In the same way, we may believe, Hasiri was born in remote days, in Upper Egypt. He ascended the throne of his kingdom, and reigned, it is recorded, for eight and twenty years. Even in life, he was

surrounded with a certain divinity. His people looked on him as the teacher of all wisdom and knowledge, winning men to the arts of life by gentleness and goodness. He was full of kindness, mildness and grace, a personality very winsome, though of royal might, yet humble and simple, who led men's hearts captive by tenderness.

Such, they say, was Osiris. Towards the close of his reign, he left his kingdom, travelling to distant lands. And during his absence, his brother Set, whom the Greeks later called Typhon, conspired against him, to kill him. Hes, the consort of Osiris, called Isis by the Greeks, sought to frustrate Set's evil plans, but without avail, for on Osiris' return to Egypt, Set brought about his death, enclosing his body in a coffin of richly carved wood, and setting it adrift on the sacred Nile. The waters carried the chest with its sacred burden far, and at last by the Tanaitic mouth it passed through the delta to the sea. Isis sought the body of her lord, with grievous sorrow following every trace and clue, and at last discovered the coffin with her lord's body enclosed in it. But even now she did not escape the enmity of Set, who found its hiding place, and tearing open the coffin, cut the body of Osiris in twice seven pieces, and strewed them through the length and breadth of the land. Yet once more did Isis gather together the scattered members of her lord with sacred care, burying them at Abydos, destined for long ages to worship him. By miraculous power Osiris rose again from the dead into a renewed and spiritual life, and, through his son Horus, vanquished his enemy Set. The beaten foe was given to Isis for safe keeping, but the bereaved queen in large generosity set him free, though Horus bitterly opposed her.

Thus lived and died Osiris. Thereafter in the hidden, spiritual world, he became the ruler of the dead, the judge in the Hall of Truth, and to his throne come all mortals to be judged. Thus far the narrative, which, we must believe, embodies the direct facts of Osiris' life on earth, events as actual as Krishna's friendship for Arjuna, or Buddha's teaching in the bamboo garden.

Yet there is the other side of the life of Osiris. Like Krishna and Gautama, he stands for the Logos incarnated, and, after his death and resurrection, for the Logos made manifest in the heavens. It is said of him that Hes or Isis was at once his mother, his sister and his

daughter, symbolizing clearly the manifestations of the one spirit in three worlds, each world having its proper vesture. The divine, the spiritual and the mental worlds are thus personified in the Eastern teachings; and in Set, the foe, yet the brother of Osiris, we see the symbol of the physical world. Paul spoke of a law in his flesh, warring against the law of his mind; and in just this sense did Set war against Osiris, in wide nature, as in man. As Osiris was put to death by Set, hidden in the casket of death, and then cut in twice seven pieces and strewn far and wide, so is the spirit buried in the material world, and, through the power of the material world, divided in many parts, strewn throughout the manifestations of life. Then Isis, the dutiful spouse, the pure spirit of aspiration, is set the task of once more assembling the fragments of Osiris, as spirit is drawn forth from matter, and once more perfected in one.

As in certain other lives, every part of the life of Osiris is symbolic. Witness that enclosing of the body in the casket as prelude to his miraculous rising from the dead, an event still celebrated in mystical rites.

THE WORSHIP OF RA.

Abydos was the centre of the teaching of Osiris, and was specially associated with his name. When Menes carried his capital northward to Menefer or Memphis, another expression was given to the same teaching, and Memphis was bound up in tradition with the worship of Ra. Ra is the Sun, born of Ptah, the mystical, abstract light, and himself the father of Shu, the sunshine.

Yet Ra is something more than the visible sun of heaven. That sun is but the symbol of the hidden Sun "after whose shining all else shines." Nor could any more fitting and beautiful symbol be chosen, especially in a land of such splendid light as Egypt. From the faint dawn, that touched the eastern hills with lines of gold and crimson, through radiant morning to perfect noon, when the sun stood at the crown of the azure dome; through the descending hours, till the sun once more touched the rim of the desert, flooding the hills with red and the sky with purple light, the whole day was a procession of magnificent beauty. And with that abounding beauty came every good

and perfect gift to the life of man, all fruitfulness, the wheat that fed him, the life of cattle and birds that brought him riches. All came from Ra. All was the gift of Ra.

Nor is the symbol of the sunset less fitting and beautiful. As the visible sun touches the rim of the desert, and then sinks, a disk of splendid red, beyond the curtain of the hills, so sink all living things into the darkness. Then follow the long hours of mystical gloom, lit with the coloured fire of the stars that move in majestic order across the dome of night. At last the sun returns, once more tinging the eastern hills, and pouring his glad light upon the earth; and so life returns, coming out of the hidden once more into the visible world.

No symbol is more universal, none more beautiful, than this which associates the hidden world of souls with the realm beyond the sunset. In all lands souls are thought of as departing to the west, whether we take the beliefs of Tibet or of New Zealand. And this from no vagary of fancy, but from the universal vision of a great truth, which in thought follows the sun beyond his setting to a hidden world that supplements the world of day. As lord of the hidden world the Egyptians paid honour to Amen-Ra, the hidden sun. Here is a version of one of their hymns:

“Hail to thee, Ra! Lord of truth, whose shrine is hidden; Lord of the gods, Creator, sailing in thy bark; at whose command the gods were made; maker of men, that supportest their works, that givest them life, that knowest how one differeth from another, that listeneth to the poor who is in distress; that art gentle of heart when a man crieth unto thee; thou who deliverest the fearful man from the violent, who judgest the poor and the oppressed; Lord of wisdom, whose precepts are wise; at whose pleasure the Nile overflows her banks; Lord of mercy, most loving, at whose coming men live, opener of every eye, proceeding from the firmament, cause of joy and light, at whose goodness the gods rejoice, their hearts reviving when they see thee!”

A few lines may be quoted from a verse rendering of the same hymn:

Son of Ptah, both fair and good,
Lo! the gods adore and love—
By the gods is honour paid—
To the God who all things made,
Things below and things above.
Lo, he passes through the sky,
Sailing in tranquillity,
Blessing both the lands with light,
King of north and king of south,
Giving law with truthful mouth.
He who takes
The earth, and makes
It like to his divinity.
In his beauties gods rejoice,
To his praise they lift their voice
And adore his name,
When he comes from his abode,
Rising crowned with flame,
Glorious the two lands above.
He whose fragrances they love,
Incense-born and dewy-sweet,
When he comes from Araby,
When his feet
Over plains of Asia fly,
And his smile
Beams along the land divine,
Where the Red Sea waters shine,
Southward of the land of Nile.
At his feet the gods attend,
In acknowledgement they bend
To his awful majesty.
Lord of fear and victory,
Mighty one of will,
Master of the crowns, and king,
Making green the offering,
Giver of the holy food,
Pure and good,

We adore with salutation
Thee, who called into creation
Even the gods, and by thy skill,
In beneficence and love
Hast outstretched the heavens above,
And hast set the earth's foundation.
Gracious ruler, rising bright,
Crowned with crown of silver white,
Lord of rays,
Great Creator of the light,
Unto him the gods give praise,
An he stretches from above
Hand of love to them that love.
Hail to thee, Lord God of law,
Thee, whose shrine none ever saw,
Sailing in thy boat along,
By whose word the great gods are,
Thee we hail in song,
Atmu, maker of mankind.

It is clear that with the visible sun is here blended the Logos, the spiritual giver of light and life, and that the sun is but one symbol of that for which Osiris is another symbol. As Osiris contended with Set the adversary and prince of this world, so contends the sun with the Serpent of Darkness; and so the light contends with the darkness in the heart.

THE SYMBOL OF THE NILE.

Other images were taken by the wise men of ancient Egypt, always to embody the same truth. Of these one of the most beautiful and fitting was the sacred Nile, like the sun a giver of life and sustenance to the whole land, a visible divinity bearing ever plentiful blessings. Here again Egypt was happy in possessing a symbol in all ways so fitting. For, like the spiritual power, the Nile was in its source recondite and mysterious, though very evident in its manifestations. From far beyond the rim of the known world it came, and entered the kingdom of Upper Egypt by the red granite gate of the first cataract at Syene, now

called Assuan. Then for hundreds of miles it flowed through the long Egyptian valley, bringing fertility, till at last it spread into the seven streams of the delta, and was lost in the sea.

At the summer solstice the Nile grew turbid, flushed with the rains of far distant tropical lands, and then, for a fortnight, great masses of green water-growths were carried down from hidden equatorial lakes. Then the waters rose until the inundation, some two months later, when the Nile once more stretched from shore to shore of its vast ancient bed. At the autumnal equinox it reached its greatest height, covering the whole land with rich earth, washed over it by the waters. And then, for nine months, the mighty stream shrunk once again to its lowest level, resting there for a few days only, and then once again beginning to rise.

The summer solstice, when the river thus touched its lowest level, was a time of solemn rites and ceremonies, which, for the people, referred only to the visible Nile and the approaching inundation, but for those more informed, embodied the teaching of the Logos, and the working of spiritual power, the flow of the river of life through the hearts of men. We may give a few verses from one of the hymns to the Nile, which show this double meaning:

Hail, all hail, O Nile, to thee!
 To the land thyself thou showest,
 Coming tranquilly to give
 Life, that Egypt so may live;
 Amen, hidden is thy source,
 Hidden thy mysterious course,
 But it fills our hearts with glee!
 Thou the gardens overflowest,
 With their flowers beloved of Ra,
 Thou for all the beasts that are,
 Glorious river,
 Art life-giver,
 To our fair fields ceaselessly
 Thou thy waters dost supply,
 And dost come
 Through the middle plain descending,

Like the sun through middle sky,
Loving, good, and without ending,
Bringing corn for granary,
Giving light to every home,
O thou mighty Ptah!

THE JUDGMENT OF THE DEAD.

We can see the unity in spirit between these three forms of divine symbol, if we compare with the hymns to the Sun and the Nile these words of a hymn to Osiris:

“Manifester of good, full of goodness and truth, beneficent spirit, beneficent in will and words, mild of heart, fair and beloved of all who see him, he brings forth plenteousness and gives it to all the earth; all men rejoice because of him, hearts are in sweetness because of him, and bosoms are in joy; all men adore him and glorify his goodness, sanctifying and beneficent is his name!”

The teaching of Osiris penetrated deeper into the spiritual world, and with him was bound up the fate of the soul after death. At the birth of Osiris, it was said, a voice was heard, saying: “The lord of all the earth is born!” and after his death, as lord of the hidden world, he became the judge of all souls. Isis stood beside his throne in the Hall of Truth with two and forty angels surrounding him. Horus, his son, led forward the souls of the dead to judgement, and Anubis, “director of the weight,” brought forth the scales for the trial. In one scale was set the image of Truth, and in the other a vase containing the good deeds of the soul on trial, and Thoth stood with his tablets to record the result of the weighing.

If the good deed weighed the heavier, the blessed soul, purged by fire, entered the solar boat and was carried to the happy fields of Aahlu and the pools of peace. Dwelling there for thrice a thousand years, the soul was once ore born upon earth, to gain a new lesson in wisdom and life, when the cycle was completed, the soul, justified and made perfect, attained the crowning joy of union with God, absorbed into the divine essence and thus reaching the full perfection of being.

For above Osiris, above Ra, above Amen, there was always the ineffable ONE who was thus addressed in prayer:

“Hail to the One in his works, single among the divine powers, chief of all the divine powers. Father of the divine powers, Maker of the divine powers, Lord of Divine Powers, the One maker of existences, the One, alone, without peer, the true King of divine powers. Sole producer of all things, both in heaven and upon earth, Himself not produced of any, the only true living God, who has made all things, but Himself was not made!”

We find the sentences of this prayer echoed in later liturgies; and it is part of the mighty genius of Egypt, that her spirit served as an inspiration for younger lands and younger faiths. In the religion of the Greeks, and most of all, in the Mysteries, of Orpheus, of Eleusis, the voice of ancient Egypt is once more heard, and heard not for the last time. In later days, Synesius, Iamblichus and Plotinus brought a part of the sacred lore of Egypt once more to the light of common day.

