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ART. I.—*Indian Theistic Reformers.*<sup>1</sup> By Professor MONIER WILLIAMS, C.I.E., D.C.L.

It is a mistake to suppose that the first introduction of Theism into India was due to the founders of the Brāhma Samāj, or modern Theistic Churches of Bengal. Some of the oldest hymns of the R̥ig-veda are decidedly monotheistic, and all the most pronounced forms of Indian pantheism rest on the fundamental doctrine of God's unity. "There is one Being and no second," or in other words, "Nothing really exists but the one eternal omnipresent Spirit," was the dogma enunciated by ancient Hindū thinkers. It was a dogma accepted by the philosophical Brāhman with all its consequences and corollaries. He firmly believed himself and the Universe to be parts of the one eternal Essence, and wrapped himself up accordingly in a kind of serene indifference to all external phenomena and circumstances. Again even the ordinary Hindū who practises the most corrupt forms of polytheism is never found to deny the doctrine of God's unity. On the contrary, he will always maintain that God is essentially one, though he holds that the one God exhibits Himself variously, and that He is

<sup>1</sup> Although this paper, which was read before the Society on November 15, 1880, is principally the result of my own researches in India, yet I am indebted to Miss S. D. Collet for supplying me with abundant materials for its compilation. Her *Brāhmo Year-book* (Williams and Norgate), published at the end of every year, gives a lucid and impartial account of the progress of the Indian theistical movement, and it is to her able and disinterested labours that the interest felt by the British public in that movement is mainly due.

to be worshipped through an endless diversity of manifestations, incarnations, and material forms.

It is to be observed, too, that as often as pantheistic and polytheistic ideas have been pushed to preposterous extremes in India, a reaction has always taken place towards simple monotheism. The Vaishṇava Reformers of the 12th, 13th, 15th, and 16th centuries inculcated a doctrine which was an approximation towards the Christian idea of God's Unity and Personality, as set forth in the first article of the Church of England. Rāmānuja, Madhva, Vallabha and Chaitanya, all taught the existence of one supreme personal God of infinite power, wisdom and goodness, the Maker and Preserver of all things—a God whom they called Viṣṇu, and whom they believed to be distinct from the human soul and the material world.

But none of these great Reformers succeeded in counteracting the corrupt tendencies inherent in the Vaishṇava system. That system contains within itself the seeds of constant morbid growth and unhealthy development. It cannot get rid of its dogma of repeated incarnations, or, to speak more correctly, repeated descents (*avatāra*). Viṣṇu, it is believed, has ever been accustomed to descend in the shape of great warriors, great teachers, and even animals, to deliver his creatures in seasons of special exigence and peril. Of course such a theory opens the door to every kind of extravagant superstition. Notwithstanding, therefore, the partial reformation accomplished by Rāmānuja, Madhva, Vallabha and Chaitanya, the tide of degrading idolatrous practices set in more strongly than ever.

Then followed the monotheistic reaction led by Kabīr in the 16th century and improved upon shortly afterwards by Nānak, the founder of the Sikh religion. These movements were in a great measure due to Muhammadan influences. Both Kabīr and Nānak did their best to purify the Augean stable of corrupt Hindū doctrine, but met with only partial success. They taught devotion to one personal God, whether called Viṣṇu or Kṛishṇa, or designated by any of his established epithets or synonyms. They even endeavoured to unite Hindūs and Muhammadans on the common ground

of belief in the Unity of the Godhead. But in this they were wholly unsuccessful, and the tenth Sikh Guru Govind made religious fusion impossible by converting Sikhs and Muslims into bitter mutual opponents.

It became, indeed, a question whether the followers of Kabir and Nānak were not destined to become exterminated under the persecutions to which they were exposed in the reign of Aurangzib. Under that Emperor India suffered everywhere from an outburst of Muhammadan fanaticism. Nor was the stability of Islām shaken or its hold over the people of India weakened, when the political power of the Muhammadans declined. On the contrary, the number of Muslims increased, and their bigotry and intolerance gathered strength in opposition to the advance of British domination, and the diffusion of European knowledge.

The Hindūs, on the other hand, were not too proud to profit by contact with European ideas. Everywhere at the great centres of British authority a mighty stir of thought began to be set in motion, and able men educated by us made no secret of their dissatisfaction with the national religion, and their desire for a purer faith than that received from their fathers. At the moment when thoughtful Hindūs were thus asking for light and leading, the right leader appeared. The Hindū reformation inaugurated by Rāmmohun Roy was the first reformation due to Christian influences, and to the diffusion of European ideas through English education. He was the first great modern theistical reformer of what may be called British India.

Unhappily no biographies of India's eminent men have ever been written. Neither Hindūs nor Muhammadans have ever shown any appreciation of the value of such writings. A good life of Rāmmohun Roy, composed in Sanskrit or Bengālī, and translated into Hindūstānī and other principal vernaculars, together with a collection of his writings, would supply a great want;<sup>1</sup> but the materials for its composition

<sup>1</sup> The Rev. K. S. Macdonald has given a short and interesting summary of his life in a paper read at Darjeeling (June, 1879), and Miss Mary Carpenter published an interesting account of his 'Last Days' in 1866.

are not forthcoming. What little is known of his early history is soon told. He was born in May, 1772, at a village called Rādhānagar, in the district of Mūrshidabad. His father, Rām Kānt Roy, was a Brāhman of high caste, and his grandfather had held offices under the Mogul Emperor. At an early age Rāmmohun Roy was sent to study Persian and Arabic literature, including the Kurān itself, at the great seat of Muhammadan learning, Patna. It was thought that his proficiency in Muhammadan lore might lead to his advancement at the Mogul court. Not that he neglected Sanskrit or his Brāhmanical studies. His father was a worshipper of Viṣṇu. Every morning the son was accustomed to read a chapter of the Vaishṇava bible—the Bhāgavata Purāṇa. Naturally thoughtful and intelligent, he soon began to think for himself, and to see through the absurd tissue of fable by which its authority is supported. Wholly unable to acquiesce in its extravagant mythology, he betook himself to the simple Vedic system, and the pure pantheism of the Vedānta and Upanishads attracted his special attention.

At the age of sixteen he composed a spirited tract against idolatry. This for a mere boy was a sufficiently remarkable achievement, and not likely to pass unnoticed. As a matter of course it roused the anger not only of his own immediate family, but of all his relatives and superiors. In consequence of the enmity thus excited against him, it was thought advisable that he should leave his father's home for a time. He resided first at Benares, the stronghold of Brāhmanism, and afterwards in Tibet, where he gave himself with much zeal to the study of Buddhism, and had many controversies with Buddhist priests. Probably Rāmmohun Roy was the first earnest-minded investigator of the science of comparative religion that the world has produced. From his earliest years he displayed an eagerness to become an unbiassed student of all the religions of the globe. His sole aim in such studies was to seek out religious truth for himself with perfect fairness and impartiality. Hence he spared himself no trouble in endeavouring to master the several languages of the world's sacred books, each of which claimed to be the

sole depositories of such truth. As he studied the Hindū Veda in Sanskrit, so he is believed to have given his attention to the Buddhist Tripiṭaka in the original Pāli. He is known, too, to have mastered Arabic that he might read the Kurān, and later in life he learnt Hebrew that he might form a just estimate of the authority of the Old Testament, and even began Greek that he might gain a complete knowledge of the New Testament.

On his return home about the age of twenty, he appears to have been reinstated in the favour of his family and relations. This led him to apply himself with more zeal than ever to the study of Sanskrit literature and an examination of the doctrines of his ancestral religion. He had too logical a mind to be deceived by Brāhmanical sophistries. Yet he was accustomed to assert that he had found nothing in the works of any other country, Asiatic or European, equal to the scholastic philosophy of the Hindūs. It was at about this period that he gave himself seriously to the study of English. At the same time he began to shake off the prejudices he had imbibed against social intercourse with his country's rulers, and to derive benefit from mixing in European society. After his father's death<sup>1</sup> in 1803, Rāmmohun Roy became bolder in his controversies with the Brāhmins. Soon he began to publish various pamphlets and treatises against the errors of Hindūism. This he did at considerable risk to his own worldly prospects. His father had left his property to be divided among his three sons; but it was not long before, by their death, Rāmmohun Roy became possessed of considerable patrimony, which would have been forfeited had he formally abjured his family religion, and legally lost caste. With an increase of wealth came an increased desire for extension of usefulness. Notwithstanding an inheritance sufficiently ample for his own personal wants, Rāmmohun Roy found himself cramped in the carrying out of the vast objects he had in view. This led him to seek Government employment, and we find him acting for ten

<sup>1</sup> His mother, who was at first very bitter against him, lived to acknowledge that he was right, though she could not give up her old faith, "which was a comfort to her."

years as Dewān or managing officer to the judges and collectors of Rungpūr, Bhāgalpūr and Rāmgarh, especially to a Mr. Digby. Hence he was often called Dewānjī,—a title by which he continued to be known until he received that of Rāja from the ex-Emperor of Delhi, on the occasion of his embassy to England. One object he had in undertaking revenue work was to gain a practical knowledge of the working of the British administration. Some have spitefully accused him of augmenting his own legitimate earnings by doubtful and underhand transactions. It is far more likely that his prosperous career was due to his righteous dealings, which made him popular among the landed proprietors, and to the skill he displayed in the settlement of Zamīndārī accounts, which made his services indispensable to his masters.

