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VIII.

*On the VÉDAS, or SACRED WRITINGS of the
Hindus.*

BY H. T. COLEBROOKE, ESQ.

IN the early progress of researches into *Indian* literature, it was doubted, whether the *Védas* were extant; or, if portions of them were still preserved, whether any person, however learned in other respects, might be capable of understanding their obsolete dialect. It was believed too, that, if a *Bráhmán'a* really possessed the *Indian* scriptures, his religious prejudices would nevertheless prevent his imparting the holy knowledge to any, but a regenerate *Hindu*. These notions, supported by popular tales, were cherished long after the *Védas* had been communicated to DA'RA' SHUCOH; and parts of them translated into the *Persian* language, by him, or for his use*. The doubts were not finally abandoned, until Colonel POLIER obtained from *Jeyepúr* a transcript of what purported to be a complete copy of the *Védas*, and which he deposited in the *British* Museum. About the same time, Sir ROBERT CHAMBERS collected, at *Benares*, numerous fragments of the *Indian* scripture: General MARTINE, at a later period, obtained copies of some parts of it: and Sir WILLIAM JONES was successful in procuring valuable portions of the *Védas*, and in translating several cu-

* EXTRACTS have also been translated into the *Hindí* language: but it does not appear, upon what occasion this version into the vulgar dialect was made.

The tenth chapter closes with a hymn to night; and the eleventh begins with two hymns relative to the creation of the world. Another, on this subject was translated in a former essay*: it is the last hymn, but one, in the *Rigvéda*; and the author of it is AG'HAMARSHAN'A (a son of MAD'HUCH'HANDAS), from whom it takes the name by which it is generally cited. The other hymns, of which a version is here subjoined, are not ascribed to any ascertained author. PRAJA'PATI, surnamed *Paramésh't'hi*, and his son YAJNYA, are stated as the original speakers. But, of these names, one is a title of the primeval spirit; and the other seems to allude to the allegorical immolation of *Brahmá*.

I. 'Then was there no entity, nor nonentity; no world, nor sky, nor ought above it: nothing, any where, in the happiness of any one, involving or involved: nor water, deep and dangerous. Death was not; nor then was immortality: nor distinction of day or night. But THAT † breathed without afflation, single with (*Swad'há*) her who is sustained within him. Other than him, nothing existed, [which] since [has been]. Darkness there was; [for] this universe was enveloped with darkness, and was undistinguishable [like fluids mixed in] waters: but that mass, which was covered by the husk, was [at length] produced by the power

* *Asiatic Researches*, Vol. V. p. 361.

† The pronoun (*tad*), thus emphatically used, is understood to intend the supreme being according to the doctrines of the *Védánta*. When manifested by creation, he is the entity (*sat*); while forms, being mere illusion, are nonentity (*asat*). The whole of this hymn is expounded according to the received doctrines of the Indian theology, or *Védánta*. Darkness and desire (*Tamas* and *Cáma*) bear a distant resemblance to the Chaos and Eros of HESIOD. *Theog.* v. 116.

of contemplation. First desire was formed in his mind: and that became the original productive seed; which the wise, recognising it by the intellect in their hearts, distinguish, in nonentity, as the bond of entity.'

'Did the luminous ray of these [creative acts] expand in the middle? or above? or below? That productive seed, at once, became providence [or sentient souls], and matter [or the elements]: she, who is sustained within himself*, was inferior; and he, who heeds, was superior.'

'Who knows exactly, and who shall in this world declare, whence and why this creation took place? The gods are subsequent to the production of this world: then who can know whence it proceeded? or whence this varied world arose? or whether it uphold [itself], or not? He, who, in the highest heaven, is the ruler of this universe, does indeed know; but not another can possess that knowledge.'

II. 'That victim, who was wove with threads on every side, and stretched by the labors of a hundred and one gods, the fathers, who wove and framed and placed the warp and woof, do worship. The [first] male spreads and encompasses this [web]; and displays it in this world and in heaven: these rays [of the creator] assembled at the altar, and prepared the holy strains, and the threads of the warp.'

'What was the size of that divine victim, whom all the gods sacrificed? What was his form? what

* So *Swad'há* is expounded: and the commentator makes it equivalent to *Máyá*, or the world of ideas.