Let us think, then, of the ancient religion of Egypt, the lore of Osiris, of Amen, of Ra, as a great flame burning in secret, from which were lit many lesser flames; a single spiritual faith, which brought forth many symbols, consecrating to its worship the splendour of sunrise and noon and evening, and the holy stream of the Nile with its gift of fertility, thus making all life a symbol of Life.

The Religion of Chaldea

Theosophical Quarterly, April, 1906

The land long known as Chaldea, wherein many nations successively grew and ruled, bears striking resemblances to the land of Egypt. Like Egypt, it is a long river valley, hemmed in between rocky mountain ridges on the east and vast expanses of sandy wilderness on the west. Like Egypt, it is of immense fertility, or might once more be, were its ancient system of irrigating canals restored. Like Egypt, it was warmed into sudden luxuriance, and burned dry by the summer sun. Again like Egypt, it was through long ages divided into two kingdoms, the north and the south land, sometimes under a single ruler, often at war.

In long past ages the resemblance went even further; for torrent rains then deluged Egypt, as they still deluge Chaldea in the winter months, and the Egyptian desert then blossomed in spring into a splendid carpet of flowers, red, blue and yellow among the luxuriant green grass, as does the Arabian desert which hems in Chaldea on the west. These analogies and relations go much deeper, as we shall presently see; for there are spiritual as well as material bonds of union, and they go back into a remote and wonderful past.

There are certain well-marked differences. Egypt has one sacred river, the Nile, flowing northward. Chaldea had two sacred rivers, now known as Euphrates and Tigris, flowing southward. At the dawn of our knowledge of Chaldea, these two rivers flowed into the sea many miles from each other; but what was then sea is now dry land, and the

two rivers, ever approaching each other, as the land gained on the sea, finally came together into a single channel, and for long centuries they have been united in one, flowing as one stream into the Persian Gulf. Here we have our first means of dating the ancient civilization of Chaldea; for certain cities, which were at first ports, built on land recently won from the sea, are far inland today. They were deserted by the ever-receding waves, as the Persian Gulf filled up with the mud and sand carried down by the rivers.

One of these ancient seaports was Uru-dugga, the "good city," the word *uru* meaning "city" in the most ancient known tongue of the land. Uru-dugga, later called Eridu, was the earliest home of religious and national culture in the valley of the two rivers, and the sea had just receded from its site when it was built. But Uru-dugga is now one hundred and twenty miles, or even further, from the present sea-shore, all the intervening land having been since built up by the sand and mud of the rivers. We know what point the receding sea had reached in the days of Alexander the Great. We can, therefore, count how much longer it took for the sea to withdraw from Eridu, and the period thus measured is some ten or twelve thousand years. Eridu was, therefore, founded ten or twelve thousand years ago; not later, because the sea withdrew some ten thousand years ago; not much earlier, because the site of the city was in earlier periods under the waves.

We have our starting-point thus fixed with some certainty, and without likelihood of future change. Other cities of the same ancient land were Uru-uku, the "city eternal," and Uru, the "city," so called because it was a royal seat; and these two cities, under the names of Erech and Ur, are found in the Hebrew scriptures, in the period immediately after the deluge. The people who dwelt in Uru-dugga, Uru-uku and Uru called themselves "the people of Sumer," or, to use the modern form of the name, "Sumerians." They spoke a language very different from most of those known to us; akin to the ancient forms of the Tartar tongues of Central Asia, Finnish, Mongol, Manchu and Turkish; one of the languages of the sub-races who bridge the gap between the ancient yellow races of China and the yellow-white races of Eastern Europe. The Sumerians were, in fact, ancient kindred of the Turks, and it is a part of time's cyclic work that their land is at this moment under Turkish rule.

When they founded Uru-dugga, the “good city,” by the sea-shore some ten or twelve thousand years ago, the Sumerians were already a learned and highly cultivated race. They were familiar with many arts. They build admirably, using bricks and ties made of the river-mud. They used gold, silver, copper, tin and lead, and perhaps antimony, in their arts and manufactures. They made canals, irrigated their fields of wheat and other grain, wove cotton and wool into cloth, and carved fine statues of rock brought from the eastern mountains.

What is more to our purpose, we find them in possession of a great spiritual culture, a religious system presided over by priest-kings, who held civil authority in virtue of their spiritual power, and who kept the ancient records in writing closely akin to the earliest hieroglyphics of Egypt. Moreover we find the men of Sumer holding the belief that their spiritual culture had come to them from the sea, from the south, out of the waters of the Persian Gulf. The great spirit who brought them wisdom and hidden knowledge, they called Ea or Hea, whom they honoured as “the Lord of the earth.” Hea dwelt in the deep, and held sway over the spirits of men. His home amid the “waters” was indicated by depicting him with the body of a fish, also a symbol of the Mysteries. Hea alone possessed a knowledge of “the supreme Name,” the ineffable Word, before which everything bows, in heaven and earth, and in the waters under the earth. The spirits of darkness yield obedience to this Name. Even the gods are awed by it. Another title of Hea was Zi-ki-a, the Zi or spirit of ki-a, “the earth and the waters,” and Hea is depicted as sailing on the deep in a mystical bark, like the boat of Ra, in the Egyptian religion. In this holy bark, built of cedar and adorned with “seven times seven lions of the desert,” go forth “Hea, who decides destinies, with Damkina, whose word is life; Silik-mulu-khi, who utters the beneficent name; Munu-abge, who guides the lord of the earth, and Nin-gar, the great pilot of heaven.” Here is an ancient Sumerian hymn to Hea, in which spiritual powers are symbolised:

Who holds his head high before the great terror which my
vast strength causes?

I am master of the steep mountains which tremble whilst
their summits reach the firmament.

The mountain of alabaster, lapis lazuli and onyx, in my hand I possess it.

Archangel of the abyss, in my right hand I hold my fiery disk; in my left hand I hold my fatal disk.

The sun with fifty faces, the raised weapon of my divinity, I hold it.

The weapon which, like a waterspout, stretches in a circle the bodies of the slain, I hold it.

That which breaks the mountains, Ana's powerful weapon, I hold it.

That which bends the mountains, the fish with seven fins, I hold it.

The flaming blade of battle, which devastates and afflicts the land of the rebels, I hold it.

The great sword which overthrows the ranks of the brave, the sword of my divinity, I hold it.

The hand of the powerful men of battle, from the attacks of which the mountain cannot escape, I hold it.

The joy of heroes, the lance which deals injury in battle, I hold it.

The club which crushes the dwellings of the rebel country, and the shield of battle, I hold them.

The thunder of battle, the weapon with fifty points, I hold it.

Like the enormous serpent with seven heads, shaking its heads, the serpent with seven heads, I hold it.

Like the serpent which scours the waves of the sea, the destroyer in the shock of battle, extending its power over heaven and earth, the weapon with seven heads, I hold it.

The burning god of the east, who makes his glory shine like that of the day, I hold him.

The creator of heaven and earth, the god whose power has no rival, I hold him.

One is reminded of the transfigured Krishna, "with disk and mace," of the "sword of wisdom," in the mystical books of India, and of the spiritual powers represented by "the armour of righteousness,"

the whole armour of God, the breastplate of righteousness, the shield of faith, able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked, the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God, a close parallel to the ineffable Name of power known to Hea. There are also analogies with the chakra, or disk, and the seven-headed serpent of Brahma, on which the Creator rests amid the waters. We may see in this the symbol of a sevenfold "serpentine" power.

Hea, Lord of the earth, is thus the lord of wisdom, of spiritual and magical power. He is regarded as the creator of men, the giver of wisdom and spiritual knowledge to men. And we may also, no doubt, see in Hea a personification of spiritual wisdom and power, the "hosts," as it were, of "perfect spirits," possessing magical power and the knowledge of immortality.

Amongst those who go forth with Hea in his sacred bark, we saw included a divine being called "Silik-mulu-khi," or "Silik-mulu-dugga," who "utters the beneficent name." Silik-mulu-dugga is a title, meaning "he who dispenses good to men," and the proper name of the Son of Hea, who bore this title, was Asari. Asari is, perhaps, the most important and vital figure in the ancient religion of the Sumerians. For it is now recognized that the Sumerian Asari, son of the Lord of the earth, is no other than Asar, or Hasiri, prince of Egypt, called by the Greeks Osiris. The identity is conclusively proved by the symbols used, which are identical in Egypt and Chaldea, the picture sign for "a place," accompanied by the picture-sign for "an eye," being used in the one land to represent Asari and in the other to represent Asar. Moreover, the character of Asari, as known to the ancient Sumerians is identical with that of Osiris, as known to the men of ancient Egypt. Asari, like Osiris, is the mediator between God and mankind. Asari is known as "the dispenser of good to men," the "prince," and in Egypt Osiris is called "the good," and "the prince." It is clear that the same divine-human personage is meant; one who, though embodied as a ruler among men, was yet of divine nature; who died and rose again; who leads and guides the souls of men.

We come to this, that the great ruler who was esteemed an avatar in ancient pre-dynastic Egypt is recognized as the great divine personage who brought spiritual knowledge and culture to the ancient Sumerian

in their city of Uru-dugga, then on the shore of the Persian gulf. The Sumerians spoke of him as the originator of their national and spiritual life, and as dwelling with them, a mediator between them and Hea, Lord of the earth. Sumerian tradition goes back no further.

This is not the case in Egypt. Asar or Osiris does not stand at the beginning of Egyptian life. Long ages of the Divine Dynasties stretch behind him, and he takes his place as one in a series of divine kings. We are, therefore, justified in believing that the Egyptian cycle is the older of the two; that the Sumerians looked back to Egypt, and especially to the divine king Osiris, as the source of their spiritual knowledge; and there may well have been an infusion of the earlier Egyptian race in Uru-dugga, the first city of the ancient Sumerians.

There is a close accord in the dates, so far as we can estimate them. Uru-dugga, as we saw, must have been founded some ten or twelve thousand years ago, when the Persian gulf lay one hundred and twenty miles further inland than it does today. The culture of Uru-dugga began, therefore, some ten or twelve thousand years ago. On the other hand, we find a date assigned to Osiris, in the reckoning of ancient Egypt, which corresponds closely with this. We saw the beginning of the "historic" dynasties is now admitted to have been some seven thousand years ago, and that Menes, the first conqueror and unifier of all Egypt, is now dated about 5,000 years before our era. But the ancient Egyptians reckoned four cycles of rulers before that period of unification under Menes, and they numbered Osiris among the rulers of the first of these four dynasties. The date they gave to his reign is some thirteen thousand years ago, agreeing closely with the known antiquity of Uru-dugga or Eridu, the oldest city of the Sumerians, where, under the name of Asar, "who dispenses good to men," Osiris was revered.

Asar, the incarnate "son of God," who died and rose again, came to be esteemed as the Mediator between Hea, Lord of the earth, and the souls of mankind. To Asar, in this character, hymns and prayers were addressed. The following is one of them:

Thy will is the sublime sword with which thou rulest heaven
and earth.

I commanded the sea, and the sea became calm.

I commanded the flower, and the flower ripened its grain.

I commanded the girdle of the river of Sippara (Euphrates),
and by the will of Asar I diverted its course.

Lord, thou art sublime I what mortal being is like unto thee?

Dispenser of good to men, amongst all the gods who are
named, thou givest the reward. Hero among the gods, who
dispensest good to men, lord of battles . . . !

In another hymn, Asar is addressed thus:

Great lord of the land, king of countries, eldest-born of Hea,
who bringest back heaven and earth,

Dispenser of good to men, lord of the lands, king of peoples,
God of gods,

Merciful one among the gods,

Regenerator, who bringest back the dead to life,

Dispenser of good to men, king of heaven and earth,

To thee are heaven and earth,

To thee are heaven and earth round about!

To thee is the breath of life!

To thee are death and life!

To thee is the sublime shore of the ocean!

