LETTERS ON HINDUISM
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LETTER I

INTRODUCTORY

My dear J..., 

I have undertaken to put you in possession of my views regarding Hinduism in a number of letters, which I promise at the outset, shall be as few as the subject admits. The necessity that there exists of bringing the same views before others of my educated countrymen has compelled me to travel beyond the limits to which the controversy between you and me would have restricted them, and I frankly admit at once that I write with a view to future publication which will explain much that would have been otherwise unintelligible to you. The same necessity, or at least an ambition on my part of obtaining a hearing from the educated portion of my countrymen, has induced me to write in a language which is neither your vernacular nor mine. We may laugh at but we can not ignore, the lofty contempt with which a large section of my educated countrymen regard their own vernacular. Conscious that no amount of eloquence or sound argument on my part will enable me to attain to the honor of being read by any considerable numbers of those whom, along with you, I intend to address,* if I made the unfortunate choice of my own vernacular as the medium of communication, I discard it in favour of what is, in the eyes of a subject race, the loftiest and holiest of human languages,

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*A Bengali gentleman of high attainments and a European representation once made enquiries of me regarding a certain vernacular publication. He felt that he had compromised his dignity by stooping to enquire about a vernacular publication, and he hastened to explain that his interest proceeded from the desire which his wife, to whom all literature but the vernacular was sealed treasure, felt to become acquainted with the publication in question.
the language of their rulers. To me who have spent the best years of my life in addressing my countrymen in my own vernacular, this seems like the desertion of a beloved parent by one who had betrayed a dutiful child and I feel that to you, who has been to me like a brother in this attachment to our own mother-tongue, I owe an explanation for this apparent desertion.

Hinduism, too, is not the exclusive property of us Bengalis, but belongs to all Hindus in India. Sanskrit has ceased to be to India what Latin was to Europe during the middle ages and any one who wishes to address all Hindus must of necessity write in English. I am not at all ambitious of finding European readers, when, as I expect to do, I come to publish these letters, but I shall be happy if any European friends of this country can be found to bestow on the matters contained in these letters such attention as to them they may seem to deserve.
set it back

sent from

sir, dear

I have no opportunity to send you in person any of the views regarding this subject that I promise at the earlier, that he as soon as possible the subject admits the necessity for these events of bringing the same views before the others of my education men less complicated.

As far as beyond the scope of the controversy between 182...
LETTER II

WHAT IS HINDUISM?

I have sought for an answer to this question from many, but have received none. I have read and heard much in condemnation of Hinduism, condemnation as strong as language can make it. Christians and their uneducated Hindu disciples unite in denouncing it as the most monstrous system of organised human depravity which has ever been called into existence. hard-hearted politicians and lachrymose philanthropists are alike convinced that to it alone is due the improvement and degradation of India. Learned philologists in Europe and half-educated missionaries in India combine in prescribing its immediate annihilation as the only possible remedy for all the evils from which that unhappy country is suffering, serenely unconscious that there are vast populations in India who are not Hindus, who are neither polytheists nor idolators, but who are even in a more unhappy condition than the Hindus.* In the writings and harangues of those who denounce so earnestly the evils of Hinduism I have sought for, but never obtained, any indication that the writer or speaker's notion of Hinduism went further than that it was a superstitious and polytheistic religion, the very worst of all superstitious and polytheistic religions, and that it is the duty of pious and benevolent Christians and of educated and progressive natives to misunderstand it, to misrepresent it and to revile it. If ever I entertained any doubts that it is possible to be exceedingly eloquent on subjects of which our own conceptions are dim and shadowy, the critics of Hinduism have certainly dispelled them.

Not that I have never received any reply to my question "What is Hinduism?" I asked an excited controversialist, "What is it

* The Mussalmans of Bengal for instance a population equal in that of......
that you denounce so furiously?” “Hinduism! why surely the religion
of the Hindus,” was the contemptuous reply. “Agreed,” said I, “and
pray what is a Hindu?” “Why—ah yes—a Hindu is a native of
Hindusthan,”—he was going to say, but as just then he happened to
cast his look on the flowing beard of his Mussalian neighbour, Gholum
Hyder Khan, he was obliged to alter his definition. “A Hindu,” said
he correcting himself, “is a person who professes the Hindu
religion.” I confessed myself obliged for this highly lucid explana-
tion, and was afterwards much exercised by a passage in Dr. Gold-
stocker’s writings, in which Dr. K. M. Banerji is described as a
Hindu writer.

Some time ago, I was attracted by the heading of certain
extremely learned letter which appeared in the Statesman newspaper.
from the pen of a well-known missionary resident in Calcutta entitled
“The cow, the mother of the Hindus.” Here at least, thought I, the
wicked Hindus are going to be thoroughly identified—and that by means
of their bovine ancestor. The learned gentleman, however, disappoint-
ed me by ultimately refusing to accord to the corrupt race the honor
of so illustrious a descent, and corrected himself by saying that the
cow was the mother not of the Hindus, but of their gods. So profound
was the learning of this writer, that it would have been useless to
attempt to convince him that the Cow is the mother only of calves.
even in the imagination of the Hindus, and that the mother of the Hindu
gods, was Aditi, the Infinite.