Notwithstanding his assiduous attention to business, he found ample time for study and for the prosecution of his schemes of reform. Every year his attitude of antagonism to the idolatry of his fellow-countrymen became more and more marked and decided. The ground he took, according to his own statement, was not that of opposition to the national faith, but to a perversion of it. He endeavoured to show that the idolatry of the Hindūs was contrary to the practice of their ancestors, and to the doctrine of the ancient books and authorities which they profess to revere and obey. Very soon after his father's death he had written a book in Persian: "Against the idolatry of all religions." This was followed at intervals by various treatises, and especially translations of some of the Upanishads. In the preface to the Muṇḍaka Upanishad of the Atharva-veda, he says:—

"An attentive perusal of this, as well as of the remaining books of the Vedānta, will, I trust, convince every unprejudiced mind that they, with great consistency, inculcate the unity of God; instructing men, at the same time, in the pure mode of adoring him in spirit. It will also appear evident, that the Veds, although they tolerate idolatry as the last provision for those who are totally incapable of raising their minds to the contemplation of the invisible God of Nature, yet repeatedly urge the relinquishment of the rites of idol-worship, and the adoption of a purer system of religion, on

the express grounds that the observance of idolatrous rites can never be productive of eternal beatitude. These are left to be practised by such persons only as, notwithstanding the constant teaching of spiritual guides, cannot be brought to see perspicuously the Majesty of God through the works of Nature.

The public will, I hope, be assured that nothing but the natural inclination of the ignorant towards the worship of objects resembling their own nature, and to the external form of rites palpable to their grosser senses, joined to the self-interested motives of their pretended guides, has rendered the generality of the Hindū community (in defiance of their sacred books) devoted to idol-worship:—the source of prejudice and superstition, and of the total destruction of moral principle, as countenancing criminal intercourse, suicide, female murder, and human sacrifice.”

Perhaps the most important point to which he awakened attention was the absence of all Vedic sanction for the self-immolation of widows (*Satī*). It was principally his vehement denunciation of this practice, and the agitation against it set on foot by him, which ultimately led to the abolition of *Satī* by law throughout British India in 1829.

Long before that period, however, the effect of his publications and addresses was to make his position one of increasing isolation, until, in 1814, finding himself surrounded by religious opponents, and ostracised by his own social circle, he retired to Calcutta. His property by that time had so far increased that he could reckon on an income of £1000 per annum, and he was able to purchase a residence there.

It was only to be expected that among the inhabitants of the metropolis would be many thoughtful persons capable of sympathizing with his lofty aspirations. Accordingly he attracted a number of adherents from Hindūs and Jains of rank, wealth and influence. They gathered round him in a small but united band, and agreed to co-operate with him for the purification of their religion.

It may well be imagined that opinions like those which Rāmmohun Roy laboured to propagate could not have been adopted by any body of Hindūs without, so to speak, loosening the anchorage by which they held on to the foundations of their ancient faith. Yet in seeking their co-operation, he

never swerved from his original position. He continued to declare that his only object was to bring back his countrymen to what he believed to be the true monotheistic doctrine underlying the Vedic hymns and brought out more clearly in the Upanishad portion of the Veda.

The first step taken was to establish a private society for spiritual improvement. The association was called *Ātmiya Sabhā*, spiritual society, and was first formed about the year 1816. It consisted chiefly of Rāmmohun Roy's own personal friends, among whom was Dvāraka-nāth Tāgore. It met in Rāmmohun Roy's house at Manictolah, for discussion at periodical intervals; but the hostility of the Brāhmins and Pandits who were sometimes present, and who were offended and alarmed at the crushing demolition of their arguments by the reforming party, proved too strong for its continued existence. One by one its members dropped off, till by degrees the society ceased to exist. The great leader of the movement, however, was not to be so easily suppressed. On the contrary, he braced himself up with greater energy than ever to continue the conflict single-handed. His zeal and industry in writing books, pamphlets and addresses, only increased in vehemence.

It is clear that even at that time his study of the sayings of Christ in the New Testament had brought him to a qualified acceptance of Christianity; for in 1820 he published in Bengālī and English a book called "The Precepts of Jesus, the Guide to Peace and Happiness." In the preface he wrote:—

"This simple code of religion and morality is so admirably calculated to elevate men's ideas to high and liberal notions of one God, . . . . and is so well fitted to regulate the conduct of the human race in the discharge of their various duties to God, to themselves and to society, that I cannot but hope the best effects from its promulgation in its present form."

In a letter prefixed to one of his later works (an edition of the *Kena Upanishad*) he makes the following admission:—

"The consequence of my long and uninterrupted researches into religious truth has been that I have found the doctrines of Christ more conducive to moral principles, and better adapted for the use



of rational beings, than any other which have come to my knowledge.”

It is said that on being one day shown a picture of Christ, he remarked that the painter had represented Him falsely, for he had given Him a European countenance, forgetting that Jesus Christ was an Oriental, and that, in keeping with the Eastern origin of Christianity, the Christian scriptures glow throughout with rich Oriental colouring.

Some, indeed, have not hesitated to affirm that Rāmmohun Roy, though he never abjured caste, was in reality a true Christian. But that he ever had the slightest leaning towards Trinitarian Christianity is altogether unlikely.

In his “Final Appeal”<sup>1</sup> he says:—

“After I have long relinquished every idea of a plurality of Gods, or of the persons of the Godhead, taught under different systems of modern Hindooism, I cannot conscientiously and consistently embrace one of a similar nature, though greatly refined by the religious reformatations of modern times. Since whatever arguments can be adduced against a plurality of gods strike with equal force against the doctrine of a plurality of persons of the Godhead; and on the other hand, whatever excuse may be pleaded in favour of a plurality of persons of the Deity, can be offered with equal propriety in defence of polytheism.”

In fact his sympathies with the Unitarian sect were always strongly marked, and it is certain that, whenever his mind could free itself from the influence of Vedāntic proclivities, it gravitated towards a form of Unitarian Christianity.

But in truth the dominant feeling in Rāmmohun Roy's mind was a craving for a kind of eclectic catholicity. Throughout life he shrank from connecting himself with any particular school of thought. He seems to have felt a satisfaction in being claimed as a Vedāntist by Hindūs, as a Theist by Unitarians, as a Christian by Christians, and as a Muslim by Muhammadans. His idea of inspiration was that it was not confined to any age or any nation, but a gift coextensive with the human race. He believed it to be a

<sup>1</sup> He published three “Appeals to the Christian public” against the unfair construction which Dr. Marshman and others had put on his “Precepts of Jesus.”

kind of divine illumination, or intuitive perception of truth, granted in a greater or less degree to every good man in every country. Whatever was good in the Vedas, in the Christian Scriptures, in the Kurān, in the Zand Avasta, or in any book of any nation anywhere, was to be accepted and assimilated as coming from the "God of truth," and to be regarded as a revelation. The only test of the validity of any doctrine was its conformity to the natural and healthy working of man's reason, and the intuitions and cravings of the human heart. "My view of Christianity," he says in a letter to a friend, "is, that in representing all mankind as the children of one eternal Father, it enjoins them to love one another, without making any distinction of country, caste, colour, or creed." It was easy for a man of so catholic and liberal a spirit to become all things to all men. Hence, it is not surprising that he cultivated friendship with Christian Missionaries of all denominations. He assisted them in their translation of the Scriptures, and occasionally joined in their worship. It is well known that he aided Dr. Duff in the establishment of his educational institution in Calcutta, recommending that its daily work should be commenced with the Lord's Prayer, and declaring that he had studied the Brāhman's Veda, the Muslim's Kurān, and the Buddhist's Tripitaka, without finding anywhere any other prayer so brief, comprehensive, and suitable to man's wants.

In 1828 occurred an event which may be regarded as an important turning-point in the history of the Theistic movement. Mr. W. Adam, a Protestant Missionary, had entered into friendly communications with Rāmmohun Roy, and had been led through his influence to adopt a decidedly Unitarian form of Christianity. Not content with changing his own creed, he sought to disseminate the opinions he had adopted by holding meetings and giving lectures in a room attached to the Bengal Hurkaru Newspaper Office. For some time Rāmmohun Roy, with a few of his friends, were accustomed to be present, till at last the thought struck them that, instead of being dependent upon a foreigner for religious

edification, they might establish a meeting-house of their own. Dwāraka-nāth Tāgore, Prosonno Kumār Tāgore, and others, came forward with pecuniary aid. Temporary rooms in the Chitpore road were hired by Rāmmohun Roy, and prayer-meetings held there every Saturday evening. The service was divided into four parts—recitation of Vedic texts; reading from the Upanishads; delivery of a sermon; and singing hymns.

It was thus that the germ of the first Theistic church was planted at Calcutta in 1828. The commencement of its existence as a living growing organization did not take place till two years later. The beginning of January, 1830, now half a century ago, inaugurated a new era in the history of Indian religious thought. It ushered in the dawn of the greatest change that has ever passed over the Hindū mind. A new phase of the Hindū religion then took definite shape, a phase which differed essentially from every other that had preceded it. For no other reformation has resulted in the same way from the influence of European education, and Christian ideas.