To thee belong all the children of men, all who breathe, all
who, bearing a name, exist on the surface of the earth;

The whole of the four regions of the world, the archangels of
heaven and earth, how many soever they are,

Thou art the propitious god;

Thou art the favourable strong one;

Thou art the life-giver;

Thou art the saviour, the merciful one among the gods,

Thou art the regenerator, who bringest back the dead to life!

Dispenser of good to men, king of heaven and earth,

I have invoked thy name,

I have invoked thy sublimity!

Asar is also represented as saying:

I am he who walks before Hea,
I am the Warrior, the eldest son of Hea, his messenger.

Asar carried a sacred reed as his sceptre and magical wand, thus described in one of the hymns:

Golden reed, great reed, tall reed of the marshes, sacred reed of the gods.

. . . I am the messenger of Him who dispenses good to men, causing all to grow young again. . . .

Above the realm of "land and sea" ruled over by Hea, the Sumerians held that there were three zones, or realms, or planes, in ascending order. Between the earth and the heavens was the zone or realm of the powers of the air, where the winds blew, the storms raged, the clouds were spread forth, the lightnings played, the hot thunderbolt whirled, and the water-spouts poured forth.

Above this cloud-realm was the lower zone of the heavens, in which the seven sacred planets moved in their courses. The planetary realm was called *ul-gana*, and the planets were conceived as living things, as beings possessed of life and consciousness, of the power to live and move in this realm where they had their being.

Higher still was the sublime heaven of the fixed stars, to which was given the name of Ana. Ana, as Heaven, was held to be the greatest of the gods, the Supreme, the Father and fore-runner of all. Or, to speak more justly, the Sumerians did not conceive the Supreme otherwise than as the Spirit of Heaven.

For everything throughout the Fourfold World was held to have not only its separate being, but its "spirit" or "life" as well, the word *Zi* meaning "life" as well as "spirit" in ancient Sumerian. Thus the Supreme was called *Zi-ana*, "spirit of Heaven." In the same way there were the Planetary Spirits, lords of the second heaven. And there were "spirits" of the elements, in the cloud-world and on earth. So Hea was *Zi-ki-a*, "Spirit of earth and seas." Men also had their spirits, guardian-angels, who watched over them from birth; and he who was full of devotion and aspiration was invariably spoken of as "the son of his god."

The light has its shadow. Each of these hosts was deemed to have

its negative or dark aspect. And there was a dark shadow-land which stood in this negative relation to the whole earth. This was the gloomy Abyss, "the waters which are under the earth," as it is called in the Decalogue. The Abyss was the dwelling of seven spirits of darkness, the forces who resist all good, who destroy the good works of nature, who are at enmity against man; the forces which resist evolution, and which contend against our spiritual growth. These are the same powers which, in Egypt, we saw personified as Set, the Adversary, who slays Osiris and scatters his dismembered body throughout the two lands; in one aspect they are the "law in the members warring against the law of the mind;" in another aspect they are the forces which bring disease, decay and death. In yet another sense, the Abyss is what we sometimes call the astral world, the astral atmosphere of the earth, and one part of the ancient Sumerian religion was dedicated to the purification of this astral region, and to averting the dark influences which might lurk therein, boding evil to men. These dark influences were of several kinds. There were elemental spirits, as we should call them, to whom storms, fires, floods and natural calamities were due. There were the classes of elementals held to cause disease, something like the astral counterpart of our modern microbes, which are supposed to be hosts of invading lives, fastening themselves in the living body, and to be exorcised by anti-septics, many of them preparations of tar. We may, perhaps, see here a suggestion of why the cedar and other fir-like trees were held especially efficacious against the elementals of disease, by the ancient Sumerians. Yet a third class of astral influences were the shades of the dead; not by any means of all who died, but of certain persons given over to evil, and who thus reverted to the realm of the abyss. Lastly, there were the malign wishes and purposes of the living. To guard against these different dark forces of the astral world a system of magical ceremonies was in use, and its special home seems to have been at Nippur, somewhat to the north of Uru-dugga. It appears likely that the ghost-lore of Nippur represents a northern system of spiritualism, handed down from a high antiquity among the ancestors of the Tartar nations, while the religious lore of Uru-dugga or Eridu carries us in the opposite direction, southward to the Egypt of Osiris.

Two visible powers, the Sun in the heavens, and Fire on the hearth, were revered as representatives of Hea and Asar, as manifestations

of their divine power, and as mediators between mankind and the spiritual world. Here is part of a hymn to the Sun:

O Sun, thou shinest in the deepest heavens; thou openest the bolts which close the high heavens; thou openest the gate of heaven.

O Sun, thou raisest thy head above the lands,

O Sun, thou stretchest the vast heavens above the lands like a covering.

Another hymn to the Sun is as follows:

Great lord! from the centre of the high heavens thou comest into our sight.

O Sun, valiant hero, from the centre of the high heavens, thou comest into our sight.

At the opening of the high heavens, at the door, thou comest into our sight.

The bolts of heaven thou drawest back.

In the great door of the high heavens, in the opening, which belongs to thee, in the highest summits of the high heavens, high in thy rapid course, the spirits respectfully and joyfully approach thee; they exalt thy crown, they raise thee up rejoicing. In the repose of thy heart the days pass.

The spirits of all countries greatly surround thee. The spirits of heaven and earth turn toward thee. . . .

The Sun is invoked as the healing messenger of Hea, when

The man, the son of his god, is burdened with the load of his omissions and transgressions. . . .

And the prayer is offered:

By thy orders may his omissions be forgiven! May his transgressions be blotted out!

These ancient Sumerian prayers end with the word Amen, held to have divine and magical efficacy. Like the Sun, Fire was revered as the purifier, the messenger of Hea made manifest on earth. A hymn addresses him thus:

O Fire, supreme chief rising high in the land!

Hero, son of the Ocean, rising high in the land!
O Fire, with thy pure and brilliant flame.
Thou bringest light into the dwellings of darkness,
Thou decidest the fate of everything which has a name.
Thou mixest copper and tin,
Thou purifiest gold and silver.
Thou art the offspring of the goddess of earth.
May the works of the man, the son of his god, shine with
purity!
May he be high as heaven!
May he be holy and pure as the earth!
May he shine as the midst of the heavens!

Another beautiful hymn to Fire begins:

Peace of the god Fire, the hero,
May countries and rivers rest with thee!
May the Tigris and Euphrates rest with thee!
May the sea rest with thee!
May the path of the daughter of the gods rest with thee!
May the inward works of nature rest with thee!
May the heart of my god and goddess rest with thee!

There are also hymns to the two rivers, Tigris and Euphrates, conceived as spiritual beings, "children of the Ocean, whose waters are sublime, whose waters are brilliantly pure, whose waters glisten . . ." which strongly call to mind the Hymn to the Nile. There is a close analogy between the worship of the Sun, as the manifested messenger of Asari and Hea among the ancient Sumerians of Uru-dugga, and the worship of the same Sun as manifested spirit, the visible representative of the Logos, in ancient Egypt. On the other hand the hymns to the Sun and Fire, which we have just given, carry us eastward, toward the headwaters of the Indus, toward the land of the Rig Veda hymns.

Many teachings which appear in later religions had their prototype among the ancient Sumerians. Thus we find them depicting the beginning of manifestation in these verses:

When the upper region was not yet called Heaven,

And the lower region was not yet called earth,
And the Abyss beneath had not yet opened its arm,
Then the chaos of waters gave birth to all of them.

And the waters were gathered into one place.
No men yet dwelt together, no animals yet wandered about,
None of the gods had yet been born,
Their names were not spoken, their attributes were not
known.

In like manner we find the story of the garden of "Edin," the sacred plain of ancient Chaldea, with the tree of life, the first man and woman, and the tempting serpent; and the Hebrew scriptures explicitly associated Eden with the Euphrates. We find also the story of the Deluge, in a form which was doubtless handed down from the earliest Sumerian times:

"I will tell thee how I was saved from the flood," says Hasisadra to the hero Izdubar, "also will I impart to thee the decree of the great gods. Thou knowest Surippak, the city that is by the Euphrates. This city was very ancient when the gods were moved in their hearts to ordain a great deluge. The lord of inscrutable wisdom, the god Hea, was with them, and imparted to me their decision. 'Listen,' he said, 'and attend, man of Surippak; go out to thy house and build a ship. The gods are willed to destroy the seed of life; but do thou preserve it, and bring into the ship every seed of life.' When I heard this, I spoke to Hea my lord, 'If I build the ship as thou biddest me, O Lord, the people and their elders will laugh at me!' But Hea opened his lips once more, and spoke to me, his servant, 'Men have rebelled against me, and I will do judgement on them, high and low. But do thou close the door of the ship when the time comes, and I tell thee of it. Then enter the ship and bring into it thy store of grain, all thy property, thy family, thy men-servants and thy maid-servants, and thy next of kin. The cattle of the fields, the wild beasts of the fields, I shall send to thee myself, that they may be safe behind thy door.' Then I built the ship, and provided it with stores of food and drink; I divided the

interior into compartments. I saw to the chinks and filled them; I poured bitumen over it without and within. All that I possessed I brought together and stowed it in the ship; all that I had of gold, of silver, of the seed of life of every kind; all my men-servants and my maid-servants, the cattle of the field, the wild beasts of the field, and also my nearest friends. Then, when the appointed time was come, a Voice spoke to me: 'This evening the heavens will rain destruction, wherefore go thou into the ship and close thy door. The appointed time has come!' And greatly I feared the sunset of that day, the day on which I was to begin my voyage. I was sore afraid. Yet I entered the ship, and closed the door behind me, to shut off the ship. And I confided the great ship to the pilot, with all its freight.

"Then a black cloud rises from the depths of heaven, with thunder and whirlwinds and floods from the depths of the earth, which quakes at their violence. The waters rise even to heaven; light is changed into darkness; confusion and devastation fill the earth. Brother looks not after brother; men have no thought for one another. In the heavens, the very gods are afraid. . . . For six days and seven nights wind, flood and storm reigned supreme; but at dawn of the seventh day the tempest decreased, the waters, which had battled like a mighty host, abated their violence; the sea retired, and storm and flood both ceased. I steered about the sea, lamenting that the homesteads of men were turned into mud. The corpses drifted about like logs. I opened a port-hole, and when the light of day fell on my face, I shivered and sat down and wept. I steered over the countries which now were a terrible sea. Then a piece of land rose out of the waters. The ship steered towards the land Nizir. The mountain of the land Nizir held fast the land, and did not let it go. Thus it was on the first and on the second day, on the third and the fourth, also on the fifth and sixth days. At dawn of the seventh day I took out a dove and sent it forth. The dove went forth to and fro, but found no resting place, and returned. Then I took out a swallow and sent it forth. The swallow went forth, to and fro, but found no resting-place, and returned. Then I took out a raven, and sent it forth. The raven

went forth, and when it saw that the waters had abated, it came near again, cautiously wading through the waters, but did not return. Then I let out all the animals, to the four winds of heaven, and offered a sacrifice. I raised an altar on the highest summit of the mountain, placed the sacred vessels on it seven by seven, and spread reeds, cedar wood, and sweet herbs under them.”

So far the religion of the ancient land later called Chaldea, in some of its larger aspects. If it be asked how we come to know so much, and in such detail, of the faith and teaching of a race long since vanished, the answer is simple. That race left books so made, that neither fire nor water could injure them; and these books, tablets of clay inscribed with a metal point, and then hardened by fire, have come down to us in tens and even hundreds of thousands. The first writing was hieroglyphic, made of picture-signs, like those of ancient Egypt. Later, it was conventionalized into what we call the cuneiform, or wedge-shaped character, which lasted, in various forms, for thousands of years. In that character many different languages were written, beginning with archaic Sumerian, and ending with classical Persian. Through inscriptions in the latter language, at Persepolis, in Southern Persia, some three hundred miles to the east of ancient Eridu, the cuneiform writing was first deciphered. Then the later language of the Chaldean region, the tongue generally called Assyrian, was slowly spelled out; in part by means of its close relationship with a well-understood group of tongues, of which Arabic, Hebrew and Aramaic are the most important. There still remained the wholly different and most mysterious language now called Sumerian, in which all the older texts were written. Here, happily, the long gone races came to our aid; for grammars and dictionaries of Sumerian were found, which had been prepared for, those whose mother-tongue was Assyrian; and many Sumerian texts were found with an Assyrian translation between the lines. Among these were those from which the hymns here given were translated, and there are still tens of thousands to be read.