If any authority on the subject is to be respected it is that of
Sir Alfred Lyall—the ruler of the most purely Hindu province in
Hindusthan. Here is his description of Hinduism drawn as he thinks
from actual experience.

“A tangled jungle of disorderly superstitious ghosts and demons,
demigods, and deified saints, house-hold gods, tribal gods, local gods.
universal gods with their countless shrines and temples and the din
of their discordant rites; deities, who abhor a fly’s death, those who
still delight in human virtues, and those who would not either
sacrifice or make an offering—a religious chaos throughout a
WHAT IS HINDUISM

vast region never subdued or levelled (like all Western Asia) by Mohamedanism or Christian monotheism."

The appearance of this passage in Sir A. Lyall’s *Asiatic Studies* you must accept as a guarantee that is not a free translation from some Spanish Missionary in Costes’ army, but a description of Hinduism which is at least equally applicable to the religion of the Aztecs, is to say the least, is an unfortunate one. Nevertheless an official document published by the Bengal Government (Census Report 1881, vol. I, p. 71), characterises this passage as describing the present state of Hinduism in India in words “which should be learnt by heart by all who wish to understand the religious position here.”

And the same official document asks in despair “what is a Hindu?” and mournfully confesses that there never has been any satisfactory answer to the question, and there exists none (Census Report 1881, vol. I, p. 71). Nor is it for the first time that a government ruling over the destinies of seventy millions has confessed itself ignorant as to what forty millions of their subjects are in regard to Ethnology and religion. Mr. Beverley who reported on the first census, had put the same despairing question and had received to it the same mournful reply.

There is more wisdom in these official utterances than one would at first suspect. It is hard to define the words Hindu and Hinduism, because in the first place the word Hindu is used in two different senses, and next, because each of these different significations is itself exceedingly loose. There are Hindus by birth and Hindus by religion. Ethnologically, the signification is vague, because the term is applied to Aryans, as well as to non-Aryans, in cases where the latter have adopted the faith of the Aryans. The religious signification is loose, because it is applied indifferently to all the various religions professed by the Hindu race which the European had not at the earlier stage of his acquaintance with India, learned the name. Nothing can be more diametrically opposed to each other than the Sakta religion of the Tantras and the Vaisnavism of Chaitanya. The former delight in animal sacrifices, while to the latter the very language of slaughter
is an abomination; the former cling to the rules of caste with unflinching orthodoxy, the latter discard all distinction of caste. It is no exaggeration to say that there is greater affinity between Mahomedanism and Christianity than between the Saktaism of the Tantras and the Vaisnavism of Chaitanya. Nevertheless both these sects are classed as Hindus;—to the European they are simply different sects of Hinduism and the meek and abstemious Vaishnavism has to hear his share of the abuse levelled at the excesses of the Saktas—for are not both Hindus?

Is there not then such a thing as the Hindu religion? Search through all the vast written literature of India, and you will not except in modern writings where the Hindu has sought obsequiously to translate the phraseology of his conquerors, meet with any mention of such a thing as the Hindu religion. Search through all the vast records of pre-Mohamedan India, nowhere will you meet with even such a word as Hindu, let alone Hindu religion. Nay more. Search through the whole of that record, and nowhere will you meet with such a word as religion.

The word Dharma, which is used in the modern vernaculars as its equivalent, was never used in pre-Mohamedan India in the same sense as Religion.

The proper inference from this is not, that there were no Hindu in pre-Mohamedan India, or that the people had no religion. That would be to argue very like those Englishmen—happily a generation now nearly extinct—who finding no word in the vocabulary of the Bengali cooly or cultivator, which was the exact equivalent of the English word gratitude, drew the inference that gratitude was a virtue to which the Bengali was a stranger. The pre-Mohamedan Hindu called himself Arya, disdaining to include under the denomination the Indian whom he had conquered. For religion he had no name, because he never entertained any conception to which such a name would have been applicable. With other peoples, religion is only a part of life; there are things religious, and there are things lay and secular. To the Hindu, his whole life was religion. To the Euro-
pean, his relations to God and to the spiritual world are a thing sharply distinguished from his relations to man and to the temporal world. To the Hindu, his relations to God and his relations to man, his spiritual life and temporal life are incapable of being so distinguished. They form one harmonious and compact whole, to separate which unto its component parts is to break the entire fabric. All life to him was religion, and religion never received a name, because it never had for him an existence apart from all that had received a name from him.

A department of thought which the people in whom it had its existence had thus failed to differentiate, has necessarily mixed itself inextricably with every other department of thought, and this is what makes it so difficult at the present day, to erect it into a separate entity, and to define its nature. There is no Hindu conception answering to the term "Hinduism," and the question with which I began this letter, what is Hinduism, can only be answered by defining what it is that the foreigners who use the word mean by the term.