The increase of contributions had enabled Rāmmohun Roy to purchase a large house in the Chitpore road, and endow it with a maintenance fund. Trustees were appointed, and the first Hindū Theistic Church, or, as it was sometimes called by English-speaking natives, the Hindū Unitarian Church,<sup>1</sup> was then opened in Calcutta on the 11th Māgha, 1751, equivalent to January 23, 1830. The name given to it by Rāmmohun Roy indicated its Unitarian character, and yet connected it with the national faith. It was called Brāhma Sabhā, or Brahmiya Samāj, that is to say, “the assembly or society of God,” the word Brāhma being an adjective formed from Brāhmā, the name of the one self-existent God of orthodox Hindūism.

The trust-deed of the building laid down that it was to be used as a place of meeting for the worship of the One Eternal, Unsearchable, and Immutable Being, the Author and Preserver of the Universe, to the promotion of piety,

<sup>1</sup> So, the Press at which Rāmmohun Roy's publications were printed was called the Unitarian Press.

morality, and charity, and the strengthening of the bonds of union between men of all religious classes and creeds.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, that no image, print, picture, portrait, or likeness, should be admitted within the building, that no sacrifice should be offered there, and that nothing recognized as an object of worship by other men should be spoken of contemptuously there. Yet Rāmmohun Roy still held fast to his original position. He was careful to make the members of the new society understand that he had no idea of founding a new sect or new system, or even a new church in the ordinary sense of the word. He simply claimed to have established a pure monotheistic worship for the first time in a building where men of all castes, all classes, and all creeds, Hindūs, Muhammadans, and Christians, were invited to worship together, the only unity of faith demanded being belief in the Unity of God. This first introduction of public worship and united prayer—before unknown among the Hindūs—was not the least of the benefits effected by Rāmmohun Roy. At the same time, he never quite abandoned the idea of an order of men ordained by God to be special teachers of divine truth. It is said that the meeting-house of the Samāj had a private room open only to Brāhmins, where special readings of the Veda were conducted by them.

And, in truth, Rāmmohun Roy's attitude towards his national religion continued that of a friendly reformer, even to the end of his life—a reformer who aimed at retaining all that was good and true in Brāhmanism, while sweeping away all that was corrupt and false. The weak point in his plan is manifest. The form of theology he propounded was too vague, undogmatic, and comprehensive. He was, in fact, by natural character too intensely patriotic not to be swayed, even to the last, by an ardent love of old national ideas. He had denounced caste as a demoralizing institution;<sup>2</sup> he had

<sup>1</sup> It is said that in accordance with this principle, Eurasian boys used to sing the Psalms of David in English, and Hindū musicians religious songs in Bengālī.

<sup>2</sup> Thus, in the introduction to his translation of the *Isopanishad*, he says, "The chief part of the theory and practice of Hindooism, I am sorry to say, is made to consist in the adoption of a peculiar mode of diet, the least aberration from which is punished by exclusion from his family and friends. Murder, theft, or perjury, though brought home to the party by a judicial sentence, so far from inducing loss of caste, is visited with no peculiar mark of infamy."

adopted a nearly true theory of the unity and personality of God ; he had abandoned the doctrines of transmigration and final absorption of the soul ; he had professed his belief in a day of judgment ; he had accepted the Christian miracles, and had even declared Jesus Christ to be the "Founder of truth and true religion," and had admitted that the Son of God was empowered by God to forgive sins ; but he never entirely delivered himself from his old prepossessions, and the alleged purity of his monotheism was ever liable to be adulterated with pantheistic ideas. In the eyes of the law he always remained a Brāhman. He never abandoned the Brāhmanical thread, and had too lively a sense of the value of money to risk the forfeiture of his property, and the consequent diminution of his usefulness and influence, by formally giving up his caste. In fact, though far in advance of his age as a thinker, he laid no claim to perfection or to perfect disinterestedness of motive as a man.

Unfortunately for the interests of India, Rāmmohun Roy's career was cut short prematurely. In 1830 the ex-Emperor of Delhi, having long felt himself ill-treated by the Indian Government, deputed Rāmmohun Roy to lay a representation of his grievances before the Court of Great Britain, at the same time conferring on him the title of Rāja. The Rāja's great wish had always been to visit England and interchange ideas with the Western thinkers. He also wished to oppose in person a threatened appeal against the law for the abolition of Suttee (*Satī*), the passing of which had been just effected through his exertions, and which only required the royal assent. He was aware, too, that the granting of a new charter to the East India Company was about to be discussed in Parliament, and he felt the importance of watching the proceedings on behalf of the natives of India, and for the furtherance of their interests.

No better time for carrying these objects into execution seemed possible than the period which followed the opening of his new Church. He therefore sailed for Liverpool in November, 1830, and arrived there on the 8th of April, 1831, being the first native of rank and influence who had ventured

to break through the inveterate prejudices of centuries by crossing "the black water." In England his enlightened views, courteous manners, and dignified bearing attracted much attention. During his residence in London he took great interest in the exciting political conflicts then raging, and the passing of the Reform Bill caused him unmixed satisfaction. He was presented to the King, and was present at the coronation. The evidence he gave on Indian affairs before a Committee of the House of Commons was of course highly valuable, and ought to be reprinted. In one of his replies to the questions addressed to him we find him asserting that the only course of policy likely to insure the attachment of the intelligent part of the native community to English rule was "the making them eligible to gradual promotion, according to their respective abilities and merits, to situations of trust and respectability in the State." Unhappily Rāmmohun Roy had not sufficient physical strength to contend with the severity of a European climate. After visiting Paris and other parts of France in 1833, he began to show symptoms of declining health. He had been invited to visit Bristol, and to take up his residence at the house of Miss Castle—a ward of Dr. Carpenter—in the vicinity of that city. He arrived there early in September, 1833, and shortly afterwards was taken ill with fever. Every attention was lavished on him, and the best medical skill called in; but all in vain. His death took place at Bristol on September 27th, 1833. He died a Hindū in respect of external observances; his Brāhman servant performed the usual rites required by his master's caste, and his Brāhmanical thread was found coiled round his person when his spirit passed away. In all his Anti-Brāhmanism he continued a Brāhman to the end.

Even after his death it was thought advisable to keep up the fiction of a due maintenance of caste. His body was not interred in a Christian burial-ground, but in the shrubbery at Stapleton Grove, and without a religious service of any kind. It was not till about ten years afterwards that Dwāraka-nāth Tāgore, on the occasion of his visiting England in 1843, had

the coffin removed to Arno's Vale Cemetery, and a suitable monument erected over the remains of one of the greatest men that India has ever produced. Yet his grave is rarely now visited, even by Indians, and few care to make themselves acquainted with the particulars of his last days. For India is not alive to the magnitude of the debt she owes to her greatest modern Reformer. Nor have his merits yet received adequate recognition at the hands of European writers. Nor indeed has it been possible within the compass of the present summary to give even a brief description of all the services rendered by Rāmmohun Roy to his country as a social as well as religious Reformer, of his labours for the elevation of women and for the education of the people generally, of his invaluable suggestions made from time to time for the carrying out of Lord William Bentinck's political reforms, and of his efforts for the improvement of the Bengālī language, and the formation of a native literature. Assuredly the memory of such a man is a precious possession to be cherished not by India alone, but by the whole human race.

It was not to be expected that the void caused by the death of so great a patriot and benefactor could be filled up immediately. The Church he had founded in Calcutta languished for a time, notwithstanding that his friend Dwāraka-nāth Tāgore made some efforts to maintain its vitality. At length, after the interval of a few years, a not unworthy successor to Rāmmohun Roy was found in Dwāraka-nāth's son, Debendra-nāth Tāgore.

This remarkable man, who was born in 1818, and is now, therefore, sixty-two years of age, was the first to give real organization to Rāmmohun Roy's Theistic Church. But he imitated his great predecessor in doing as little violence as possible to the creed and practice of his forefathers. He aimed at being a purifier rather than a destroyer. He had the advantage and disadvantage of a rich and liberal father. The luxury in which he passed his youth was for some time a drawback rather than an aid. It was not till he was twenty years of age that he began to be conscious of spiritual

aspirations. Utterly dissatisfied with the religious condition of his own people, and with the ideas of God presented by Brāhmanical teaching, he set himself to discover a purer system. It was creditable to his earnestness and sincerity that he took time for consideration before joining Rāmmohun Roy's Brāhma-sabhā, or, as it came to be afterwards called, the Brāhma-samāj.

In 1839, he established a society of his own, called "the Truth-knowing Society" (Tattva-bodhinī-sabhā), the object of which, according to its founder, was to sustain and carry on the labours of Rāja Rāmmohun Roy, and to assist in restoring the monotheistic system of divine worship inculcated in the original Hindū scriptures.