Undoubtedly the most interesting discovery in this field in recent years is that which shows the relation between the archaic Sumerians and the Egypt of Osiris. Along this line, much more will, perhaps, be

learned in years to come. In the mean time, it is of high interest to point out that the period, some ten or twelve thousand years ago, in which we must place the founding of Uru-dugga by the ancient shore of the Persian gulf, was evidently marked by a wide alteration of conditions in ancient Egypt. At that date, it would seem, a change came over the face of the Nile valley. The tropical rains ceased. The land began to assume its present form.

We can date this change in Egypt in a very interesting way, quite similar to that which fixes the founding of Eridu. It is found that the Nile deposits a certain amount of sediment after every inundation, and that, in a hundred years, this sediment will amount to four or five inches. The total depth of the sediment is thirty-eight to forty feet, which gives us ten or twelve thousand years since the present sediment began to be formed. Perhaps the changes in the face of Egypt may have caused some of the people of Osiris to seek a new home in the east, where the Two Rivers fell into the Persian Gulf; and in the story of the Sumerian Asari we may have the echo of their coming.

The Religion of India

Theosophical Quarterly, July, 1906

I.

When we come to India, the contrast with Egypt and Chaldea is strongly marked. Of the ancient Sumerian culture and religion of Chaldea, nothing was known to us a few years ago, but a few heaps of ruins, in the hot wilderness of the Euphrates. And in Egypt it is not so long since the hieroglyphic inscriptions were only less mysterious than the riddle of the sphinx. Even now, we know comparatively little of the Mystery Teaching in ancient Egypt, though the evidence of its presence there is overwhelming; and what we do know of defined philosophical and spiritual value, comes to us rather through the Neoplatonists than direct from the monuments. To that same wonderful school, the child of Egypt and Greece, we also owe, it should be noted, some of the most penetrating light on the teachings of ancient Chaldea.

For nearly two thousand years in Egypt, and even longer in Chaldea, we have had no articulate voice speaking to us of their ancient religions, no new documents added, and no interpreters of the documents; only monuments carven on the rocks, tablets of clay, age-old papyri buried in the sand. In India, the difference is immense. The ancient teaching is alive today, visible and within the reach of all men. The archaic scriptures are still studied, reverently and comprehendingly, by the lineal descendants of those who first wrote them down millenniums ago. Their language is still on the tongues of

learned men of India, a living speech, taught to their disciples, chanted in their temples, spoken in their discourses, written in modern works on the sacred traditions. If the spiritual life of ancient Egypt be a hidden fire, glowing in some secret cave-temple of the desert, the religious life of India is a beacon seen of all men, lighting the path of the disciples who seek the way to the temple.

The western world came to a knowledge of ancient India, her sacred tongue and her archaic scriptures in the last quarter of the eighteenth century. At that day, the chronology drawn by archbishop Ussher from obscure sentences and genealogies in the Hebrew scriptures was still held to be the authentic time-record of the world. It set the beginning of creation some six thousand years ago, and fixed the universal deluge twenty-four centuries before our era. If that chronology were true, all existent races and civilizations must be compressed within some four thousand years, elapsed since the destruction of mankind in the flood and the renewal of the races from a single family. And by those who explored the traditions of India, the chronology of archbishop Ussher was held to be absolutely true, in authority equal to holy writ. Finding in India traditions and records of a vastly greater past, they felt themselves bound to lop and prune the centuries and millenniums, until they fitted the Procrustean bed of the archbishop's world-scheme, and, in the early records of the Asiatic Society, one may see the Hebrew patriarchs set as the standard down one side of the page, with the Indian monarchs of the Solar line forced into conformity on the other. The whole is compressed into the twenty-four centuries between the supposed universal Flood and the beginning of our era. This would be merely a curiosity of research, were it not that the dates thus estimated for ancient India have never been revised to this day; each generation of Orientalists accepting almost without question or examination the dates handed down to them by the first pioneers, whose thoughts and imaginations were cramped with the limits set by archbishop Ussher. The result is that, even today, the data assigned to many events in ancient India are impossibly recent; and the whole system of chronology of that archaic land is in complete and perplexing confusion.

Had Providence willed that the ancient books of India should be withheld until after Egypt and Chaldea had in part given up their

secrets, a very different result would have been reached. With such data as "5,000 B.C." for Egyptian Menes and "before 4,600 B.C." for a certain Sumerian ruler accepted without question, there would have been less tendency to shrink India's millenniums into centuries, her centuries into decades; and with the epoch-making discoveries of Darwin recognized in principle, there would have been less cause to treat as fables the archaic systems of Evolution which fill certain scriptures of India.

Yet, while regretting this mutilation of India's chronology, we can see how vital it was for her archaic records to be given to the world just when they were. Of all ancient lands, India alone supplied an available key to the wisdom-religion, the mystery-doctrine; and, for the spiritual development of the world, the giving of the key could not be delayed. We can see already, and we shall see more clearly later, how vast and far-reaching has been the influence of Indian thought, on the philosophy and culture of the last century, throughout the whole western world. For such a result it was well worthwhile to throw India's chronology into temporary confusion.

II.

We must in part restore that chronology, before we can get any clear view of the religious life of ancient India; and, for the purpose of that restoration, we can take no better date than that of the supreme teacher, Siddhartha the Compassionate, known as Gautama Buddha. When the doctrines and records of that great teacher were carried to other countries, like Ceylon and China, they were interlinked with the state chronology and their dates were thus effectively preserved. In this way we know that the Buddha's work and mission belong to a period some twenty-five hundred years ago; and this date is fixed and corroborated in so many ways, that it is not liable to be altered.

In one of his most eloquent sermons, the Buddha describes the Brahman priesthood, in ideal, and in actuality; and we have thus preserved a graphic record of the position, character, life, and standing of the Brahman caste, twenty-five centuries ago. That caste had grown great and spread all over northern India; its authority was immense, and indeed availed later to overshadow the teaching of the Buddha

himself. Its spiritual tradition was high, yet it was subject to many and grave abuses, which the Buddha vividly enumerates. The Brahman caste had then reached not only full development and maturity, but in many respects was over-ripe, and had fallen far from its former ideals of unworldliness and purity.

In another great series of religious documents, clustering around the life of another great spiritual hero of India, we have also a full and graphic picture of the Brahman caste. Krishna, prince of Dvaraka, is the centre of that era; and its records are stored, with much that is of earlier date, and perhaps, something also of a later day, in the vast poem called the *Mahabharata*. It is now conceded that Krishna is a genuine historical personage, and very much of the Mahabharata authentically belongs to Krishna's epoch. Much of this bears on the standing of the Brahmans at that time. That standing we find to be incomplete, provisional, and far from authoritative in the degree attained long before the Buddha's day. Brahmanical law is by no means supreme; Brahmanical rules are transgressed, in such vital matters as the marriage relations; and the sacrosanct character of the caste is not yet established. The period of Krishna must, therefore, be many centuries behind that of Buddha; and the great religious revival which has Krishna as its central figure, must be regarded as another great landmark in the spiritual life of India, very much earlier than the epoch of the Buddha, twenty-five centuries ago.

So conservative is Indian life, that even today Krishna has vast numbers of votaries, who have exalted him into the god of a popular religion, full of emotional elements, yet inspired with very genuine devotion. Indian tradition assigns to the great war of the Mahabharata a date almost exactly five thousand years ago, and this date is confirmed by a certain conjunction of all the planets, recorded in the story of the Great War itself. In the days when the Deluge was placed at 2349 B.C., such a date as 3100 B.C., for the Great War of the Mahabharata was incredible; and the Procrustean process of pruning was accordingly put in force. But for the Orientalists of today, who readily admit 3800 B.C. as the date of Sargon's conquest of the far more ancient Sumerian cities, and 5000 B.C. as the period when Menes of Egypt amalgamated the Two Lands into a single empire, the more modest claims of ancient India should win some credence. The

epoch of Sargon is fixed unquestioningly from a single cuneiform inscription. That of the Great War of India has, to support it, a living tradition, still dating events from that war, and a vast mass of historical, ethical, astronomical and sociological facts scattered throughout a thousand books, and still living among many of the races of India.

We have yet another dearly marked period, that of the great Upanishads. Here also a complete view of the standing of the Brahman may be gained, as a basis of comparison with the two epochs already outlined: that of the Great War and Krishna of Dvaraka, and that of the Buddha. So important is this matter, and so little understood, that it may be well to quote certain of the texts that bear on it. Here, for example, is a passage from the Chhandogya Upanishad:

“Shvetaketu, grandson of Aruni, went to the assembly of the Patthalas. To him king Pravahana, son of Jibala, said:

“Youth, hast thou received the traditional teaching?”

“I have, worshipful one!” said he.

“Knowest thou how beings ascend, going forth hence?”

“No, worshipful one!” said he.

“Knowest thou how they return again?”

“No, worshipful one!” said he.

“Knowest thou the dividing of the two paths, path of the gods and path of the fathers?”

“No, worshipful one!” said he.

“Knowest thou how the other world is not filled?”

“No, worshipful one!” said he.

“Knowest thou how, at the fifth offering, the “waters” rise up, and speak with human voice?”

“No worshipful one!” said he.

“Then how sayest thou that thou hast received the teaching? For if one knows not these things how an he be called instructed?”

“He went away disconcerted to his fathers place, and said to him: ‘After teaching me, thou, my father, didst call me

instructed; yet this Rajanya fellow has asked me five questions, and I was not able to solve one of them!’

“His father said: ‘As thou hast told them to me, and as I do not know one of them—had I known them, how should I not have told them to thee?’ So the descendant of Gotama went to the place of the king; and when he came, the king did come to him. Early in the morning he went up to the king, who had entered the assembly, and the king said to him:

“‘Choose, worshipful descendant of Gotama, a wish of human wealth.’

“‘Let human wealth be thine, O king!’ he replied. ‘But the word which thou saidest in the presence of my boy, do thou declare that to me!’

“The king kept silent, ordering him to dwell there a long time. “Then the king said to him:

“‘Be it as thou hast asked me, O descendant of Gotama! As before thee this teaching goes not to the Brahmans, but among all peoples was the hereditary teaching of the Kshatriyas. . . .’”

No more significant passage is to be found in the sacred books of India, when we have the clue to its meaning. The very form of the questions speaks of the Mystery Teaching, and the questions themselves contain their answers. The two paths, the path of the gods and the path of the fathers, are the way of Liberation and the way of Reincarnation. By the former go the perfect, to divinity; by the other, the souls of men return to this world after receiving their reward in paradise in the “lunar world.” And that world is not filled, because the souls of men, going there, return again to this world to be born. Their former works are called “the waters;” and at the fifth offering, the offering of birth, the “works” of the new-born child “speak with human voice.”

So that these questions themselves, even without their answers, indicate the whole of the Mystery Teaching, the splendid twin doctrine of rebirth and of liberation from rebirth; of Sansara and Nirvana. And of this teaching the Brahman Shvetaketu and his father were wholly ignorant; as the version of the same story in the Brihad Aranyaka Upanishad says, “do not thou or thy forefathers blame us,

for before thee this teaching never dwelt in any Brahman!" Yet we are also told that both Shvetaketu and his father knew by heart the three ritual Vedas, the Rig, the Yajur and the Sama Vedas, and were instructed in all the wisdom of the Brahmans.

The truth is, that in the days of these greatest and oldest Upanishads the Brahmans had not yet learned the Mystery Teaching; and the occasion of their first initiation into that teaching is here recorded in the two greatest Upanishads. We have thus a third view of the Brahman caste, when the Brahmans were still the humble disciples of the Rajanyas or Rajputa; and it is evident that this archaic period must lie many centuries behind the period of the Great War, when the Brahmans had gone far towards establishing themselves in a dominant spiritual position throughout the greater part of northern India. It is further significant that we find the Upanishads reflecting a period when the tribes who possessed them extended westward as far as Gandhara, the present Kandahar, in the mountains of Afghanistan, which is now well beyond the western frontier of India.