For, as you know, it is a word entirely of foreign origin. Originally Hindu was only the name of a river. The western neighbours of the early Aryan settlers on the banks of the Sindhu dropped the sibilant and substituted the aspirate. From the river, the name came in course of time to be extended to the dwellers on its banks; and from them again to all peoples of the same race and language with whom the same foreigners came into contact. It may be that all the peoples with whom they came into contact did not, even in those early ages, speak the same language. But all the languages were at any rate of common stock, and a foreigner would little understand provincial differences. The Hindus were then, in the eye of the foreigner, one people—of one race and one language, and it was assumed, and probably in those early ages at least, correctly assumed, that they had a common religion too. Any differences that may have a risen then would be imperceptible to the eye of the foreigner. The writings of the ancient Greeks who visited India so far as they are still in existence show that even those acute observers failed
to perceive any difference between Hinduism and Buddhism. Megasthenes and Ktesias apparently view the Brahmanas and the Sramanas as professors of the same religion.

If they assumed that the whole Hindu race had a common religion, that common religion very naturally received from its foreign critics the name of Hindu Religion. Mark now the sources of error that the further development of Hindu Society called into existence. The non-Aryan races conquered by the Aryans of India embraced the religion of their conquerors. And as a consequence of their embracing the faith of the Hindus, they too came to be ranked by foreigners as Hindus, though the Aryans themselves sternly refused to accord to them the honored name by which they distinguished themselves. The Hindus thus ceased to be one race. They soon ceased to be of one religion also, for the primitive faith soon developed itself into a multitude of independent religions. The differences in religion were, however, imperceptible to the foreigner who, without trying to understand anyone of the various systems, thought he discerned the same grotesque features in all; and the idea of a common religion of the Hindus has been retained to this day, and the supposed common religion has been honored by its European critics with the name of Hinduism.

Now in this use of the word Hinduism, there is a good deal of truth and a good deal of error. The truth that lies in it is this: all the various religions to which the name is applied have at least two features in common.

They are all sprung from a common source, and therefore hold many doctrines in common. They are all supported by sacred scriptures in Sanskrita, or in some other language sprung from the Sanskrita.

The errors implied in the use of a common name are manifold.

(1) The first is the application of a common name to diversified forms of faith sprung from a common stock leads, where the differences are not sufficiently studied, to attribute to the common faith a homogeneity it does not possess. That the various faiths are
all sprung from a common source, it is true, and it is true also that by reason of this community of origin, they possess certain features in common. The same however may be said, and would be even more true if said, of Judaism and Christianity. That would hardly justify the use of one name to designate both.

(2) Another error is that the religion of the Aryans of India has been the same throughout all history—that there is not only historical continuity but practical identity between the religion of the early Aryan settlers on the banks of the Sapt-Sindhu, and that of the modern Brahmans of Nuddia and Calcutta. Much light however has dawned upon our European critics* in the course of the last fifty years, and European scholars now confined the term Hinduism to the faith of modern India, while the earliest religion is called the Vedic, and the mediæval the Brahmanic. And the idea of all the religions sprung of the Indian stock having practically one religion conveniently designated by the name of Hinduism is also fast going away. The existence outside the pale of Hinduism of vast nations professing the Buddhistic religion has led to its recognition as a distinct faith, though theoretically there is no reason why it should be treated on a different footing from Chaitanya's Vaisnavism. The recognition of Buddhism as a distinct integral religion has led to the same honor being conferred on its kindred faith, and Jainism is now recognised as something which does not come under that comprehensive term. The national importance of the gallant defenders of the Anglo-Indian Empire has led to the recognition to [of] the faith of the Sikhs as an independent religion—though in reality it is one of its youngest offshoots. The same honor has been won by the splendid eloquence of Keshab Chandra Sen from admiring Europeans for the latest and smallest number of seceders from the great parent religion; and Brahmoism is believed by its foreign critics to be a formidable antagonist of the religion of which it seeks to be only a rational interpretation.

* Not apparently always upon my own countrymen. The following is an extract from a letter from so accomplished a native scholar as Dr. K. M. Banerji addressed to the Statesman and published in its issue of the . ..... December, 1882.
(3). A third and a very serious source of error arising out of this extensive application of the term Hinduism is that much is now believed to be a part of the Hindu religion, which is not religion at all, but is purely secular. I have said that the Hindus never sought to distinguish between religion and other departments of thought and feeling; and as a consequence the same principles, the same considerations, and even the same authorities guided them in their religious and their secular life. That however is no reason why, now that we are able to distinguish between the two, we should take to be religion all that [which] without being such, happens to be connected with religion as parts of one whole. Yet no one takes the trouble, in his study of Hinduism to separate the one from the other. Much that is purely social ethics, or usage written down and raised to the dignity of the Lex non Scripta, is swallowed up by the voracious modern scholar as the essence of Hinduism. It is at least as certain that the Hindus had their social polity, their codes of Ethics, their folk-lore, and their popular observances, as they had a religion; and it happens from the peculiar encyclopaedic character of their literary productions, that the same treatise has something to say on every one of these subjects. But that same rapacious animal, the modern scholar, seizes and gulps down the compound mixture as the pure article he was in search of. When talking of Hinduism, he entirely forgets that there is such a thing as secular Hinduism. Everything Hindu is merged into that whirlpool of things—the Hindu religion.