This Society lasted for twenty years, and was not finally merged in the Brāhma-samāj till 1859. It met every week for discussion at Debendra-nāth's house, and had also monthly meetings for worship and prayer, and the exposition of the Upanishad portion of the Veda. It had its organ in a monthly periodical, called the Tattva-bodhinī patrikā. This journal was started in August, 1843, and was well edited by Akhai Kumār Datta, an earnest member of the theistic party. Its first aim seems to have been the dissemination of Vedāntic doctrine, and this it continued for many years, though its editor had no belief in the infallibility of the Veda, and was himself in favour of the widest catholicity. He afterwards converted Debendra-nāth to his own views.

It was not till 1841 that Debendra-nāth, without giving up occasional meetings at his own house, formally joined the church founded by Rāmmohun Roy. He soon saw that if Indian Theists were to maintain their ground in India, they needed organization, and that if the Samāj was to exist as a permanent church, it wanted a properly appointed president, a regularly ordained minister, a settled form of worship, and a fixed standard of faith and practice. He himself undertook the task of preparing what is sometimes called the Brāhma covenant, consisting of seven solemn declarations, or vows to be taken by all candidates for admission into the Theistic Society.



By the most important of these declarations every member of the Society bound himself to abstain from idolatry; to worship no created object, but to worship through the love of God, and through the performance of the works God loveth (Para-brahmaṇi prītyā tat-priya-kārya-sāadhanena), the Great God the Creator, Preserver, Destroyer (śṛiṣṭi-sthiti-pralaya-karṭṛi), the Giver of Salvation (mukti-kāraṇa), the Formless (nir-avayava), the One only without a second (ekamātrādvītiya); to lead holy lives, and to seek forgiveness through abandonment of sin. At the same time a few short formulæ of divine worship (Brahmopāsanā), consisting of prayers, invocations, hymns, and meditations, were promulgated for use in the daily services. This took place at the end of 1843.

Paṇḍit Rām Chandar Vidyā-bāg-ish was appointed minister of the newly-organized church, and not long afterwards Debendra-nāth, with twenty friends, solemnly took the oaths of the new Theistic covenant in his presence. The year 1844 may be given as the date of the real commencement of the first organized Theistic Church of India, hence afterwards called the Ādi-Brāhma Samāj, though at that time and until the first secession it was simply denominated the Calcutta Brāhma Samāj.

Three years later, in 1847, the number of covenanted Brāhmas had increased to seven hundred and sixty-seven.

But, as usual, with the accession of new members, the growing church began to be agitated by contending opinions. It was affirmed that the Vedas had never been thoroughly examined with a view of arriving at a just estimate of their value as an authoritative guide to truth. Four young Brāhmins were therefore sent to Benares. Each was commissioned to copy out and study one of the four Vedas. The result of a careful examination of the sacred books was, that some members of the Samāj maintained their authority, and even their infallibility, while others rejected them as abounding in error. A serious conflict of opinion continued for some time. In the end it was decided by the majority, that neither Vedas nor Upanishads were to be accepted as an

infallible guide. Only such precepts and ideas in them were to be admitted as harmonized with pure Theistic truth, such truth resting on the two foundations of external nature and internal intuition. In short, the religion of Indian Theists was held to be a religion of equilibrium—neither supported wholly by reason on the one hand, nor by blind faith on the other.

This took place about the year 1850, by which time other Samājes had begun to be established in the provinces, such as those at Midnapur, Krishnagar, and Dacca.

A new Theistic Directory was then put forth by Debendra-nāth, called Brāhma-Dharma, or “the Theistic Religion.” It contained a statement in Sanskrit of the four fundamental principles of Indian Theism, together with the seven declarations revised, and approved extracts from the Veda, Upanishads, and later Hindū scriptures, as, for example, from the Īsopanishad, Śatapatha-Brāhmaṇa, and Manu. Selections from these works were thought to have the advantage of national association as an instrument for the dissemination of truth. Otherwise they were not regarded as possessing any peculiar inspiration, or even any inherent superiority over extracts from other good books.

Any one who examines the whole compendium with impartiality must come to the conclusion that, although the quotations it gives are pervaded throughout by a strong aroma of Vedāntic and Pantheistic ideas, it marks an advance in the Theistic movement. It presents us for the first time with a definite exposition of Indian Theistic doctrine, which may be held by those who reject Vedāntism. Its four fundamental principles (called Brāhma-dharma-vīja) translated from the Sanskrit are :—

I.—In the beginning, before this Universe was, the One Supreme Being was (Brahma vā ekam idam-agra āsit); nothing else whatever was (nānyat kinēnāsit); He has created all this universe (tad idam sarvam asrijat).

II.—He is eternal (tadeva nityam), intelligent (jnānam), infinite (anantam), blissful (śivam), self-dependent (sva-tantram), formless (niravayavam), one only without a second (ekam evādvī-

tiyam), all-pervading (sarva-vyāpi), all-governing (sarva-nīyantri), all-sheltering (sarvaśraya), all-knowing (sarva-vit), all-powerful (sarva-śaktimat), unmovable (dhruvam), perfect (pūrnam), and without a parallel (apratimam).

III.—By Worship of Him alone can happiness be secured in this world and the next (Ekasya tasyaivopāsanayā pāratrikam aihikam ēa śubham bhavati).

IV.—Love towards Him (Tasmin prītis), and performing the works he loves (priya-kārya-sādhanaṃ ēa), constitute His worship (tadupāsanam eva).

Any one who subscribed to these four principles was admitted a member of the Calcutta Brāhma-samāj. The seven more stringent declarations were only required of those who desired a more formal initiation into the system.

The substance of this improved theistic teaching may be thus summarized :

Intuition and the book of Nature form the original basis of the Brāhma's creed, but divine truth is to be thankfully accepted from any portion of the ancient Hindū scriptures as from any other good books in which it may be contained. According to the truth thus received, man is led to regard God as his Heavenly Father, endowed with a distinct personality, and with moral attributes befitting His nature. God has never become incarnate, but he takes providential care of His creatures. Prayer to Him is efficacious. Repentance is the only way to atonement, forgiveness, and salvation. The religious condition of man is progressive. Good works, charity, attainment of knowledge, contemplation, and devotion, are the only religious rites. Penances and pilgrimages are useless. The only sacrifice is the sacrifice of self, the only place of pilgrimage is the company of the good, the only true Temple is the pure heart. There is no distinction of castes.

Yet there can be no doubt that great latitude in regard to the maintenance of old national customs was still allowed, and a friendly demeanour towards the national religion encouraged.

In fact, the Mission of the Calcutta Brāhma Samāj, accord-

ing to its chief secretary and most able literary representative Rāj Narain Bose,<sup>1</sup> was to fulfil or at least to purify the old religion, not to destroy it.

Such a compromise appeared wholly unsatisfactory to the more thoughtful members of the Samāj, especially to those who were beginning to be influenced by the opinions of a clever eloquent young man, Keshab Chandar Sen, who joined it in 1858. They felt that a more complete Reform was needed before the Samāj could deliver itself from all complicity with degrading social customs.

The youthful Keshab addressed himself to the task of radical reform with the ardour of a young man full of spirit and energy, who had his knightly spurs to win.

It must be borne in mind that we in Europe are wholly unable to realize the difficulties which beset the career of a radical religious reformer in India. There, religious and social life are so intimately interwoven—there, the ordinary creed of the people, their debasing idolatry and demoralizing superstitions, are so intertwined with the texture of their daily life, with their domestic manners and institutions, and even with the common law of the land, that to strike at the root of the national faith is to subvert the very foundations of the whole social fabric. Let a man enter on the path of progress, let him abandon the ideas inherited by his parents, let him set his face against the time-honoured usages of his country, let him stand up boldly as the champion of truth, the eradicator of error, the regenerator of a degenerate age, the purifier of a corrupt condition of society, and what are the consequences? He has to fight his way through a host of antagonisms and obstructions, sufficient to appal, if not to overpower, a man of ordinary courage and determination. The inveterate prejudices of centuries, deeply-seated antipathies, national pride, popular passion, a thousand vested interests of tradition, ignorance, bigotry, superstition, indolence, priestcraft, conspire to crush

<sup>1</sup> Rāj Narain Bose has rendered good service to the Ādi-Brahma-Samāj by his able writings, just as Mr. P. C. Mozoomdar has to the later development of Theism about to be described—the Brahma-Samāj of India.

his efforts and impede his advance. Every inch of the ground is disputed by a host of bitter antagonists. Humiliation, insult, threat, invective, vituperation are heaped upon his head. Father, mother, wife, children, relatives and friends hold him fast in their embraces or unite their efforts to drag him backwards. No one stirs a finger to help him onwards. At length, by the force of his own resolute character, by patience and conciliation, by firmness and gentleness, by persuasion and earnestness, by carrying people with him against their will, by making his work theirs as well as his own, he gains a few adherents; for nowhere do qualities such as these command so much admiration as in India. Then his progress becomes easier. But if his attitude towards ancient creeds and social abuses continues that of an uncompromising enemy, he will still have to do battle at the head of a little band of followers against countless adversaries, and will only triumph over opposition in one quarter, to find it renewed with increased acrimony and vehemence in other directions.

This may be taken as a description of the early career of the third great Theistic Reformer of British India, Keshab Chandar Sen, who was born in 1838.