III.

The two Brahmans who came to the Rajanya or Rajput king, Pravahana, son of Jibala, were both learned in the Three Vedas, and were yet wholly ignorant of the Mystery Teaching, the twin doctrines of Rebirth and Liberation. The story becomes vastly more significant when we realize that the Three Vedas do not contain this doctrine; that one may search the Rig, the Yajur and the Sama Vedas through, and nowhere find in them any understanding of the teaching of reincarnation and liberation, which, nevertheless, is the heart of the secret doctrine of India.

We have, in the religion of India, the confluence of two streams: one of these is the Rig Veda with its two subordinate Vedas; the other is the Mystery Teaching contained in the Upanishads. The former was the property of the Brahman priesthood; the latter, the secret doctrine, belonged not to the Brahmans, but to the Rajanyas or Rajputs, and, as king Pravahana said, never before dwelt in any Brahman, until he himself revealed it to the humble father of Shvetaketu. The division between the two great elements of the ancient religion of India

becomes even more significant, when we learn that it coincides with a difference of race; that the Brahmans, who possessed the hymns of the Rig Veda, were a white race, evidently coming from a more northern region; while the Rajanyas or Rajputs were a red race, close kindred of the royal race of ancient Egypt. This race difference is clearly marked even at the present day, the white Brahman belonging to a wholly different type from the red Rajput; each race having been kept pure through millenniums by the rigorous laws against race mingling, which are the basis of all the old Indian law.

The white Brahman race had, in the hymns of the Vedas, a very precious possession, and one which rightly claimed a high antiquity. The hymns, in their original form, made up the Rig Veda, or Veda of hymns. Separate lines taken from different hymns, and woven together for their virtue as incantations, formed the chants, to which the name of Yajur Veda, or Veda of chants, is given; and a certain class of these chants, those used at the mystic Soma ceremony, formed the Sama Veda, the third Veda of Songs. The Rig Veda hymns are, therefore, the original form of this whole Vedic material.

The Rig Veda hymns are divided into ten "circles," assigned to different famous "seers" of hymns. Thus the third circle is attributed to Vishvamitra, the seventh to his rival Vashistha. In all, there are something over a thousand hymns: and those of the tenth circle seem to belong to a later period than the rest. The hymns are addressed to various deities, especially Indra and Agni, and some of them are poems of great beauty, while the greater part are avowedly magical incantations. When we look at them more closely, we cannot fail to be struck with the very marked resemblance between these Vedic hymns and certain hymns of the ancient inhabitants of Chaldea, notably those to the deified Fire, who corresponds closely to the Vedic Agni, the Fire-god. The mystical conception of Fire on the altar, as the manifested deity, among the people of Uru-duggu, is exactly that of Agni, the Fire-god among the Vedic Brahmans.

Once we note this resemblance, we find many more signs of kinship. Such is the seven-headed serpent, in a Sumerian hymn already quoted. Such are the resemblances between the Chaldean and the Brahmanical stories of the Deluge, with the personification of the deity

as a “great fish,” in both accounts; the doctrine of the “central mountain” upholding the heavens, in both teachings; and the occurrence of the figures 432,000 years in the mystical computations of both the Sumerians and the ancient Brahmans. All these indications at least very strongly suggest that one element of the ancient Chaldean teaching and one element of the ancient Brahman teaching were drawn from a common source. Both peoples looked backward to a home among the northern mountains, and from this common home the two peoples may well have descended, one going toward the Indus, the other toward the Tigris and Euphrates.

When we consider the teaching concerning the dead, the likeness becomes even more significant. Both the ancient Sumerians and the ancient Brahmans were “ancestor worshippers,” every year making certain sacrifices to the spirits of the dead, the “fathers,” who were deemed to dwell in the gloomy underworld, and were dependent for sustenance on the yearly offerings of food made by their pious descendants. The “fathers” were thought of as spiritually present among their descendants, and as forming with them a single undivided family, in part in the visible world, in part in the dark invisible; and all indications go to show that, at a period which may have been ten thousand years ago, this teaching of the “fathers” was dominant in Central Asia, and spread thence south-westward to the Euphrates valley, south-eastward to the Indus and later the Ganges; and also northward and eastward to the vast Chinese empire, and the lands spiritually dependent on China.

The teaching of the “fathers,” the departed spirits present behind the family, overshadowing the family, and drawing sustenance from the pious offerings of the family, was the chief element in the religion of the ancient Brahmans, as touching humanity; and even to this day it remains all-important in Brahmanical life and Brahmanical law. The first duty of the son is to make the yearly offering; and, where a son has not been born, or has not survived, it becomes of vital moment to obtain one by adoption, lest by any means the yearly rites might fail, and “the fathers fall into the pit of hell, cut off from the rites of the cakes and water.” Hence the immense importance of the right of adoption in Brahmanical law. The heir is supposed to inherit primarily in order that he may have the means to celebrate the yearly sacrifices to

the spirits of the “fathers.” Thus, on the human side, the Brahmanical religion was concerned chiefly with the rites for the “fathers,” and the care for their spiritual well-being, as dependent on the offerings made for them year after year. Exactly the same belief prevailed among one division of the ancient Sumerians of Chaldea, and the resemblance in detail is highly significant. It is evident that this belief is quite out of harmony with the doctrine of reincarnation, and of the paradise between death and rebirth, which is an integral part of the Mystery Teaching; and it is also evident that the teaching of the “fathers” is the genuine traditional doctrine of the Brahmans, preserved by them even today, as the corner-stone of Brahmanical civil and religious law.

On the divine side, the Brahman teaching embraced the worship of Indra and Agni, and other “bright ones,” Indra being the dome of the sky, and Agni the divine principle of Fire. The lord of the abyss, Varuna, who seems to have been also the lord of the dark dome of night; the Maruts, or the spirits of the storm, the Asuras, first spirits of life, and then fallen spirits of evil contrasted with the bright spirits of good, all remind us strongly of the ancient Sumerian worship, the religious traditions into which, it would seem, was poured a different stream of teaching brought from the south, from Egypt, by the votaries of the great Osiris.

IV.

Just as we find the two contrasted teachings in early Chaldea, so we find them in ancient India. The white Brahmans had their worship of the spirits of the “fathers,” and of the Sky-lord, the Fire-lord, and the hosts of bright and dark spirits, the Devas and Asuras. The red Rajputs or Rajanyas—both names are very ancient—had their Mystery Teaching of the two ways, path of the gods and path of the fathers; of the great twin doctrines of Reincarnation and Liberation. And it is of high significance on the one hand, that we find the Rajputs closely akin in ethnical type to the royal race of ancient Egypt; and on the other, that we find their Mystery Teaching closely resembling that associated with the name of the great Osiris of Egypt; a teaching also of reincarnation “according to righteousness, according to works,” and the ultimate liberation from rebirth, by the divine way which Osiris taught.

This divine way, or “path of the gods” was the main theme of the Mystery Teaching; and to that supreme goal of Liberation the wisdom and will of the disciples were directed. It is the great theme with which all the divine teachers of India were concerned, and again and again we see it presented, by teacher after teacher, in age after age.

The teaching of the “path of the gods” is always associated, in ancient India, with certain temptations or trials, certain rites of initiation. Only after these are passed, is the divine path revealed to the disciple. Thus in the great story of Nachiketas, the son sacrificed by his father, who descended into the house of Death and rose again on the third day, we have the trial of Nachiketas by Death the initiator, who tempts the disciple with three wishes. Only after Nachiketas has overcome these temptations is the Mystery revealed to him. Death speaks thus to the aspirant:

“Even by the gods of old it was doubted about this; not easily knowable, and subtle is this law. Choose, Nachiketas, another wish; hold me not to it, but spare me this!

“Choose sons and grandsons of a hundred years, and much cattle, and elephants and gold and horses. Choose the great abode of the earth, and for thyself live as many autumns as thou wilt.

“If thou thinkest this an equal wish, choose wealth and length of days. Be thou mighty in the world, O Nachiketas; I make thee an enjoyer of thy desires.

“Whatsoever desires are difficult in the mortal world, ask all desires according to thy will.

“Them beauties, with their chariots and lutes - not such as these are to be won by men—be waited on by them, my gifts. Ask me not of death, Nachiketas.”

To this Nachiketas replies:

“Tomorrow then fleeting things wear out the vigour of a mortal’s powers. Even the whole of life is short; thine are chariots and dance and song.

“Not by wealth can a man be satisfied. Shall we choose wealth if we have seen thee? Shall we desire life while thou art master? But the wish I choose is truly that.

“Coming near to the unfading immortals, a fading mortal here below, and understanding, thinking on the sweets of beauty and pleasure, who would rejoice in length of days?

“This that they doubt about, O Death, what is in the great Beyond, tell me of that. This wish that draws near to the mystery, Nachiketas chooses no other wish than that. . . .”

The Brihad Aranyaka Upanishad gives us a second version of the story of Shvetaketu’s father and king Pravahana, which we have already quoted from the Chhandogya Upanishad. This other version contains certain sentences, which at once suggest the Mystery Teaching. After the boy had failed to answer the questions, the king invited him to remain and learn:

“But he, refusing to remain, ran away and came to his father, and said to him:

“‘Did not my father declare that I was instructed?’

“‘How now, wise youth?’ said his father.

“‘This Rajanya fellow has asked me five questions, and I do not know even one of them!’

“‘What are they?’ said he; and he told them to him.

“He said:

“‘As thou knowest us, dear, that whatever I know, I have told it all to thee—come! Let us go back there, and serve as disciples!’

“‘Let my father go himself!’ said he. So his father went.

“So the descendant of Gotama came where was the dwelling of king Pravahana son of Jibala. The king offered him a seal, and had water offered to him. And he did honour to him. And the king said:

“‘To the worshipful descendant of Gotama we give a wish!’

“He answered:

“‘The wish is promised to me! The word which thou saidst in the presence of the boy, tell that to me!’

“But the king said:

“‘That is among wishes of the gods, O descendant of the Gotama! choose thou a wish of mortals!’

“But he replied: ‘It is well known—Treasure of elephants and

gold, of cattle and horses, slave-girls and vestures and robes! But let not the Master be niggardly of the great, the endless, the boundless!

“The king replied to him: ‘This is a holy wish, O descendant of Gotama!’

“‘I offer myself as thy disciple!’ said he; for with this word did the men of old offer themselves as disciples. So he dwelt there as a disciple. And the king said to him:

“‘Do not thou or thy forefathers blame us, O descendant of Gotama, for before thee this teaching never dwelt in any Brahman!’”

Here we have the same sacramental formula of temptation as in the Upanishad of the House of Death: “elephants and gold, cattle and horses, slave-girls and robes;” and always we have this trial before the threshold. It corresponds exactly to “the kingdoms of this world, and the glory of them” in another mystical temptation.

Then, if the trial be passed, the twin secrets are revealed: the secret of personal development through a series of rebirths, of Reincarnation; and then, when personal development is completed, the way of Liberation, the path of union with the Eternal. The teaching of rebirth is set forth again and again in the Upanishads, as for instance in the Brihad Aranyaka: “Through his past works he shall return once more to birth, entering whatever form his heart is set on. When he has received full measure of reward in paradise for the works he wrought, from that world he returns again to this.” Or in the Prashna Upanishad: “He whose radiance has become quiescent is reborn through the impulses dwelling in mind.” It is taught very fully, though in the Mystery language, to the father of Shvetaketu, whose trial and faith have been already recorded.

Even more distinctive is the teaching of Liberation. What is written thereon, is the most splendid part of the Upanishads, a strain of eloquence which it would be hard to equal in the whole recorded speech of the world: Thus in the Brihad Aranyaka we read:

“Now as to him who is free from desire, who is beyond desire, who has gained his desire, for whom the Soul is his desire. From him the life powers go not out. Growing one with the Eternal,

he enters into the Eternal.

“When all desires that were hid in the heart are let go, the mortal becomes immoral, and reaches the Eternal.