I have not yet done with this monstrous nature of misuse of a name. I have to point out a fourth error. Not only is Hinduism under the name of Hindu religion, held to include all Hindu religion—past and present, all things Hindu whether religious or secular, but also such that never has had any connection with ‘anything Hindu, religious or secular.’ Non-Aryan customs and observances retained by non-Aryan tribes converted into Hinduism, non-Aryan fetishism, popular superstitions without any warranty in Hinduism, and only similar to those that are to be found in every country Christian Mussulman or heathen, nursery legends disseminated by old crones
for the edification of class-going children, and such every other subject of popular or juvenile belief is pressed by the critic of Hinduism into his service, and a monstrous caricature of a national faith is thus manufactured and described in eloquent language. "as a tangled jungle of gods, ghosts, demons and saints," and other monsters, language which admiring statisticians call upon all students of Hinduism to learn by heart.

Let us eliminate all these sources of error. Let us rid our conception of Hinduism of this "tangled jungle of ghosts, demons and saints," and such other articles of belief which are to be found in every country and among peoples of all creeds, and which are no more essential parts of Hinduism than they are of Christianity. Let us free it also of all that is not properly religion but social polity or domestic morality, the unwritten law of the country, or general culture. Something of this no doubt will have to be included in Hinduism, if you conceive religion, as I think you do, to be a system of social culture, and I shall give to this point due consideration at its proper place. There will still remain a vast quantity of matter utterly foreign to religion which will have to be excluded. Thirdly, the term Hinduism has to be restricted to the articles of religious belief accepted by Hindus generally at the present day in exclusion of the Vedic and Brahmanic faiths out of which Hinduism evolved itself. Lastly, we have to remember that these articles of faith vary from province to province, differ in different sects in the same province, and even among individuals in accordance with the culture, or the mental constitution of the individuals concerned. Yet among all these varieties and divergences, will be found some common features, certain fundamental principles which form the basis of all. These fundamental principles will be found sufficient to constitute a religion in themselves, and this religion is Hinduism.

In thus restricting the application of the term Hinduism I do nothing which is arbitrary. I merely insist that if you wish to denote by it an existing religion, you must confine its application to an existing religion, and exclude all that does not properly belong to the
existing religion. If you seek to define Christianity, a Christian has
a right to insist that you should restrict the definition to that which
forms the common basis of the various denominations of Christianity,
and exclude all that is not common to them all. You must then
necessarily exclude the image worship and saint worship which is
peculiar only to certain forms of Christianity, exclude also the belief
in ghosts and demons which still obtain in many parts of Europe; throw
out of consideration the folklore of European peoples, nursery legends
and pre-Christian legends like those [incorporated] into the *Edda* and
the *Niebelungen Lied*; the leaven of Greek Paganism, which purely as an
aesthetic element, has found its way into the literature of Christian
countries and exclude many things beside. You must also distinguish it
from the Judaism out of which it has sprung. Fancy what a conception
of Christianity you would arrive at, if you included in it all this, and
not only all this, but also the political and social constitution of
Europe, its codes of morality, its jurisprudence, its international law
and its legislative enactments. Nay, go on further. Give to Dante
and to Milton in Christianity the place now occupied in the ordinary
conception of Hinduism by the Ramayana, and the Mahabharata, to
Tribonian and Puffendorf, to Montesquieu and Bentham that of Manu
and Yagnavalka, Gautama and Parasara; to the legends of King
Arthur and to the Romance of the Cid, to Ariosto and to Tasso.
the place of the Puranas, to Spinoza that of Badarayana; and give to
the writings of the early fathers, what they once possessed, the sanctity
and authority of the Upanishads; and you will then arrive at a notion
of Christianity very similar to the notion of Hinduism [to] which the
ignorance, the intolerance and the contempt of foreigners and the
degeneracy of natives have reduced it.

I do not exaggerate. Suppose a Hindu, ignorant of European
languages, travelled through Europe, and like most Europæans in his
situation, set about writing an account of his travels. What would be
his account of Christianity? Observing the worship of the Virgin and
the Saints in Catholic countries, he would take Christianity to be a
Polytheism. The worship of images would lead him to believe, that
Christianity was an idolatry also, and the reverence paid to the Crucifix would induce him to think that there was also a leaven of Fetishism in it. Protestant Christianity he would account to be a Dualism, a religion of the Good and Evil Principles,—a religion of God and the Devil. And if he mixed well enough with the ignorant peasantry of Christendom, he too would meet with that tangled jungle of ghosts and demons which it has been Sir Alfred Lyall's lot to meet with in India. And who shall say that the Hindu's account of Christianity would be wider of the truth than many an account of Hinduism by European or native?