A few particulars of Mr. Sen's life ought here to be given. He is a grandson of a well-known member of the Vaidya caste, Rām Comul Sen, who was a man of great worth, talent and literary culture,<sup>1</sup> but a bigoted Hindū of the Vaishṇava school. The young Keshab was brought up in an atmosphere of Hindū superstition and idolatry. As might have been expected, the Vishṇu-worship in which he was trained predisposed him to emotional religion and to a belief in one supreme personal God. Subsequently he received a thorough English education at the Presidency College, Calcutta. There, of course, the foundations of his family faith crumbled to pieces. It could not bear collision with scientific truth as imparted by European

<sup>1</sup> He was held in great esteem by Prof. H. H. Wilson, and was the author of a useful English and Bengālī Dictionary, to which my own lexicography is under some obligations.

teachers. Nor was any new faith built up immediately on the ruins of the old. His attitude towards all religion became one of absolute indifference. Happily, in a character like that of Keshab, the void caused by the over-development of one part of his nature was not long left unfilled. With a greater advance in intellectual culture came a greater consciousness of spiritual aspirations, and a greater sense of dependence upon the Almighty Ruler of the Universe. He began to crave for a knowledge of the true God. One day, when he was twenty years of age, a Brāhma tract fell into his hands, and he found to his astonishment that a pure Theistic Church had been already founded in Calcutta. Without a moment's hesitation he decided to enroll himself a member of the Calcutta Brāhma-Samāj. This happened towards the end of 1858, when he was in his twentieth year.

The English culture and freedom of thought, not un-mixed with Christian ideas, which Keshab imported into the Calcutta (Ādi) Samāj, could not fail to leaven its whole constitution. The fear was that his enthusiasm might lead him to put himself forward prematurely. Happily his extreme youthfulness and inexperience compelled him to veil his own individuality. He longed from the first to bring all the impetuosity of his fervid nature to bear on the accomplishment of vast changes. He was ambitious of penetrating to the very springs of social life and altering their whole course. But he was sensible enough to perceive that he could not enter upon such a Herculean task without feeling his way and testing his powers. He, therefore, commenced his mission as a fellow-worker with Debendra-nāth, and in due subordination to him as his recognized leader. Their fellowship and co-operation lasted for about five years. Nothing, however, could keep the enthusiastic Keshab long in the background. It was not sufficient for him that idolatry had been eliminated from Hindū usages. They remained Hindū usages still. He soon began to urge a complete abolition of all caste-restric-

tions. The first change he advocated was that all who conducted the services in the Mandir should abandon the sacred thread (*upavīta*) which distinguished the Brāhmins and higher castes from the lower. But Debendra-nāth, though he consented to give up the sacred badge of caste in his own case, declined to force a similar renunciation upon others. Unhappily this was the commencement of a difference of opinion between the progressive and conservative Reformers, which afterwards led to a more complete rupture.

Next to the abandonment of the thread came the alteration of the Śrāddha, or worship of deceased ancestors—a rite involving ideas incompatible with the Brāhma doctrine of a future state. This was followed by a remodelling of the ritual at the ceremonies of birth (*jāti-karma*), name-giving (*nāma-karaṇa*), and cremation of the dead (*antyeshti*). Then a solemn and impressive form of initiation into the Brāhma faith was substituted for the Upanayana or initiatory rite of Brāhmanism. Of course, efforts were made for the education and elevation of women. They were encouraged to join the Brāhma Samāj, which many eventually did under the name of Brāhmikās, worshipping at first either behind screens, or in a separate room.

A still more important matter was the reform of marriage customs. Vast difficulties beset any reform in this direction. Marriage is the most ancient, sacred, and inviolable of all Hindū institutions, and its due performance the most complicated of all religious acts. It involves intricate questions of caste, creed, property, family usage, consanguinity, and age. To remodel the institution of marriage is to reorganize the whole constitution of Indian society, and to create, so to speak, an entirely new social atmosphere. The first change advocated by the Reformers had reference to the abolition of child-marriages. Nothing has tended to the physical and moral deterioration of the people so much as early marriage. It has not only resulted in excessive population, rapidly multiplying till reduced to so low a standard of physical and moral stamina that every failure of crops adds demoralization to starvation. It is an ever-present source of

weakness and impoverishment, destructive of all national vigour, and fatal to the development of national thrift and economy. The progressive Reformers felt that until this evil was removed there could be no hope of India's regeneration.

Of course, another reform aimed at had reference to polygamy. No man was to be allowed more than one wife. Then widows were to be released from enforced celibacy. As to the marriage ceremony itself, all semblance of idolatrous worship, all foolish ritual, all noisy music, needless display and unnecessary expense caused by spreading the festivities over many days were to be eliminated. Debendra-nāth himself was induced to set the example of celebrating a nuptial ceremony in his own family according to this simple Brāhmīc form. His second daughter was engaged to be married to Babu H. N. Mukerjea. The rite was performed on the 26th of July, 1861, quietly, solemnly, simply, and without protracted festivities, in the presence of nearly two hundred co-religionists. This was the first Brāhmīc marriage. A still more momentous reform was attempted by Keshab Chandar Sen when he performed a marriage ceremony between two persons of different castes in August, 1864. An innovation so revolutionary gave great dissatisfaction to Debendra-nāth. In fact, Mr. Sen, notwithstanding the real good he had effected by his influence, example, and personal efforts, found himself hampered by his connexion with the too conservative Calcutta (Ādi) Samāj. He was like a man working in chains. He felt himself powerless to penetrate beneath the outer crust of the social fabric. The old caste-customs, the old superstitious rites, were still practised by a large number of Theists, while others who professed sympathy with the advanced Reformer, and adopted his opinions in public, secretly reverted to their old ways. It was not to be expected that a man of Mr. Sen's temperament would long acquiesce in merely superficial changes and patchy half-finished reformatations. He was willing to accept half measures as an instalment. But nothing short of a thorough reconstruction of the whole religious and social fabric could



afford him permanent satisfaction. He was bent on laying the axe to the very root of the tree. He felt his own mission to be very different from that of Debendra-nāth. He was to destroy rather than to renovate the old Vedic system with all its train of ceremonial rites and observances.

Of course, he no sooner gave up all idea of compromise than instantly he found himself plunged in a slough of obstruction. Difficulties and opposition met him at every turn. At length, in February, 1865, the inevitable crisis arrived. Keshab Chandar Sen with a large number of the younger members of the Samāj formed themselves into a separate body of advanced, or progressive reformers, and seceded from the old Society, leaving behind them all its accumulated property. It was not, however, till November, 1866, that they were able to organize themselves into a new Theistic Church called the Brāhma-Samāj of India (*Bhara-tavarshīya Brāhma-Samāj*),<sup>1</sup> a church which gloried in having broken entirely with Brāhmanism, and severed every link which connected it with the national religion.

At a meeting held on November 11th, 1866, the day of the incorporation of the new society, Mr. Sen announced that the aim of the new church would be to unite all Brāhmas into one body, to reduce their labours to a well-organized system of co-operation, and to establish a central metropolitan Brāhma Samāj of all India, to which all other Samājes throughout the country might be affiliated, or with which they might establish friendly relations. This idea was not a new one. An effort had been made in 1864 to establish a General Representative Assembly or Council of all the existing Brāhma Samājes. A meeting was then convened, and twenty-eight out of the existing fifty Samājes sent representatives, but little further was done. Nor did Mr. Sen ever succeed in making his own Samāj a centre of union and authority, though for a long time his talents as an orator secured him a position as chief leader of the Brāhma community.

<sup>1</sup> This new Church has been sometimes called the progressive Brāhma-Samāj.

The first stone of the new Mandir or place of worship of the Brāhma Samāj of India was laid on the 23rd of January, 1868, but the building was not opened until August (*Bhadra*), 1869. As might have been expected, the new Samāj exhibited from its first foundation a decided reflection of its founder's individuality. He had imbibed Vaishṇava ideas with his earliest impressions. Yet the peculiar vein of Hindū theology which permeated his mind only operated beneficially. The introduction of faith (*bhakti*), emotional religion, and devotional fervour into the Brāhma system was a real advantage. It infused warmth and light into a cold inanimate Theology, and brought the latest development of Indian Theism into closer harmony with Christian ideas.

It remains to describe more fully the nature of that development. No sooner was Brāhmanism finally discarded than it became necessary to formulate more definite articles of faith. Briefly the new creed might have been described as "the Fatherhood of God and the Brotherhood of Man." Its most essential points were as follow :

God is the first cause of the Universe. By His will He created all objects out of nothing and continually upholds them. He is spirit, not matter. He is perfect, infinite, all-powerful, all-merciful, all-holy. He is our Father, Preserver, Master, King and Saviour.

The soul is immortal. Death is only the dissolution of the body. There is no new birth after death; the future life is a continuation and development of the present life. The men that now live are the embryos of the men that are to be.

The true scriptures are two,—the volume of nature, and the natural ideas implanted in the mind. The wisdom, power and mercy of the Creator are written on the Universe. All ideas about immortality and morality are primitive convictions rooted in the constitution of man.

God Himself never becomes man by putting on a human body. His divinity dwells in every man, and is displayed more vividly in some. Moses, Jesus Christ, Muhammad, Nānak, Chaitanya, and other great Teachers, appeared at special times, and conferred vast benefits on the world. They are entitled to universal gratitude and love.