“And like as the slough of a snake lies lifeless, cast forth upon an ant-hill, so lies his body, when the spirit of man rises up bodiless and immortal as the Life, as the Eternal, as the Radiance.

“The small old path that stretches far away has been found and followed by me. By it go the Seers who know the Eternal, rising up from this world to the heavenly world.

“When a man gains the vision of the godlike Soul, lord of what has been and what shall be, he fears no more.

“At whose feet rolls the circling year with all its days, him the gods worship as the one, the light of lights, the immortal life.

“In whom the five hierarchies of being and the ether are set firm, him I know to be the Soul. And knowing that deathless Eternal, I too am immortal.

“He who knows is therefore full of peace, lord of himself; he has ceased from false gods, he is full of endurance, he intends his will.

“In his soul he beholds the Soul. Nor does evil reach him; he passes all evil. He is free from evil, free from stain, free from doubt, a knower of the Eternal.”

This is the authentic Mystery Teaching of India, as set forth in the great Upanishads, the records of the ancient Rajput race.

V.

In the religious history of India, after the two streams of teaching were blended in the ancient days of the Upanishads, there are two events, two epochs of supreme importance. The first is the Avatar or divine incarnation of Krishna, reckoned traditionally as five thousand years ago. The second is the Avatar or divine incarnation of Siddhartha the Compassionate, known as the Awakened, the Buddha, who taught two thousand five hundred years ago. If we would understand these two great events, we should keep clearly in mind that both taught the

same doctrine; or, to speak more truly, that both came to restore the great pristine teaching which had been handed down among the Rajanya or Rajput wages. Both Krishna and Siddhartha were of Rajput race, and both speak explicitly of their predecessors in the teaching. Of Krishna, much is said elsewhere; it will suffice to quote a few words:

“This imperishable teaching of union I declared to the Solar lord. The Solar lord imparted it to Manu, and Manu told it to Ikshvaku. Thus the Rajanya sages knew it, handed down from Master to Disciple. . . . Many are my past births and thine also, Arjuna; I know them all, but thou knowest them not. Whenever there is a withering of the Law, and an uprising of lawlessness on all sides, then I emanate myself, for the salvation of the righteous, and the destruction of such as do evil; for the firm establishing of the Law I come to birth in age after age. He who thus perceives my birth and work as divine, as in truth it is, leaving the body, he goes not to rebirth; he goes to Me.”

Here is an outline of the whole Mystery Teaching; the twin doctrines of reincarnation and liberation; the very principles which are the heart of the great Upanishads. And here also this teaching is explicitly identified as that of the Rajanya race. Moreover Krishna again and again quotes from the great Upanishads to fortify his teaching; among other passages, he cites a part of the answer of king Pravahana to the father of Shvetaketu, and the teaching of Death to the boy Nachiketas. The identity of the Mystery Teaching in the Upanishads and the Bhagavad Gita, the scripture of Krishna, might well be proved at length and in detail; but for the present this brief summary must suffice.

VI.

The first great revelation of the Mystery Teaching in India came in the older Upanishads. The second great mention came with the divine incarnation of Krishna. The third was brought by Siddhartha the Compassionate. Much has been written, of high eloquence and worth, of the Buddha's teaching; much has been written of less value. But all, or almost all students of his teaching in the west have failed to understand its relations to the life of India in earlier ages. They have

spoken of the older religious teaching as Brahmanism, as the doctrine of the Brahmans; and they have pictured the Buddha as rising against this Brahmanical doctrine, and teaching a new and better way. But the Mystery Teaching in India came not from the Brahmans but from the Rajputs; then after it was imparted to the Brahmans, in the days of king Pravahana and the great Upanishads, it fell into confusion, and was once more restored to purity by the great Rajput prince, Krishna of Dvaraka; falls once again into confusion and misinterpretation, it was again revived by prince Siddhartha, of the royal line of Ikshvaku.

We find the Buddha marking the entrance to the path, as it was marked of old, by the trials and temptations in which Death had tried Nachiketas. Prince Siddhartha in his turn made the great renunciation, turning his back on the "treasures of elephants and gold, of cattle and horses, of slave-girls and vestures and robes," and this renunciation was symbolized by his departure from the splendid palace of Kapilavastu, when he left behind him kingdom and wealth and home, setting forth on the search for wisdom.

The Buddha taught most explicitly the twin doctrines of Reincarnation and Liberation. Thus, in the sermon of the *Akankheyya Sutta*, he declares:

"If a disciple should frame a wish, as follows: 'Let me call to mind many previous states of existence, to wit, one birth, two births, three births, four births, five births, ten births, twenty births, thirty births, forty births, fifty births, one hundred births, one thousand births, saying, I lived in such a place, had such a name, was of such a family, of such a caste, had such possessions, experienced such happiness and such miseries, had such a length of life. Then I passed from that existence and was reborn in such a place. There also I had such a name, was of such a family, of such a caste, had such possessions, experienced such happiness and such miseries, had such a length of life. Then I passed from that existence and was reborn in this existence.—Thus let me call to mind many former states of existence. . . .'"

This is nothing but an expansion of the words of Krishna: "Many are my past births, and thine also. I know them all, but thou knowest

them not.” The Buddha also taught Liberation from rebirth.

“Wife and child are subject to birth and dissolution; slave, elephants, cattle, horses, gold and silver are subject to birth and dissolution. . . . There may be one, O disciples, who, himself subject to birth, perceives the misery of what is subject to birth, and longs for the incomparable security of a Nirvana free from birth; himself subject to old age, sickness, death, sorrow, dissolution, perceives the misery of what is subject to dissolution, and longs for the incomparable security of a Nirvana free from dissolution.”

This is the same immemorial teaching that Death declared to Nachiketas. This is the teaching which Krishna imparted to Arjuna. This is a further revelation of that splendid Mystery Doctrine which, for ages past, has been the heart of the Eastern wisdom, and which is the heart of that wisdom today.

VII.

The great name of Sankara must in no wise be omitted from any survey of the wisdom of India. Since the coming of the Buddha, no work has been comparable in value and fruitfulness in the field of Indian wisdom to the work of Sankara. With the hand, the mind and the heart of a Master, Sankara gathered together the priceless records of India's age-long mystical past, choosing what was most excellent from the vast archives of the sages, and adding to each part the illumining grace of his own crystalline spirit. Thus for the great Upanishads and for the Bhagavad Gita the wonderful commentaries of Sankara are not only a torch lighting the dark places, but also a cord, binding together the archaic leaves; preserving, coordinating, illumining. To Sankara's pure spirit and far-sighted constructive genius we owe both the completeness of the texts which record the ancient Mystery Teaching, and the Indian schools of learning in which that teaching has been handed down.

Thus we have the pristine light of the Upanishads, the fire of Krishna, the love of Siddhartha, while Sankara stands as the genius of conservation.

The Religion of China

Theosophical Quarterly, January, 1907

The records of China go back nearly five thousand years. Twenty-eight centuries before our era, say these records, a hundred families, coming from the west, entered China as conquerors, gradually building up a kingdom, and then an empire. From these hundred families several successive dynasties arose, among whom certain monarchs gained enduring fame. The sacred books of ancient China record the sayings and doings of these monarchs, their wisdom and justice; and they are sacred through the reverence paid to the antique kings, rather than from any claim to inspiration, or from dealing with divine things. In truth they are histories and poems, rather than scriptures; yet the divine shines through them, and the view they give of life is lofty and noble, full of faith in God and immortality.

Some three or four centuries after the coming of the Hundred Families, a certain Exalted Lord ruled over the Kingdom of Flowers. His title was Ti Yao, and his history is enshrined in the earliest chapter of the *Shu King*, the ancient Chinese Book of Histories. Of this monarch of the twenty-fourth century before our era, four thousand three hundred years ago, the *Shu King* says:

“Examining into antiquity, we find that the Exalted Lord, Ti Yao, was reverential, intelligent, accomplished, and thoughtful—naturally, and without effort. He was sincerely courteous, and capable of all complaisance. His bright influence was felt through the four quarters, and reached to heaven above, and

earth beneath.

“He distinguished the able and virtuous, and thence proceeded to the love of the nine classes of his kindred, who thus became harmonious. He also regulated and polished the people, who all became devoutly intelligent. He united and harmonized the myriad states, and so the black-haired people were transformed. The result was universal concord.

“He commanded the brothers of the Hsi and Ho families in reverent accordance with the wide heavens to calculate and delineate the sun, the moon, the stars, and the zodiacal spaces, and so to deliver respectively the seasons to be observed by the people. He declared to the Hsi and Ho brothers that a round year consisted of three hundred and sixty and six days. . . .”

The exalted Yao thus played in China somewhat the same part as had been played in Egypt, some two thousand years earlier, by the great Menes, who “united the Two Lands” of Upper and Lower Egypt into a single stable monarchy. In due time, Yao desired to retire from his throne, and sought everywhere for a worthy successor. A certain Shun was recommended to him, of whom it was said: “his father was obstinately unprincipled, his step-mother was insincere, his half-brother was arrogant. But by his filial piety he has been able to live in harmony with them, and to lead them gradually to self-government.” No stronger recommendation could be asked for, therefore Shun was sought out, and after due testing, was enthroned in Lord Yao’s stead, “receiving Yao’s retirement in the temple of the Accomplished Ancestor.” Of Shun, the *Shu King* tells us that:

“He examined the pearl-domed turning sphere, with its transverse axle of jade, and reduced to a harmonious system the movements of the Seven Directors.”

In this poetical way we are told that Shun, like his great predecessor, was an astronomer; for the pearl-adorned sphere is the proud overhanging firmament fretted with golden fire, and the Seven Directors are the Seven Stars, called in India the Seven Seers, and later the Great Bear. The *Shu King* continues concerning Lord Shun:

“Thereafter he sacrificed specially, but with ordinary forms, to

God; sacrificed with reverent purity to the Six Honoured Ones; offered their appropriate sacrifices to the hills and rivers; and extended his worship to the host of spirits. He made a tour of inspection eastwards as far as Thai Tsung (in Shan-tung), where he presented a burnt offering to Heaven, and sacrificed in order to the hills and rivers. Thereafter he gave audience to the princes of the east. He set in accord their seasons and months, and regulated the days: he made uniform the standard tubes, with the measures of length and capacity, and the steel yards; he regulated the five ceremonies. . . . He then returned to the capital, went to the temple of the Cultivated Ancestor, and sacrificed a single bull. . . . He instituted the division of the land into twelve provinces, raising altars upon twelve hills in them. He also deepened the rivers. He exhibited to the people the statutory punishments . . . and money to be received for redeemable offences . . . Those who transgressed presumptuously and repeatedly were to be punished with death. 'Let me be reverent! Let me be reverent!' he said. 'Let compassion rule in punishment!'"

In due time, the Lord Shun "went on high and died." Of his successor Yü, it is said in the *Shu King*:

"On the first morning of the first month, he received the appointment in the temple dedicated by Shun to the spirits of his ancestors."

The *Shu King* records the following noble sentiments of another monarch of the same period:

"Heaven hears and sees as our people hear and see; Heaven rightly approves or displays its terrors as our people brightly approve or would awe; such connection is there between the upper and lower worlds. How reverent ought the masters of territories to be! . . .

"To revere and honour the path prescribed by Heaven is the way ever to preserve the favouring appointment of Heaven."

It is related that, some three thousand six hundred years ago, the Lord Thang ruled over the Land of Flowers. To his princess he

addressed these words, as the *Shu King* records:

“I am fearful and trembling, as if I were in danger of falling into a deep abyss. Throughout all the regions that enter on a new life under me, do ye not follow lawless ways; make no approach to insolence and dissoluteness; let every one be careful to keep his statutes; that so he may receive the favour of Heaven. The good in you I will not dare to keep consoled, and for the evil in me, I will not dare to forgive myself. I will examine these things in harmony with the mind of God.”