To return to my definition of Hinduism. It will exclude as I have advanced, much that is popularly considered to be a portion of Hinduism even by Hindus themselves. That, however, is not and ought not to be an objection against the definition. It is precisely popular delusions of this sort that have encrusted Hinduism with the rubbish of ages—with superstitions and absurdities which subvert its higher purposes; and which it is the duty of every true Hindu, actively to assail and destroy. The noxious parasitic growth must be exterminated before Hinduism can hope further to carry on the education of the human race. Hinduism is in need of a reformation;—not an unprecedented necessity for an ancient religion. But reformed and purified, it may yet stand forth before the world as the noblest system of individual and social culture available to the Hindu even in this age of progress. I have certainly no serious hope of progress in India except in Hinduism*—in Hinduism reformed, regenerated and purified. To such reformation, it is by no means necessary that we should revert, like the late Dayananda Saraswati to old and archaic types. That which was suited to people who lived three thousand years ago, may not be suited to the present and future generations. Principles are immutable but the modes of their application vary according to time, to circumstances. The great principles of Hinduism are good

* "For a system to rise and be generally adopted it must during the greater part of the period of its supremacy be to a considerable extent in agreement with our nature and far from unfavourable to our peoples." *Catechism of the Positive Religion*, p. 384. Congreve's Translation, 1st edition.
for all ages and all mankind—for they are based on what Carlyle would call the “Eternal verities,” but its non-essential adjuncts have become effete and even pernicious in an altered state of society. It will be one of the objects of these letters to show what these non-essential adjuncts are. I shall describe what true Hinduism is by showing what false and corrupt Hinduism pretends to be. Let us not be awed and silenced by the imposing authority of ancient names, or be led away by pretended learning or antiquated jargon. Let us look steadily and boldly into the face of things; discard falsehood whenever we meet with it, hoary and hallowed by time though it may be; and if in our search we meet with Truth, let us drag it out of the darkness under which it was hid, and enthrone it in the light of Heaven. Let us revere the past, but we must, in justice to our new life, adopt new methods of interpretation, and adopt the old eternal and undying truths to the necessities of that new life.
LETTER III

I said in the last letter, that I define Hinduism as consisting in the fundamental principles which underlie various religious faiths of the modern Hindus. Hinduism, in the ordinary acception of the term is protean in its form. There is a monotheistic Hinduism, a dualistic Hinduism, a polytheistic Hinduism, a pantheistic Hinduism—and unless we resolutely exclude Buddhism from the group of Hindu religions—there is also an Atheistic Hinduism. There is a Ritualistic Hinduism, and a non-ritualistic Hinduism: there is a Hinduism of Asceticism; there is also a Hinduism of gross sensuality; there is the humane Hinduism of the Vaisnavas; and there is also the cruel and blood-thirsty Hinduism of certain Saivas and Saktas. There is the liberal and sympathetic Hinduism of the followers of Kabir and of Chaitanya; and there is also the illiberal and bigoted Hinduism,—one of its very worst form, which finds an expression in some of the ordinances of Manu. In spite however of this diversity, even this frequent antagonism, there is a common basis for all; certain fundamental principles which all accept, and which therefore alone is Hindu Religion. That which is outside this common basis, is excluded as being merely the special characteristic of some particular sect, with which the modern unsectarian Hindu has no concern. But besides their sectarian specialities, certain other things are also excluded from my definition, as not pertaining to religion. This exclusion indicates a grave defect in my definition or explanation whatever you may call it. I have tried to define the Hindu religion, without any explanation as to what I understand by religion. This is precisely the point where those who may take objection to the exclusion, are likely to join issue with me. Nor is this point quite easily settled. With many, religion is only theology—there are others who will consent to give the name to anything which excludes their own creed. A very ordinary idea of
religion is that it is a system of worship and sacrifice. So eminent an authority as Tylor, define religion to be "a belief in spirits;" spirit being with him a general name for god and ghosts. Positivists give quite rightly the name of religion to their own system, which utterly ignores and puts entirely out of court that theology to which alone the professors of religion have hitherto restricted the name. We have heard of a religion of Art, and a religion of Science. (See Natural Religion by the author of Ecce Homo. What then is religion?