The Brāhma religion is distinct from all other systems of religion; yet it is the essence of all. It is not hostile to other creeds. What is true in them it accepts. It is based on the constitution of man, and is, therefore, eternal and universal. It is not confined to age or country.

All mankind are of one brotherhood. The Brāhma religion recognizes no distinction between high and low caste. It is the aim of this religion to bind all mankind into one family.

Duties are of four kinds. (1) Duties *towards God*—such as belief in Him, love, worship and service; (2) Duties *towards self*—such as preservation of bodily health, acquisition of knowledge, sanctification of soul; (3) Duties *towards others*—such as veracity, justice, gratitude, the promotion of the welfare of all mankind; (4) Duties *towards animals* and inferior creatures, such as kind treatment.

Every sinner must suffer the consequences of his own sins sooner or later, in this world or the next. Man must labour after holiness by the worship of God, by subjugation of the passions, by repentance, by the study of nature and of good books, by good company and by solitary contemplation. These will lead through the action of God's grace to salvation.

Salvation is deliverance of the soul from the root of corruption, and its perpetual growth in purity. Such growth continues through all eternity, and the soul becomes more and more godly and happy in Him who is the fountain of infinite holiness and joy. The companionship of God is the Indian Theists' heaven.

With regard to the worship of God, it was declared to be "a wholly spiritual act."

The form of divine service was as follows:—First a hymn; then an invocation of God by the minister, followed by another hymn; then adoration of God, chanted by the whole congregation together, and continued by the minister alone; then silent communion for some minutes. Then the following united prayer, chanted by the whole congregation standing:—"Lead us, O God! from untruth to truth, from darkness to light, from death to immortality. O! thou Father of truth, reveal thyself before us. Thou art merciful, do thou protect us always in thy unbounded goodness. Peace! Peace! Peace!" Then a prayer for the well-being of the whole world by the minister alone standing, succeeded

by another hymn, and by a recitation of texts from Hindū and other scriptures. Finally, a sermon, followed by a prayer, a benediction, and a hymn.

Services of this kind still take place—generally on Sundays, and often on a week day in addition. There are also grand anniversary festivals to celebrate the foundation of the Brāhma Church. The chief festival, called Māghotsab (*Māghotsava*), on the 23rd January (11th of Māgha), is kept by all the Samājes in commemoration of the founding of monotheistic worship by Rāmmohun Roy. Another, called Bhadrotsab (*Bhadrotsava*), is held by the Brāhma-Samāj of India in celebration of the opening of the Mandir in August, 1869. Solemn initiation services for the admission of new members are also performed. They correspond in an interesting manner to our Confirmation services.

Clearly it would be easy to prove that the advanced Indian Reformers, trained and educated by us, and imbued unconsciously with Western theological ideas, have borrowed largely from our Christian system in formulating their own creed. The points of agreement are too obvious to need indicating. One noteworthy point of contact with Christianity is the active missionary spirit displayed by progressive Brāhmas. Such a spirit is, of course, essential to the growth and vitality of all new systems. Keshab Chandar Sen has made several Missionary tours in India, and in 1870 he came to England, giving out that his mission was to excite the interest of Englishmen in the religious, social, and political progress of his fellow-countrymen. Here he visited fourteen of the chief towns of England and Scotland, and conducted religious services in the pulpits of Baptist, Congregational, and Unitarian chapels. He preached to large congregations in East London, and addressed seventy meetings in different places in behalf of such objects as Temperance, Peace, Reformatories, Ragged Schools, and general education. He had interviews with Her Majesty and several eminent Statesmen.

And what were the impressions he formed of Christian religious life and doctrine in England? It may do us no

harm to listen once more to the Hindū Theist's utterances before he left our shores :—

“One institution,” he said, “in England I have looked upon with peculiar feelings of delight—the happy English home, in which the utmost warmth and cordiality of affection, and sympathy, are mingled with the highest moral and religious restraint and discipline. The spirit of prayer and worship seems mixed up with daily household duties, and the influence of the spirit of Christ is manifest in domestic concerns.” “Yet,” he added, “it grieves me to find that the once crucified Jesus is crucified hundreds of times every day in the midst of Christendom. The Christian world has not imbibed Christ's spirit.”

At Birmingham he said :—

“Since my arrival in England I have found myself incessantly surrounded by various religious denominations, professing to be Christians. Methinks I have come into a vast market. Every sect is like a small shop where a peculiar kind of Christianity is offered for sale. As I go from door to door, from shop to shop—each sect steps forward and offers for my acceptance its own interpretations of the Bible, and its own peculiar Christian beliefs. I cannot but feel perplexed and even amused amidst countless and quarrelling sects. It appears to me, and has always appeared to me, that no Christian nation on earth represents fully and thoroughly Christ's idea of the kingdom of God. I do believe, and I must candidly say, that no Christian sect puts forth the genuine and full Christ as He was and as He is, but, in some cases a mutilated, disfigured Christ, and, what is more shameful, in many cases, a counterfeit Christ. Now, I wish to say that I have not come to England as one who has yet to find Christ. When the Roman Catholic, the Protestant, the Unitarian, the Trinitarian, the Broad Church, the Low Church, the High Church, all come round me, and offer me their respective Christs, I desire to say to one and all: ‘Think you that I have no Christ within me? Though an Indian, I can still humbly say, thank God that I have my Christ.’”

This remarkable statement has become invested with far deeper significance and interest since the publication of Mr. Sen's last year's lecture, on the subject “India asks, who is Christ?” It might have been expected that his English visit would have brought his Theism into closer

affinity with Christian dogma. But such was not really the case. I may state, however, as interesting facts, that two of his Hindū travelling companions have been baptized, and that the Reverend Luke Rivington (one of the Oxford Cowley Fathers) has recently made a great impression in discussing the truths of Christianity with Mr. Sen and his followers, and taking his stand with them on the common platform of the Unity of God.

On his return to India Mr. Sen applied himself zealously to the work of social reform, and at once started what was called "the Indian Reform Association" for female improvement, for the promotion of education among men and women, for the suppression of intemperance, and generally for the social and moral reformation of the people of India. This society, open to all classes and creeds, was founded November 2nd, 1870, and a female Normal and Adult School was opened in 1871.

The most important Reform of all — that relating to marriage — to which Mr. Sen's efforts had already been directed, had not made much progress. The example so well set by the marriage of Debendra-nāth Tāgore's daughter in 1861 had created hopes of a better state of things, but little real advance had been achieved. It is true that similar marriages had followed, but the legality of such marriages was disputed, though a form of ritual had been adopted which was thought to be sufficiently conformable to Hindū usage to insure their validity. It was not encouraging that between 1864 and 1867 only seven or eight Ādi Samāj Brāhma marriages and four or five Progressive Brāhma intermarriages between persons of different castes had been solemnized. Nor had much success attended the attempt to prevent early marriages. Mr. Sen and his followers now threw themselves more vigorously than ever into the marriage-reform movement. The best medical opinions were sought, and the proper marriageable age fixed. But the most important step taken was to memorialize the Government for a new Marriage Act, to relieve Brāhmas from their disability to contract legal marriages according to their own

forms. Much agitation ensued. The native mind became greatly excited, and Indian society was stirred to its depths by a conflict of opinion on a matter which affected the very framework of its whole structure and composition.

At length a Bill was drawn up by Sir Henry Maine, and improved upon by his successor Mr. Fitzjames Stephen, which pleased no one. It was violently opposed not only by the orthodox Brāhmans, but by the more conservative Theists. The struggle was protracted with much bitterness on the part of the natives for four years. Finally, after many ineffectual attempts at obtaining a general agreement of opinion, a third Bill was elaborated by Mr. Stephen (now Sir Fitzjames Stephen), and under his able management the Native Marriage Act became law on the 22nd of March, 1872. It commences thus:—"Whereas it is expedient to provide a form of marriage for persons who do not profess the Christian, Jewish, Hindū, Muhammadan, Pārsī, Buddhist, Sikh or Jaina religion, and to legalize certain marriages the validity of which is doubtful; it is hereby enacted . . . ." The Act, in fact, introduced for the first time the institution of civil marriage into Hindū society. It sanctioned matrimonial union without any necessary religious ceremonial. It legalized marriages between different castes. It fixed the minimum age for a bridegroom at 18 and of a bride at 14, but required the written consent of parent or guardian when either party was under 21. It prevented the marriage of persons within certain degrees of consanguinity. It prohibited bigamy, and permitted the remarriage of Indian widows.

After the passing of this Act fifty-eight marriages took place in the eight and a half years ending August, 1879, against fifty-one in the ten and a half years which preceded its ratification. The average of widow marriages has not as yet been greatly increased by the passing of the Act. The same may be said of intermarriages between persons of different castes, though these are said to have become more numerous during the Prince of Wales's visit. All the marriages which took place before the Act might

have been registered retrospectively, and in this manner legalized, but only twenty-one were so registered. Singularly enough, too, even to this day, some Hindū Theists continue to prefer being married according to Brāhmic rites, without availing themselves of the Act. There appears to be a dislike to the Registrar, as if he were required to take the place of the minister of religion, whereas he simply witnesses the contract between the bride and bridegroom, and listens to the words by which they bind themselves to matrimonial union. Some Theists also object to the categorical repudiation of the Hindū religion which must precede the performance of the civil marriage, considering that because they are Brāhmas they are not, therefore, un-Hindūized.