This last magnificent sentence would be hard to parallel, in the sacred books of other faiths. It is full of the grandeur of simple piety and abiding faith in Providence; and it is characteristic of the ancient religion of China that all earthly events are viewed as immediate expressions of the Divine Will. “Good and evil do not wrongfully befall men,” says the *Shu King*, “but Heaven sends down misery or happiness according to their conduct.”

Another monarch of the same epoch declares:

“When I offer the great sacrifices to my predecessor, your forefathers are present to share in them. They all observe the happiness I confer and the sufferings I inflict, and I cannot dare to reward virtue that does not exist.”

These passages give a fair view of the quality of the *Shu King*, with its pictures of Yao and Shun and Thang, and the ancient monarchs who ruled in reverence and virtue, sacrificing to God, to the Six Great Ones, to the Ancestors, to the spirit of river and hill. There is no theology here, but very genuine religion, and even more ethics. Religion is applied directly to life, to the social system; and the duties of all classes, from the king to the husbandman, are looked on as appointed by High Heaven, who rewards the righteous and punishes evil-doers. There is also a strong faith in immortality, in the survival of the spirit of the ancestor, who dwell close to their descendant, watching over them, and receiving from them the offerings at the four great sacrifices of spring, summer, autumn and winter. “When the lutes are strongly swept or gently touched,” says the *Shu King*, “the progenitor of the Ruler come to the service.”

The *Shih King*, the Book of Odes, sheds a further light on these sacrifices to the Progenitor. Here is part of the Ode sung at the sacrifice offered to the Lord Thang, of whom we have already spoken:

“How admirable! How complete!
Here are set our cymbals and drums.
The drums resound harmonious and loud.
To delight our meritorious Ancestor!
The descendant of Thang invites him with his music,
That he may soothe us with the realization of our thought.
Deep is the sound of our cymbals and drums, shrilly sound
the flutes,
All harmonious, and blending together.
According to the notes of the sonorous gem.
Oh majestic is the descendant of Thang;
Very admirable is his music
The large bells and drums, fill the ear;
The various dances are grandly performed.
We have the admirable visitors,
Who are pleased and delighted.
From of old, before our time,
The men of old set us the example,
How to be mild and humble from morning to night,
And to be reverent in discharging the service.
May he regard our sacrifice of winter and autumn,
Thus offered by the descendant of Thang!”

We see that the quarterly sacrifice to the spirits of the Ancestors was a kind of dramatic performance, with music and dancing, and a certain effect of orchestral richness. It was held in the temple of the Ancestors, and visitors were invited to take part in it. Sacrifices were offered, generally a red bull, and we learn that a liquor distilled from rice or millet was also poured out as a libation to the spirits of the ancestors.

One sentence in this Ode needs further consideration: that in which the spirit of Thang is asked to soothe his praying descendant

with “a realization of his thought.” This refers to the central event of the sacrifice, the apparition of the progenitor himself. The descendant who offered this sacrifice spent three days in fasting, during which he was to call up before his mind’s eye the image of the progenitor to whom the offering was made, imaginatively reproducing every detail of his face and garments and gestures, until a living and moving picture was visible to his mind’s eye. He was to carry this picture to the temple of the ancestors, and there the spirit of the ancestor would enter and vivify the form thus reproduced, communing with his descendant, and revealing to him secrets, or giving him wise counsel. The Book of Odes makes it clear that not only fathers and grandfathers were thus invoked, but that the spirits of women ancestors were likewise called on:

“Abundant is the year with much millet and rice;
 And we have our high granaries,
 With tens and hundreds of thousands, and millions of
 measures,
 For liquors and sweet liquors,
 To present to our ancestors male and female,
 And to supply all our ceremonies.
 The blessings sent down on us are of every kind.”

Among the Odes of the *Shih King*, there are some full of pathos and aspiration; prayers in a very true sense. Such is the following, uttered by a servant of the state, who had been wrongfully accused and disgraced by the king:

“O vast and distant Heaven,
 Who art called our Father!
 That without crime or offence,
 I should suffer from disorders thus great!
 The terrors of great Heaven are excessive,
 But indeed I have committed no crime.
 The terrors of great Heaven are excessive,
 But indeed I have committed no offence!”

Hardly less touching is the following prayer of a youthful prince

called to reign before he had come to strength, and weighed down by the burden laid upon him:

“Alas for me, who am a little child,
On whom has devolved the unsettled state!
Solitary am I, and full of distress,
Oh my great father,
All thy life long thou wast filial,
Thou didst think of my great grandfather,
Picturing him ascending and descending, in the court,
I, the little child,
Day and night will be as reverent.
Oh, ye great kings!
As your successor,
I will strive not to forget you!”

Noteworthy all through the earlier Chinese books is the view that God removes dynasties as well as sets them up. There is the divine right of kings, so long as they rule justly. Then, when they fall from justice and virtue, a new dynasty is appointed, and rules equally by right divine. This doctrine is well illustrated in the following lines from one of the Major Odes of the *Shih King*:

“Great is God,
Beholding this lower world in majesty,
He surveyed the four quarters of the kingdom,
Seeking for someone to give establishment to the people.
Those two earlier dynasties
Had failed to satisfy Him with their government;
So throughout the various states,
He sought and considered
For one on whom He might confer the rule.
Hating all the great states,
He turned kind regards on the west,
And there gave a settlement. . . .”

It is a tribute to the essentially democratic spirit of ancient China,

that the poem of the small farmer appears in the ancient Book of Odes, side by side with the memorial song of the departed king. It would be hard to find a more vivid expression of common life, the life of the toiling millions of men, than is enshrined in this poem:

“Very sharp are the excellent plough-shares
 With which they set to work on the south-lying acres.
 They sow their various kinds of grain,
 Each seed containing in it a germ of life.
 There are those who come to see them
 With their baskets round and square,
 Containing the provision of millet.
 With their light splint hats on their heads,
 They ply their hoes on the ground,
 Clearing away the smartweed on dry land and wet,
 The weeds being decayed,
 The millet grows luxuriously.
 The millet falls rustling before the reapers;
 The gathered crop is piled up solidly,
 High as a wall, united like the teeth of a comb;
 And the hundred houses are open to receive it,
 Those hundred houses being full,
 The wives and children have a feeling of repose.
 Now we kill the black-muzzled tawny bull.
 With his crooked horns,
 To imitate and hand down,
 To hand down the observances of our ancestors.”

There is a like natural freshness in this little poem, which is also very ancient:

“Crash! crash! respond the falling trees;
 Chirp, chirp, respond the birds to their fellows.
 They come from the shady delta
 Flitting upon the lofty trees,
 Answering each other in their songs.

And seeking their friends with their notes;
Behold these songsters!
Like friends they ask for replies.
Shall it be then that men
Desire not their living friends?
The gods listen to those
Who to their end are peaceful and united.”

Even more pathetic is the following song of sorrow:

“Even the solitary larch
Has leaves to form a green shade;
But I must wander alone and forlorn.
Do I say there are no human beings?
No! But none to me is kindred.
Ah, ye who pass by,
Will none of you consort with me?
A man bereft of his brothers;
Alas! will none assist me?”

With these texts in mind, let us now take a general survey of the ancient religion of China. All the elements are included in the citations we have given from the oldest Sacred Books. We find, at the head and front of this ancient religion, a genuine reverence for God, the moral and intelligent Governor of the Universe, who is approached in prayer, who watches over mankind, exalting the humble and casting down the mighty from their seats. God is the author of moral law, of the law of righteousness; and he who would be righteous must act “in harmony with the mind of God.” Very genuine virtues were recognized: honesty, humility, temperance, compassion, effective work for others; and there was a single standard for king and peasant alike. The realm of God is personified as Heaven; or perhaps it would be better to say that divine providence is so personified; yet God is always thought of as one and indivisible, mighty, and just.

Reverent worship is next paid to the hosts of spirits, also held to be intelligent and moral beings, dwelling in the invisible world, guiding the movements of the heavenly bodies, and the ordered processes of

natural forces on earth. These spirits are the ministers of God, and carry out God's decrees throughout nature, and toward man.

Regular worship is also paid to the spirits of the dead, in sacrifices celebrated every quarter, or every year. Bulls and rams are offered as burnt offerings, and rice-wine and the liquor of millet are poured forth to them a libations. As far as these ancient books tell us, the condition of the spirits of the dead is uniformly happy. Where there has been sin, it has been punished by suffering on earth, and the spirits of ancestors are gathered in the realm of the divine, whence they watch over their descendants, and whence they come, summoned by music, to the festal sacrifices, to commune with their children and grandchildren, to counsel them, reproving or approving their works.

This is the entire spiritual content of the ancient Chinese religion, as shown in the most ancient Sacred Books of China. It is not less remarkable for what it contains than for what is omitted. It is a religion of light. There is no dark counterpart of the Deity, there are no gloomy Spirits of the Abyss. There is no hell of torment for erring mortals. Further, among the cardinal omissions we may reckon the fact that there is no cosmogony, no teaching of the Creation or Evolution of the worlds; there is no Deluge story; there is no system of Avatars, such as we find in nearly all religions; there is no doctrine of Reincarnation or rebirth. Among the spirits, we find those who punish evil-doing, but we find no spirits of malice and destruction.

We have seen that the Hundred Families came from the west some five thousand years ago, and settled on the Hoang-ho. It has been conjectured, with much show of reason, that they came from a region within the influence of the ancient Sumerians, whose land we may call Chaldea. Like them, they had a hieroglyphic system, closely resembling that of ancient Egypt, and it is the difference of writing material, more than anything else, which has differentiated the Chinese ideographs from the Chaldean cuneiform. The worship of God as the Spirit of Heaven, the worship of the hosts of spirits, and of the souls of ancestors all take us toward Chaldea; yet we miss entirely in the Chinese system the dark and sinister elements so conspicuous in the Chaldean system, especially as developed at Nippur, in the north of the Chaldean land. The numeral and astronomical systems of China

also point toward Chaldea, and nearly all our Sinologues are ready to accept these indications. Yet it seems difficult to account for the omissions just pointed out. How is it that the Chinese have preserved the light of Chaldea without the shadow? Are we not almost forced to believe that the Chinese and Chaldean systems are divergent branches of a common source, in some region further to the north, perhaps in the neighbourhood of Issyk Kul, and that from this centre colonies went forth in three directions, to the Euphrates valley, to the headwaters of the Indus, to the Hoang-ho, carrying with them the worship of God as the Spirit of Heaven; of the hosts of spirits; of the souls of the departed, who were propitiated and nourished by regular sacrifices, in Chaldea, in India and in China alike?

In each case, these colonies of many thousand years ago came into contact with older populations, who already possessed strongly contrasted elements of religion. Thus in Chaldea the ancestor-worshippers were mingled with an Egyptian colony, worshippers of Osiris, whom they revered as a divine Incarnation. In India, the ancestor-worshippers found the more ancient Rajanya or Rajput race, akin to the Egyptians, and in possession of the Mystery Teaching which was the secret splendour of Egypt. In China, the ancestor-worshippers were mingled with older tribes, of older races, for whom the propitiation of demons was a large part of religion, as it was also with a part of the population of Chaldea and among the darker races of southern India. Thus grew up the later deformation of a purer primitive faith.

II.

When we come to the Chinese sages, of whom Lao Tse is the most renowned, we find many of the elements which are missing in the older religion of China. Here are cosmogonies, accounts of the Creation of the world; and here also are more mystical elements, making a closer approach to what we have found in Egypt and India.

In the works of the great sage Yü Tze, who was at the height of his fame rather more than three thousand years ago, we find certain of these mystical elements. When asked by his disciple King Wen-Wang what was the supreme shortcoming, the sage replied:

“To know one’s faults, and not to correct them. Acting thus, a man loses himself, and destroys his own life. This is the ruin of the principles of government and morals. The righteous man and the sinful man are shown by their words and deeds. Thus he who rejects error, knows the truth; he who hates evil, follows good. Thus wisdom (Tao) is in his speech. The teaching which has been handed down to our day, and which gives happiness to the world, is what is called Tao. Sincere benevolence is what brings the people what they need, without their seeking. To drive away the evils of this world is the work of goodness. Goodness and loyalty, peace and justice (Tao) are the principles of action of sovereigns; all beings are the instruments of these principles. He who ignores them, will not attain his end.”

