ART. XV.—*On the Mahābhārata MSS. in the Whish Collection of the Royal Asiatic Society.* By M. WINTERNITZ, Ph.D.

AT the last Congress of Orientalists in Paris I read a paper on the Mahābhārata MSS. in the Royal Asiatic Society, which represent the South Indian recension of the great Hindu epic. As it will take some time before this paper, with extracts from the MSS., will be printed, it may be useful to give here a brief summary of the results to which a closer examination of at least two of these MSS. has led.

These two MSS. are the Grantha MS., Whish No. 65, and the fragment contained in the Malayalam MS., Whish No. 158. The former contains the Pauloma and Āstika Parvans, the latter a fragment of the Sambhava Parvan.

Even these two MSS. alone prove beyond any doubt that the South Indian MSS. represent a distinct recension of the Mahābhārata. Apart from numerous various readings, we find both omissions and additions in the Southern MSS., and frequently the order of verses differs in these MSS. from that found in the Nāgarī editions. A remarkable omission is that of the legend of Gaṇeśa, who, at the request of Vyāsa, writes down the whole of the Mahābhārata. Not only is the legend omitted, but the whole arrangement of the passage in which the story occurs is entirely different in the Grantha MS. This is all the more important, as the same legend of Gaṇeśa is omitted in Kṣēmendra's Bhārata-mañjarī.

The *Parvasaṃgraha*, and especially the *Anukramanikā*, are very different, and much shorter in the Grantha MS.

The story of *Kadrū* and *Vinatā* and their wager about the horse Uccaiṣravas (Mahābhārata, I, 20–22) reads much better in the Grantha MS. than in the Nāgarī editions. For the verses I, 20, 12–16 are omitted, and instead of them

we are told that Brahman gave the power of destroying snake poison to *Kāśyapa* (not to Kaśyapa, as in the Nāgarī editions), and that Kārṅkōṭaka, troubled about Kadrū's curse, promises to do his mother's bidding and turn himself into black hair, in order to make the horse's tail appear black. This is much better than the weak attempt made in I, 22, 1-3 of our editions to get over the difficulty that the Serpents perish in consequence of their mother's curse, although they actually complied with her wish. Chapter I, 22, which is mainly a repetition of I, 21, is omitted in our MS.

Another important omission is that of the story of Rāhu and his enmity against the Sun, and the appointment of Aruṇa as the Sun's charioteer, told in I, 24, 4-25, 1 of our editions.

But the most important divergence between the two recensions occurs in the Sambhava Parvan, of which MS. Whish No. 158 contains, unfortunately, a short fragment only. In this fragment the story of Śakuntalā, told in I, 68-74 of the Nāgarī editions, is omitted. Instead of it we find two chapters giving genealogies of Pūru and Bharata, corresponding to the chapters I, 94 and 95 of our editions. The genealogy of Bharata ends with the brief statement that *Duṣṣanta* (compare the Vedic *Duḥśanta*) had two sons, viz., Janamējaya by Lakṣaṇā, and Bharata by Śakuntalā.

It is, of course, possible that the Śakuntalā episode may be found in one of the later Adhyāyas of the Sambhava Parvan in the South Indian recension. This might easily be ascertained, if other and more perfect copies of the Parvan could be obtained from the South of India.

There are only these two MSS. of the *Ādi Parvan* in the Whish Collection corresponding to the first 75 Adhyāyas of this Parvan.

Of the *Sabhā Parvan* the Royal Asiatic Society possesses a complete copy (Whish No. 18), of the *Vana Parvan* an almost complete copy (the beginning as far as III,

32, 45 being lost) in MS. Whish No. 62, and a complete copy of the *Virāṭa Parvan* in the Grantha MS. Whish No. 53. Of the *Udyōga Parvan* we have two fragments supplementing each other, MS. Whish No. 84A containing Adhyāyas 1-94, and No. 84B containing Adhyāyas 41-198. There are no copies of the Sixth Parvan, and only a fragment (chapters 1-34) of the *Droṇa Parvan* (MS. Whish No. 86). Nor are there any copies of the Parvans VIII-XIII. The last five Parvans (XIV-XVIII in our editions) are found in MS. Whish No. 51.

Besides these MSS. of the Mahābhārata itself, there is in the Whish Collection (No. 71) a copy of *Mahēśvara's Mahābhārata samgraha*, a collection of stories from the Mahābhārata, divided into seventeen Parvans. The Strī, Śānti, and Anuśāsana Parvans are not represented in this work.

My acquaintance with these MSS. has convinced me that Burnell was right in saying that there is as much difference between the Northern and the South-Indian recensions of the Mahābhārata, as between the different recensions of the Rāmāyaṇa. But from what I have seen, it seems to me that the South Indian recension is neither longer nor shorter than the text of the Nāgarī editions. For while many passages found in the latter are omitted in the Grantha and Malayalam MSS., we find also additions in the Southern MSS. which do not occur in the Northern recension. I have frequently found that the South Indian MSS. offer better readings, and in some places a better text generally than the Nāgarī editions. On the other hand, there are numerous passages where the Nāgarī editions give a decidedly better text than that found in the MSS. from the South.

The only thing which seems to me absolutely certain is that these MSS. are indispensable for any critical restoration of the text of the Mahābhārata, and that for any critical and historical researches regarding the Mahābhārata the editions printed in various parts of India are utterly insufficient. A critical edition of the Mahābhārata, made

by European scholars according to the principles followed in editing any other important text, is wanted as the only sound basis for all Mahābhārata studies—nay, for all studies connected with the epic literature of India. And I was glad to see at the Congress held in Paris that many other Sanskrit scholars, too, entirely agreed with me as to the necessity of such a critical edition. There are, no doubt, great practical difficulties in the way of such an enormous undertaking, which would involve the examination of hundreds of MSS. from all parts of India. No single scholar could ever undertake such a work, and it would necessitate a very considerable expense. But the munificence and insight of Governments, Academies, Oriental Societies, and enlightened Indian princes have made it possible to publish critical texts of the most important works of Vēdic literature. Thanks to the untiring energy of one enthusiastic scholar, the “Pāli Text Society” has been able to publish critical editions of the most important Buddhist texts: why should not a “Sanskrit Epic Text Society,” aided by Governments and Academies and Oriental Societies, be able to bring out a critical edition of the great Hindu epic, which, whatever its merits as a literary production may be, is an invaluable storehouse of information about the history, religion, philosophy, folklore, and civilization of ancient India.