Yet, it cannot be doubted that Mr. Sen and his followers deserve the gratitude of their fellow-countrymen for their labours in agitating for and obtaining the ratification of so useful an Act. At any rate the events of the year 1872 must always constitute an epoch in the history of the reforming movement.

For some time afterwards the Ādi Brāhma Samāj led by Debendra-nāth, and the Brāhma Samāj of India under Keshab Chandar Sen, achieved good work in their respective spheres, and in not unfriendly co-operation with each other. The two leaders, though very different in character, were both men of unusual ability, and both penetrated by a sincere desire for the regeneration of India. Each Samāj, too, had its able Secretary and Writer, the Ādi Samāj in Rāj Narain Bose, and the more progressive Samāj in Mr. Sen's cousin Pratāp Chandar Mozoomdār. Moreover, the Conservative Samāj had its literary organ in the *Tattva-bodhinī-patrikā*, and the Progressive in a daily newspaper called "The Indian Mirror."

No better proof of the activity of the two societies could be given than the success of their missionary operations. By the end of 1877 the number of Brāhma Samājes scattered throughout India, including Assam, had increased to a hundred and seven, some following the Conservative pattern, and some



the Progressive. In 1875 fresh attempts were made to establish a general representative Council of all the Samājes, and one or two meetings were held, but no definite scheme has yet been matured.

Meanwhile, lamentable dissensions leading to a serious schism have taken place in the Progressive Brāhma Samāj. Without doubt the career of this Samāj continued for several years to be one of real progress. It did sterling work in propagating its own reforming principles. It sent forth earnest missionaries to all parts of India. It put forth an ably written Sunday edition of its daily newspaper the Indian Mirror.<sup>1</sup> It encouraged fervour of faith and devotion (*bhakti*) to such an extent that it was accused of making religion an affair of mere emotion and excitement. One direction in which the devotional side of the movement developed itself was in the rapturous singing of hymns in chorus (*sankīrtana*), sometimes performed in procession through the streets. Another form of development was the establishment of Brāhmotsavas, or periodical religious festivals as seasons of special prayer, faith and rejoicing. Besides all this many members of the Society were remarkable for austerity of life, and the Samāj had a niche for those who gave themselves up to severe self-discipline and asceticism (*Vairāgya*).

The rock on which it split was its too unquestioning submission to the commanding ability of its leader. Keshab Chandar Sen had fought his way through difficulties, hardships and perils, with indomitable energy, but was not prepared for an unsuspected danger—the danger of success—the danger that too much praise would be lavished on the work he had accomplished. For many years his daily path had certainly not led him through clover; nor had his nightly rest been taken on a bed of roses. But prosperity proved a greater trial than adversity. Nowhere is eminent ability worshipped with more fervour than in India. So

<sup>1</sup> Besides the 'Indian Mirror' the *Sulabh Samāchār* ('Cheap News') and *Dharma-tattva*, 'Religious truth,' have long been exponents of Mr. Sen's teaching. Mr. Mozoomdar's *Theistic Annual* and his *Theistic Quarterly Review*, which has lately taken its place, are more recent advocates on the same side.

conspicuous were Mr. Sen's talents that his followers began to pay him reverence as if he had been more than human. He was even accused of accepting divine honours. This, of course, he indignantly denied, but his old Vaishṇava training was not without its influence on his own estimate of his own mission and office. He certainly supposed himself to be in some special manner a partaker of divine gifts. Even in his address, delivered so recently as January, 1879, though he answers the question, "Am I an inspired prophet?" in the negative, he lays claim to a kind of direct inspiration. He declares that he has had visions of John the Baptist, Jesus Christ and St. Paul, who all favoured him with personal communications, that the Lord said he was to have perennial inspiration from heaven, that all his actions were regulated by divine command (*ādeśa*), and that men should remember that to protest against the cause which he upheld was to protest against the dispensations of God Almighty.

Then, again, Keshab Chandar Sen was not merely an autocrat among his own people in matters of faith and doctrine. He was the sole administrator of the affairs of the Society, and ruled it with the rod of an irresponsible dictator. People began to complain that the Progressive Brāhma Samāj was without a constitutional government. It had no freedom of discussion in the management of its own affairs. Keshab Chandar Sen was not only its Bishop, Priest, and Deacon all in one. He was a Pope, from whose decision there was no appeal.

While all these elements of discontent were at work, a most unexpected revelation took place, the effect of which was to precipitate the disruption of the Samāj. It turned out, in fact, that Keshab Chandar Sen, with all his almost superhuman eloquence, ability, and genius, was nothing after all but a plain human being, with very human infirmities. It appears that as early as August, 1877, it began to be anxiously whispered that the great social Reformer was likely to sacrifice his own cherished principles at the altar of ambition. He, who had denounced early marriages as the curse of India, was said to be inclined to accept an offer of

marriage for his own daughter not yet fourteen, from the young Mahārāja of Kuch Behār not yet sixteen years of age. The rumour proved to be too true, and the Indian Mirror of February 9, 1878, formally announced that the marriage had been arranged. Protests from every conceivable quarter poured in upon the great social Reformer, but they were not only unheeded, they were absolutely ignored. The marriage took place on March 6, 1878, and not without idolatrous rites on the bride's side, though these were not performed in the presence of Mr. Sen himself.<sup>1</sup> In point of fact, the performance of certain ceremonies, such as the Homa, or fire-oblation, was necessary to secure the validity of the marriage in a Native State protected by our Government, but not subject to the operation of the Marriage Act. Immediately after the wedding, and before living with his child-wife, the young Mahārāja set out for England.

Subsequently the Dharma-tattva and the Indian Mirror published an elaborate justification of Mr. Sen's conduct. The defence set up was that Mr. Sen had no choice in the matter. He had acted, it was said—as was said of Muhammad of old—under divine command (*adeśa*), and in obedience to God's will. Moreover, it was contended that the marriage of his daughter with a Mahārāja had dealt a blow at caste-marriages, while the propagation of Theistic opinions in Kuch Behār and other Native States was likely to be materially promoted. Another line of defence taken was that Keshab Chandar Sen's mission had always been that of a religious and not secular Reformer.

Mr. Sen himself has lately made extraordinary efforts to restore his prestige by the elaboration of novel ideas and sensational surprises. The year 1879 was signalized by the institution of an order of professed teachers of religion, called *Adhyāpaks*. Four teachers were ordained by Mr. Sen on September 7, 1879, among whom was Mr. Mozoomdār.

<sup>1</sup> The Indian Mirror of March 17, 1878, informed its readers that "though the Rāja's Purohīts, who were orthodox Brahmins, were allowed to officiate at the ceremony, the Hom was not performed *during* the marriage; but after the bride and her party left the place. The principles of Brāhma marriage were barely preserved."

A curious practice has also been introduced of holding supposed conversations and passing days and nights as imaginary pilgrims with the great prophets, apostles and saints of the world—as, for example, Moses, Socrates, Chaitanya, the Rishis, Muhammad, Buddha—who are supposed to be present and to take part in the dialogues and to inspire the pilgrims with the fire of their own nature.

Furthermore, a remarkable “Proclamation” was issued in the Sunday Mirror of December 14, 1879, purporting to come from “India’s Mother.” It is here abridged:—“To all my soldiers in India my affectionate greeting. Believe that this Proclamation goeth forth from Heaven in the name and with the love of your Mother. Carry out its behests like loyal soldiers. The British Government is my Government. The Brāhma Samāj is my Church. My daughter Queen Victoria have I ordained. Come direct to me, without a mediator as your Mother. The influence of the earthly Mother at home, of the Queen Mother at the head of the Government, will raise the head of my Indian children to their Supreme Mother. I will give them peace and salvation. Soldiers, fight bravely and establish my dominion.”

This idea of God’s Motherhood as a correlative to God’s Fatherhood is, I need scarcely point out, thoroughly Hindū. It existed in Hindūism long before the Christian era.

Mr. Sen’s lecture delivered on the 24th January, 1880, called “God-vision,” is too full of rhapsody and rhetoric mixed up with many fine thoughts; but that delivered in the Town Hall, Calcutta, on the 9th of April, 1879, before at least a thousand persons, on the subject, “India asks, Who is Christ?” was pronounced by those who heard it to be a masterpiece of oratory.<sup>1</sup> He not only entranced his hearers by an extraordinary effort of eloquence; he surprised them by calling upon India to accept Christ. According to Mr. Sen, Christianity is the true national religion of his fellow-

<sup>1</sup> The Reverend Luke Rivington is my authority. He was present with the Bishop of Calcutta and a few other Europeans. Indeed the lecture was due to a previous conversation with Mr Rivington at a dinner-party given by Mr. Sen to him and to a large number of thoughtful natives.

countrymen. India is destined to become Christian, and cannot escape her destiny. "You, my countrymen," he says, "cannot help accepting Christ in the spirit of your national scriptures." In another part of the lecture we find him using these remarkable words:—"Gentlemen, you cannot deny that your hearts have been touched, conquered and subjugated by a superior power. That power, need I tell you? is Christ. It is Christ who rules British India, and not the British Government. England has sent out a tremendous moral force in the life and character of that mighty prophet to conquer and hold this vast empire. None but Jesus, none but Jesus, none but Jesus, ever deserved this bright, this precious diadem, India, and Jesus shall have it." It is evident, however, that Mr. Sen intends Christ to be accepted by his fellow-countrymen as the greatest of all Asiatic saints and not in the character ascribed to Him by the Church of England. "Christ comes to us," he says, "as an Asiatic in race, as a Hindū in faith, as a kinsman and as a brother . . . Christ is a true Yogī, and will surely help us to realize our national ideal of a Yogī. . . . In accepting Him, therefore, you accept the fulfilment of your national scriptures and prophets." This is all very striking, but seems rather like presenting Christianity to the Hindūs in the light of an advanced phase of Hindūism.