Now I should trouble myself but little as to the fate of the Hindu Religion, or of any religion at all, if I accepted religion in the sense of the theologists or of philosophers of Mr. Tylor's school. I should leave my countrymen to believe or disbelieve in ghosts, spirits or gods at their pleasure. I yield to none in the firmness of my conviction in the existence of Great Authors of Nature and my trust in his providence, but I should care little whether my countrymen, or anyone else in the world, accepted the doctrine of His existence and His Providence, if I found that such acceptance enabled them to make an approach to Religion. I am not one of those who think that a belief in God, or in a number of gods, or in a future existence, or anything else which does admit of proof, constitute religion. But when such belief, or any belief whatever, furnishes a basis for conduct—for the conduct of the individual towards himself as well as towards others, when by becoming a common faith and therefore furnishing a common basis of conduct, it becomes a bond of union between man and man, a standard by which human existence individual and aggregate, comes to be regulated, it is religion. This is a very large definition, I admit. Religion, viewed thus, is in theory a philosophy of life; in practice it is a rule of life. It includes our beliefs, and the principles of our conduct founded upon those beliefs.

Now, test this definition by taking as an illustration an extreme case. Take the case of the Utilitarian. He has a rule of conduct,—the greatest good of the greatest number. No one has ever dreamt of applying the name of religion to simple Utilitarianism. But why, I ask, does the Utilitarian seek the greatest good of the greatest number?
Why does he seek the good? Because he loves the good. He is a worshipper of the good. That is his Religion. Nor is his religion a wholly false religion, for the good is entitled to our love and our worship, and to regulate our conduct. It is so far a false religion that it does not take cognizance of what along with the good claims our love and worship, and to regulate our life. It takes cognizance only of one of the aspects in which man and nature are presented to our apprehension. Add to it, the worship of the Beautiful and the true, and you have a complete religion. Add to Morality, Science and Art, and you have a complete guide to life.

You may reply to this, that this is culture, not Religion. I may reply to you, in the words of a writer, whom we both admire, that "the substance of Religion is Culture" (Natural Religion by the author of Ecce Homo, p. 145).

I hope however to return to this point in a future letter and shall now say no more. There may however be raised what certainly appears at first, as a much more formidable objection to this view of Religion, by those whom you, as a positivist, put out of court as supernaturalists. If the worship of the Good, the Beautiful and the True, suffice to form a complete religion, and is true religion, what becomes of the belief in a personal God and his Providence? This view of religion they may say, simply dispenses with it as an idle and unnecessary fable. By no means. I accept the worship of a personal god as the highest perfection of religion. A personal God alone realizes the highest and most perfect ideal of the Good, the Beautiful and the True. In that Ideal alone is realized the complete Unity and Harmony of Goodness, Truth and Beauty. If Religion is Culture, the worship of such of a perfect Ideal is by far the most important means of Culture.

What I really mean to say is, that what is called Supernaturalism is by no means essential to Religion. I believe firmly as I have said in the existence of God, and in His Providence, but I do not hold that any system of religion which does not believe in God and in His Providence, is no religion at all, or even that it is an incomplete
religion. What I do hold that such a Religion is imperfect religion, though not necessarily an incomplete religion. Completeness does not necessarily perfection. Completeness is attained when all the component parts exist, perfection when the component parts and the whole they form are exactly suited to the purposes they are destined to answer. Completeness has reference to unity; perfection to quality. A regiment is complete when it possesses the full complement of soldiers; it will nevertheless be imperfect if it is deficient in fighting qualities.

I may return to this subject in a future letter. Let me at present return to the more immediate purpose of this one. Religion, then, is a philosophy of life, and the principles of conduct flowing from it. Now take note that this conduct has to be distinguished from the principles themselves. In conduct, you apply a certain principle which you have accepted to the circumstances before you; the result is your conduct. The application may be erroneous; nothing is more common than erroneous applications of right principles. The principle may be good, but if the application is erroneous, the resulting conduct will be bad. The fault lies not with the principle on which you have acted, but in your own judgment. It would be absurd if the principles of Christianity were held responsible for all the wars, all the massacres, all the murders that have been committed in its name. Yet nothing is more common than this absurdity in respect of Hinduism. The principles of Hinduism are confounded with their erroneous application; and Hinduism is accused, judged and condemned because its principles have been misunderstood and perverted. If you hold that the principles of Christianity are not responsible for the slaughter of the Crusades, the butcheries of Alva, the massacre of St. Bartholomew or the flames of the Inquisition, I do not see how any one can hold the principles of Hinduism responsible for the immolation of Hindu widows on the funeral pyre. If the principles of Christianity are not responsible for the civil disabilities of Roman Catholics and Jews, which till lately disgraced the English Statute Book, I do not understand how the principles of Hinduism are to be held responsible for the civil disabilities of the Sudras under the
Brahmanic regime. The critics of Hinduism have one measure for their own religion, another for Hinduism. Principles and their erroneous application are distinguished in the case of the one, they are confounded in the case of the other.

And it was to guard against this confusion that I sought in the preceding letter, when I warned you against confounding Hinduism, or the Hindu religion, with what is not religion at all. Examine for a moment what this confusion means.