From the same sage, who preceded Lao Tse by five centuries, we quote also a fragment of cosmogony:

“Heaven-and-Earth brought forth, and all beings were born. All beings thus born were governed by man. He can slay what he has not brought to life; but what Heaven-and-Earth have slain, he cannot bring to life. Man changes to grow better. Animals change only to become worse. A man whose acts are evil is justly called an animal.

“There was first Heaven, then Earth. When the Earth was formed, distinction immediately came into being. From distinction came right and duty. After right and duty came the teaching, and after the teaching, the body of principles. From the principles came the rules of action, and then the numbers were formed.

“The sun has its darkness and its brightness, the day and night, and this produces numbers. The moon waxes and wanes, and has its conjunctions and disjunctions, which mark the periods. These four facts by their fixity rule the numbers.”

Contemporary with this sage was another, Tze-Ya-Tze by name, also a preceptor of King Wen-Wang. When the monarch was at the point of death he called his heir, and asked the sage to declare the principles of Tao, the teaching of wisdom. The sage replied:

“Three things hinder Tao: to see the good to be done, and to neglect it; to hesitate when the occasion presents itself; and to know evil and follow it. On the other hand, four things make Tao prosper: perfect calm with gentleness; respect with diligence in duty; humility with force; firmness with endurance.”

The words of these two sages have this added interest, that they show us the use of the mysterious word Tao several centuries before it was chosen by the great Lao Tse as the central thought of his great work the *Tao-Teh-King*: “the Book of Tao and Teh,” “of the Way and Virtue.”

Lao Tse was born in the year 604 B.C., in the third year of King Ting of the Chan dynasty. He was curator of the royal library of Chan, but filled with grief over the decadence of the dynasty he determined to retire from the world and betake himself to the mountain region to the west of China. At the pass on the frontier, in Honan, he was recognized by the guardian of the pass, himself a lover of wisdom, who asked him to leave a record of his doctrine. This record is the *Tao-Teh-King*, divided into two parts, and containing five thousand characters. It contains eighty-one short chapters, sentences from some of which we shall give:

“The way that can be trodden is not the enduring and unchanging Way. The word that can be named is not the enduring and unchanging Word.

“Having no name, It is the originator of Heaven and Earth; having a name, It is the Mother of all things.

“Under these two aspects It is really the same; but as development proceeds, It receives different names. Together we call them the Mystery. Where the Mystery is deepest, is the gate of all that is subtle and wonderful.” (I. 1, 2, 4)

It is evident that the Tao of Lao Tse is Brahma or Atma of the Upanishads, described as “the Living Self, the great Mother, full of divinity, who comes forth through life, standing hid in secret, born through creatures.” In Chinese, Tao has three meanings: in the physical sense, it is a Way; in the moral sense, it is Wisdom; in the spiritual sense, it is the Oversoul, the Eternal, the Logos. Let us quote

further:

“Tao is like the emptiness of a vessel; and in our employment of It, we must be on our guard against all fullness How deep and unfathomable it is, as if It were the honoured Ancestor of all things!

“We should blunt our sharp points, and unravel the complications of things; we should temper our brightness, and bring ourselves into agreement with the obscurity of others. How pure and still the Way (Tao) is, as if It would ever so continue.

“I do not know whose son It is. It might appear to have been before God.” (IV. 1, 2, 3.)

With this we may compare the words of the Upanishad:

“When the five perceptions and mind are steadied; and when the soul struggles not, this, they say, is the highest Way. . . . All that the universe is, moves in life, emanated from It.”

Once more Lao Tse:

“Heaven is long-enduring, and Earth continues long. The reason why Heaven and Earth are able to endure and continue thus long, is because they do not live of, or for, themselves.

“Therefore the Sage puts his own person last, and yet it is found in the foremost place; he treats his person as if it were foreign to him, and yet that person is preserved. Is it not because he has no personal and private ends, that therefore such ends are realized?” (VII. 1, 2.)

Here again, we may compare the Upanishad teaching:

“Considering the life of the powers as apart, and their rising and setting as they grow up apart, the Sage grieves not. . . . When all desires that dwell in the heart are let go, the mortal becomes immortal.”

We may also compare the words of another Teacher:

“The last shall be first, and the first, last.”

The *Tao-Teh-King* further declares:

“The highest excellence is like water. The excellence of water appears in its benefiting all things, and in its occupying, without

striving, the low place which all men dislike. Hence its way is nearer to that of Tao." (VIII. 1.)

This vividly recalls the words of St. Francis of Assisi:

"Praised be my Lord for our sister water, who is very serviceable unto us, and humble and precious and clean."

Once more from the Tao-Teh-King:

"When the intelligent and animal souls are held together in one embrace, they can be kept from separating. When one gives undivided attention to the life, and brings it to the utmost degree of pliancy, he can become as a babe. When he has cleansed away the most mysterious sights, he can become without a flaw. . . .

"Tao produces all things and nourishes them; It produces them and does not claim them as Its own: It does all, and yet does not boast of it; It presides over all things, and yet does not dominate them. This is what is called the Mysterious Quality of Tao," (X. 1.)

The first part of this passage teaches that the animal soul must be held firmly in subjection to the divine soul; that thus the life-force will be concentrated, and perfect control reached; that the mind-images in the psychic body must be purified; that thus the disciple will become as a little child, pure and without flaw. The purity from egotism thus reached is illustrated by the Soul, which, having made all things, boasts not. Lao Tse continues:

"We look at It, and we do not see It, and we name it 'the Equable.' We listen to It, and we do not hear It, and we name It 'the Inaudible.' We try to grasp It, and we do not get hold of It, and we name It 'the Subtle.' With these three qualities, It cannot be made the subject of description; hence we blend them, and obtain 'the One.'" (XIV. 1.)

Compare with this the Upanishad teaching.

"The form of That does not stand visible, nor does anyone behold It with the eye. By the heart, the soul, the mind, It is grasped; and those who know It, become immortal."

This is, no doubt, the real meaning of the oft quoted saying that Tao promotes longevity, generally misunderstood in a bodily sense.

“The subtle Masters (of Tao) in olden times, with a subtle and exquisite penetration, comprehended its mysteries, and were deep also, so as to elude men’s knowledge.” (XV. 1.)

“The partial becomes complete; the crooked, straight; the empty, full; the worn-out, new; he whose desires are few, gets them; he whose desires are many, goes astray.

“Therefore the Sage holds in his embrace humility, and manifests it to all the world. He is free from self-display, and therefore he shines; from self-assertion, and therefore he is distinguished; from self-boasting, and therefore his merit is acknowledged; from self-complacency, and therefore he acquires superiority. It is because he is thus free from striving that therefore no one in the world is able to strive with him.” (XXII. 1, 2.)

Perhaps these sentences show better than any others that Lao Tse is in truth one of the Illumined, and that his teaching is the immemorial wisdom of old, the wisdom that the Seers know.

“There was something undefined and complete, coming into existence before Heaven and Earth. How still It was and formless, standing alone, and undergoing no change, reaching everywhere and inexhaustible. It may be regarded as the Mother of all things.

“I do not know its name, and I give It the designation of Tao. Making an effort to give It a name, I call It the Great.

“Being Great, It passes on. Passing on, It becomes remote. Having become remote, It returns. Therefore Tao is great; Heaven also is great, Earth is great; and the royal Sage is great. In the universe there are four things that are great, and the royal Sage is one of them.

“Man takes his law from the Earth; the Earth takes its law from Haven; Heaven takes its law from Tao. The law of Tao is being what It is.” (XXV. 1, 2, 3, 4.)

This is the teaching of Emanation, thus set forth in the Upanishad:

“The Lord of Beings desired beings. He brooded with fervour; and, brooding with fervour, he forms a pair. These are the Substance and the Life. ‘These two will make beings manifold for me,’ said he.”

This is almost verbally the same as the sentence of Lao Tse:

“Tao produced One; One produced Two; Two produced Three; Three produced all things.” (XLII. 1.)

“To those who are good, I am good; and to those who are not good, I am also good. To those who are sincere, I am sincere; and to those who are not sincere, I am also sincere.” (XLIX. 2.)

The closest parallel to this is found, perhaps, in the words:

“Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you and persecute you; that you may be the children of your Father which is in heaven; for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and the unjust.”

“Tao which originated all under the sky is to be considered the Mother of them all.

“When the Mother is found, we know what her children should be. When one knows that he is his Mother’s child, and proceeds to guard the qualities of the Mother that belong to him, to the end of his life he will be free from all peril.” (LII. 1.)

This beautiful passage is most closely paralleled by that quoted already from the Upanishads, concerning “the great Mother, full of divinity, who comes forth through life;” and we find the same image in another Upanishad:

“All this is in Life’s sway, all that is set firm in the triple heaven. Guard us as a Mother her sons, and as fortune, give us wisdom!”

The closest approach to this personification of divine Wisdom as the Mother to be found in the New Testament is, perhaps, the

sentence of St. Paul to the Corinthians, where he speaks of the Christos as “*Theou dunamin kai Theou Sophian*,” Sophia being taken as the feminine power of the Logos, the Sanskrit Vach. The primordial Mother in Sanskrit is called Aditi, from whom Ten Sons are born, the Host we might call them, of Planetary Spirits.

“He who knows It, does not speak. He who is ready to speak, does not know It.” (LXI. 1.)

This is exactly the same as the Upanishad sentence:

“Of whom It is not thought, of him It is understood; who thinks It, knows It not. It is unknown to the knowing; It is known to the unknowing.”

For this is the wisdom hid from the wise and prudent, and revealed to “babes”; the intuitional wisdom, which eludes the mind.

“The Master of Tao anticipates things that are difficult, while they are easy, and does things that would become great, while they are small. All difficult things in the world are sure to arise from a previous state in which they were easy, and all great things from one in which they were small. Therefore the Sage, while he never does what is great is able on that account to accomplish the greatest things.” (LXIII. 2.)

“The Sage desires what other men do not desire, and does not prize things difficult to get; he learns what other men do not learn, and turns back to what the multitude of men have passed by. Thus he helps the natural development of all things, and does not dare to act from his own desires.” (LXIV. 4.)

We may parallel this ideal from the Upanishads:

“The Self-being pierced the openings of the senses outward; hence one looks outward, not within himself. A wise man looked toward the Self with reverted sight, seeking immortality.”

We may close our study of Lao Tse with these words:

“The Sage does not accumulate. The more he expends for others, the more does he possess of his own; the more he gives to others, the more he has for himself.

“With all the sharpness of the Way of Heaven, It injures not; with all the doing in the Way of the Sage, he does not strive.” (LXXXI. 1, 3.)

The quotations suffice to show that Lao Tse is a genuine Seer and Sage, worthy to be counted among the Wise Men of the world. His teaching is at all points in harmony with the teaching of the Upanishads, the Mystery Doctrine, and it is in such a work as the *Tao- Teh-King* that we have the clearest evidence of the presence of the Mystery Teaching in China. It is true that in that Far-Eastern land the Mystery Teaching is rather a method, a Way, than a philosophy with ordered doctrines. Yet this is wholly in harmony with the spirit of that race and land, and is what we should look to find. It is worth remembering that Krishna speaks of himself as “the Way;” and that the method of that other Teacher who also said: “I am the Way,” was called “the Way” before it was called the Gospel.

III.

A word in conclusion. The ancient Chinese religion which we have described and quoted, was gathered from many sources, and set in order by the great Confucius, who was born some fifty years later than Lao Tse, and who knew that great Teacher. Confucius said of himself that he was a transmitter and not a maker, “one who believed in and loved the ancients;” and it was said of him that “he handed down the doctrines of Yao and Shun, as if they had been his ancestors.” We have already seen what were the doctrines of Yao and Shun; amongst them was the reverence for ancestors here alluded to.

It is usual, in studies of the religions of China, to include an account of Buddhism, which reached that country in the sixtieth year of our era. I have thought it better to illustrate only what China herself contributes to the world’s religions, omitting what other lands contributed to the religions of China.