Mr. Sen's still more recent sermon preached on the 25th of last January announces the advent of a New Dispensation, which any one perusing the discourse will be surprised to find is a kind of amalgamation of Hindūism, Muhammadanism and Christianity.

As might have been expected, the Protesters, who objected to Mr. Sen's proceedings in regard to the marriage of his daughter, met together, soon after he left for Kuch Behār, to decide on their line of action. An unsuccessful attempt was then made to depose Mr. Sen from his office as Minister, and an unseemly struggle took place for the possession of the Mandir. In the end it was determined to establish a new church on a constitutional and catholic basis. All the provincial Samājes were consulted, and with the approval

of the majority, a meeting was held in the Town Hall, Calcutta, May 15, 1878, Mr. Ānanda Mohan Bose being in the chair, when the following resolution was passed :—

“ That this meeting deeply deplores the want of a constitutional organization in the Brāhma Samāj, and does hereby establish a Samāj to be called ‘The Sādhāran [or general] Brāhma Samāj,’ with a view to remove the serious and manifold evils resulting from this state of things, and to secure the representation of the views and the harmonious co-operation of the general Brāhma Community, in all that affects the progress and well-being of the Theistic cause and Theistic work in India.”

At first the Prayer Meetings of this the latest Brāhma Samāj, of which Mr. Ānanda Bose was the first President,<sup>1</sup> were held in temporary rooms, but a new Prayer Hall was commenced in January, 1879, and the building is now, I believe, nearly completed. At the same time, the Brāhma Public Opinion newspaper, and the Tattva-Kaumudī, ‘Moonlight of Truth,’ a fortnightly paper, were started as religious and literary organs of the protesting party.

It is scarcely possible as yet to predict what may be the future of this fourth development of the Brāhma Theistic movement. Its name, *Sādhāraṇa*, implies that it aims at more comprehensiveness, and a more democratic system of Church government, but its organization, though promising well under the leadership of Mr. A. M. Bose, is not as complete in relation to the rest of India as it may yet become. There appears in fact to be no one man at present among its members who has the religious genius of either Keshab Chandar Sen, or of Debendra-nāth Tāgore, or the literary culture which characterizes the best productions of Mr. P. C. Mozoomdār and Rāj Narāin Bose. But there are a larger number of secondary leaders—men of good sound sense, religious earnestness, and plain practical ability, who accomplish a great deal of useful work together, and will probably hereafter make their society the leading Samāj of India.

Some attempt at combined action between the numerous

<sup>1</sup> He has been succeeded by Babu Shib Chandar Deb.

bodies of Theists, which the operation of our educational system is rapidly calling into existence, is certainly needed; for there are now more than a hundred and twenty Theistic Churches scattered throughout the country. That at Madras, founded in 1871, and developed out of a previous Society, called the Veda Samāj, was well led for some time by its Secretary, Sridhāralu Naidu, but at his death languished. It revived in 1879, but seems to be still in want of a good leader. At Bombay, the Prārthanā Samāj, or Prayer Society, was the first Theistic Church of Western India. It was founded in 1867, and owes much of its continued vitality to the support of an enlightened native Doctor of Medicine, Dr. Ātmarām Pāndurang.

Many of the Samājes take an independent line of their own. Some are conservative, and conform to the pattern of the Ādi-Brāhma Samāj at Calcutta. Some, again, have distinct characteristics peculiar to themselves, which can only be understood by personal investigations in each locality.

I myself attended meetings of the Ādi-Brāhma Samāj at Calcutta, and of the corresponding Samāj, called the Prārthanā Samāj at Bombay. The services at the former were conducted by a son of Debendra-nāth. The sermon was preached from a raised platform or altar (*Vedi*); and three singers, seated in front of a kind of organ, chanted the hymns in loud tones, and with much warmth of manner and energetic gesticulation.

At Bombay the Manual used by the Prārthanā Samāj contained selections from the Veda, Upanishads, Christian Bible, Kurān, and Zand-Avasta. Hymns were sung with much fervour in a thoroughly Hindū fashion to an accompaniment played on the Vinā or Indian lute, and prayers were said, consisting chiefly of invocations of the Supreme Being, with praise and adoration of His attributes, but without confession of guilt, while the congregation remained seated, though their hands were joined in reverence. After the prayer a sermon was preached by Professor Bhāṇḍārkar of the Elphinstone College, who took for his text a passage from the Kathopanishad (vi. 15), thus translatable:—"Man can-

not obtain immortality till all the knots in his heart caused by ignorance and unbelief are untied (yadā sarve prabhidyante hṛdayasya granthayaḥ).” He then illustrated his text by quotations from other books. For example—a passage from Tukārām—the most popular Marāṭhī poet :—“There is no happiness other than peace. Therefore preserve peace, and you will cross over to yonder shore.” What chiefly struck me was the apparent absence of sympathy or *rapproch*, between the official performers of the services and the general congregation. The hymns were energetically sung by the appointed singers, the prayers earnestly repeated, and the address solemnly delivered by the minister, but the congregation neither stood nor knelt, and seemed to take no really cordial part in the proceedings. It is true that a sitting posture at prayer is customary, and by no means intended to imply irreverence; yet I came away persuaded that the Prārthanā-Brāhma-Samāj of Bombay, in spite of honest strivings after a pure soul-stirring Theism, is still chilled and numbed by the lingering influence of the old Vedāntic Pantheism, which it is unable wholly to shake off.

Before concluding this paper I should note that occasional Reformers still arise who make efforts to go back to the Veda, and to found a pure Theism on the doctrines contained in the hymns. A conservative Theistic movement of this kind has recently been inaugurated by a remarkable Gujarāṭī Brāhman named Dayānanda Sarasvatī Svāmī—now about 56 years of age—who calls his new church the Ārya-Samāj. He is a strong opponent of idolatry as well as of both Pantheism and Polytheism, but contends that the four Vedas are a true revelation, and that the hymns to Agni, Indra and Sūrya are really hymns to One God. In the printed statement of his creed he declares that he is not an independent thinker (nāham svatantraḥ), but a follower of the Veda; that the four texts (Saṃhitās) of the Vedas are to be received as a primary authority in all matters relating to human conduct; that the Brāhmaṇas beginning with the Śatapatha; the six Angas or limbs of the Veda, beginning with Śikshā; the four Upa-Vedas; the six Darśanas or



Schools of Philosophy, and the 1,130 schools of Vedic teaching (*śākhās*)<sup>1</sup> are to be accepted as secondary authority in expounding the meaning of the Vedas, and that adoration, prayer and devotion are to be offered to one God only, abstracted from all idea of shape and form, and without any second, as set forth in the Vedas.

Of course such a form of monotheistic teaching—including as it does the doctrine of metempsychosis (*punar-janma*)—is repudiated by the various Brāhma Samājes, and even by the Ādi-Samāj of Calcutta. Nor would Dayānanda himself admit an identity of teaching with the Brāhma Theistic movement. Nevertheless he is doing undoubted good by his uncompromising opposition to the later developments of Hindūism, including the whole circle of Purānic mythology.

And let us not be slow to acknowledge the good results likely to flow from all the agitation in Indian religious thought—all the upheaval of old ideas due to the various Theistic movements. Still less let us regard with suspicion the efforts of these modern Theistic Reformers, as if they were unfavourable to the progress of Christian truth. We may be quite sure that men like Debendra-nāth Tagore, Keshab Chandar Sen, and Ānanda Mohan Bose, are doing good work in a Christian self-sacrificing spirit, though they may fall into many errors, and may not have adopted every single dogma of the Athanasian Creed.

Let us hold out the right hand of fellowship to these noble-minded Patriots — men who, notwithstanding their undoubted courage, need every encouragement in their almost hopeless struggle with their country's worst enemies, Ignorance, Prejudice, and Superstition. Intense darkness still broods over the land — in some places a veritable Egyptian darkness thick enough to be felt. Let Christianity thankfully welcome and wisely make use of every gleam and glimmer of true light, from whatever quarter it may shine.

<sup>1</sup> That is "branches." Of these there are one thousand for the Sāma-veda, one hundred for the Yajur-Veda, twenty-one for the Rig-Veda, and nine for the Atharva-Veda. See Patanjali's *Mahābhāṣya*.