Hinduism, I have said, consist of certain fundamental principles which constitute a religion. Those fundamental principles must consist, if my view of Religion as a whole be accepted, of a body of doctrines, which constitute the theoretic belief of the Hindu, as well as the Elementary basis of his practical life. The principles which form the basis of practical life, came to be applied as Hindu society developed itself to the large problems of social existence. Thus came into existence a Hindu system of Ethics, Hindu systems of Philosophy, Hindu systems of Law, and a complicated social polity of which caste is a prominent feature. These were more or less based on practical applications of the principles of the Hindu religion, but are not the principles themselves. They have no more right of being considered as component parts of the Hindu religion, than the philosophy, or the moral theories, or the international Law of Europe as component parts of Christianity. And yet it is chiefly, if not wholly, on account of what is thus no part of Hindu religion, but often erroneous and corrupt application of its unquestioned principles, that Hinduism is reviled by foreigners and rejected by their native disciples. If the ultimate principles of Hinduism be found true and sound, and the practical applications of those principles erroneous, the wise course is not to subvert and annihilate Hinduism—which is now the cry of educated India, but to discard the erroneous applications and to remodel life in accordance with its true principles. That is the direction in which Religious Reform is most desirable, and in which alone I trust is its success possible.

You will now see why I have devoted two entire letters to a
definition of the term Hinduism. The extremely loose signification attached to it lies at the root of the whole mischief. [You as a positivist, and I as a Hindu, equally deplore the irreverence for the past, the dissociation with the dead and deathless teachers of Ancient India.] It is as if you gave the name A, sometimes to B, and sometimes to C, and then proceeded to take for granted that B and C are the same things. If you never learn to discriminate between the two, you will never learn much about either of them. Though one may be pure gold, and the other dross, you will either fling the gold after dross, or treasure up the dross with the gold. That is precisely the position of Hinduism. While the mass of the people cherish Hinduism, and with it, all its conceptions, its accretions, and its adjuncts, good or evil, the educated classes reject the whole. The one class treasures up the dross with the gold, while the other is flinging the gold after the dross.
LETTER IV

The two foregoing letters but little advanced us in our search after a clear conception of Hinduism. I have defined it to consist in the fundamental principles underlying the various denominations of faith professed by the Hindu peoples, but I have not said what those fundamental principles are. I am going to begin.

The fundamental principles do not lie on the surface. Hinduism in this respect labours under a disadvantage. It is not a religion founded and made symmetrical by a single founder. In the case of the great religions of the world the foundations of which were laid by individual founders, the governing principles lie on the surface. The very acceptance of a new Religion depends on the ease with which its principles can be apprehended by outsiders. The necessities of a new Religion induce the founders to give the utmost prominence to the fundamental principles. It thus becomes, at its very inception, a symmetrical work of Art. Indeed, it may be said of the great Historic Religions of the world, which owed their origins to individual founders, like Christianity or Mohamedanism, that at the outset there was little in the religion beyond the fundamental principles themselves. The legends and the rites, the mythology and the superstitions come afterwards. It is easy therefore to formulate the fundamental principles of such a religion; and when they are thus formulated, they easily carry assent.

Not so with Hinduism. Hinduism has had no founder human or divine. It never sprang forth, like Minerva from the head of some Brahminical Jove, armed and equipped for the conquest of the World. It is, like hundreds others of less known and less developed forms of faith—the product of nature. It sprang out of the necessities of primitive life and grew with the growth of culture. Its origin lies veiled in the mist of ages hidden in that impenetrable gloom of pre-
historic culture. It has developed itself from rude and simple beginnings, grown during the lapse of thousands of centuries, developed itself according to the necessities and the tendencies of the Hindu race, and has assimilated a vast quantity of foreign matter with which it came into contact. It is overlaid with a veritable "tangled jungle" of superstitions and absurdities which hide its proportions from the observer's view. There is no symmetry discernible in a structure of such spontaneous development. It is not the work of human Art, with its parts regularly arranged along definite lines. The development has no doubt proceeded along central lines of thought, but the overgrowth and rubbish have first to be swept away, and the whole has to be patiently surveyed, before these can be discerned.

To such a survey, it is necessary at the outset clearly to map out the whole field to be surveyed. Let us do so.

I have said that Religion is a Philosophy of life in theory, and in practice, principles of conduct in harmony with that philosophy. If Hinduism is a religion, we should expect to find it to consist of such a philosophy and such principles of conduct. The theoretical or philosophical religion is found in all cases to consist of a body of received doctrines; and the principles of practical conduct find expression in a system of worship, or rites and a code of religious morality. The doctrines of Hinduism have to be sought in a vast mass of literature, and are there taught either in the shape of legends or as dogmatic philosophy. The two often get intermixed. The legends often teach genuine philosophy while the dogmatic philosophy is very often found to consist of legendary materials. We shall begin with the legends, and then pass on to the dogmatic philosophy which developed itself out of the legends. I shall next take up the Hindu worship, its rites and sacrifices, and conclude with a survey of the ethics of Hinduism.

It is convenient to begin with the legends, because in them lie imbedded the early history of religion. The received legends of Hinduism are in themselves later developments of the historic myths,
and it becomes necessary to begin with the pre-historic myths themselves.

And here the Hindu has to acknowledge an immense debt to European scholars. The researches of European scholars have converted what was once unintelligible nonsense to a subject of accurate scientific study. What was hitherto unnecessary and meaningless, has now been shown to be a necessary condition of primitive culture, and full of deep signification. A myth can now be traced back from its ulterior development to its origin. The formation of myths has been found to be due to two distinct principles. One is the reflex action of language. The other is the action of the belief so universal in primitive man in the animation of all nature, that is in the production of phenomena by operation of Life and Will. To this has been given the not inappropriate name of Animism.

You are in such complete possession of the results of European research on this subject, and I dare say the same can be said of my educated countrymen in general that it is unnecessary for me to enter into detailed explanations. I shall content myself with an illustration or two.

Language and Animism have generally acted in concert in the production of myths. Language first names an object. The necessities of language require that there should be some correspondence between the name given and the object named, or in other words, that the name should be descriptive of the object. Now animism steps in. The object becomes a Personal Being, with Life and Will. The descriptive name now passes into a personal name. The attributes signified by the descriptive name become personal attributes of the personified object. Thus springs into existence the myth of a Supernatural Being animating a natural object, and possessing definite personal attributes. And names come to multiply, as each object becomes better and better known, and its properties and influences are better studied. As names multiply, the attributes multiply, each attribute comes to have a history of its own, until a simple natural object becomes the centre of a host of mythic legends.
You know how the Sanskrit word *Dyaus*, which you meet with in the first couplet of Amara Sinha's Lexicon, came to be the name of the bright Heavens. It is derived from a root *Div* to shine. The name originally meant simply the Bright or the Shining One. By and by the Bright Heavens were personified and the *Zeus* of Greece, the *Jovis* of Rome, the *Jui* of Germany, is this same bright sky, *Dyaus*, personified. Once personified, so great an object as the vast and magnificent sky had an attribute assigned to it, commensurate with its greatness. It was the father of the human race. So it became Dyaus Pitar in Sanskrit, Zeus Pater in Greek, and Jupiter in Latin. Nor is the conception of the human race confined to the Aryan nations only. You will find [it] in the *Tien* of the Chinese, among the Maoris, in Polynesia, among American races and in fact all over the world. Now mark how a myth continues to develop itself. If the Heavens are the father of the human race, they must have a mother too. And who so fit to be the consort of the wide-spreading heavens but the wide-spreading Earth herself? So by and by we have *Prithivi matar* in Sanskrit, *Ouranos* and *Gaia* (names of Heaven and Earth) among the Greeks, Chinese legends and *Maori* legends about mankind being the children of Heaven and Earth, an Earth mother among Peruvians, *Caribs*, Aztecs, and other American races, and even among Scythians. The forefathers of our English rulers, the Anglo-Saxon held that *Hal mes the folde, pra modor*.(?)

Now mark how legend passes into Philosophy. The mythical conception of Heaven as the father and Earth as the mother, of the human race was converted by the Chinese into a philosophical conception of two great principles in nature, the *Yu*, and the *Yung*, the one male, the other female, the one heavenly and the other Earthly. And the Brahmans of India formulated the same doctrine with greater elaboration and philosophical dignity in the Sankhya theory of Purusha and Prakriti. How this philosophical doctrine influenced the later religious faith of India, and even its secular literature, is a point on which I need not enlarge.

Another illustration, and a most beautiful one, I give in Professor
Max Müller's own language. "Before the Aryan nations separated, before there was a Latin, a Greek, or a Sanskrit language, there existed a root Svar or Sweol which meant to beam, to glitter, to warm. It existed in Greek Selas splendour Selene moon, in Anglo-Saxon, as swelan, to burn, to swell, in modern German, Schwül, oppressively hot. From it we have in Sanskrit the noun Svar, meaning sometimes the sky, sometimes the Sun; and exactly the same word has been preserved as Sol, in Gothic as Sauil, in Anglo-Saxon as Sol. A secondary form of Svar is the Sanskrit Surya, for Svarya, the Sun, which is the same word as the Greek Helios.

"All these names were originally mere predicates, they mean bright, brilliant, warm. But as soon as the name Swar or Surya was formed, it became through the irresistible influence of language, the name, not only of a living but of a male being. Every noun in Sanskrit must be either a masculine or a feminine, (for the neuter gender was originally confined to the nominative case), and as Surya had been formed as a masculine, language stamped it once for all as the sign of a male being, as much as if it had been the name of a warrior or a King. In other languages where the name for a Sun is feminine and the Sun is accordingly conceived as a woman, as the bride of the moon, the whole mythology of the love-making of the Heavenly bodies is changed."

Observe again how the myth proceeds to develop itself. If the sun is a male being, he must have his wife or wives. An unmarried Divinity, like the Kumara of later fiction, is an abhorrence to the spirit of legend. So the Sun is endowed with a couple of wives, one of whom is a very intelligible person, and must have sprung to her position very early. She is no other than his invariable companion—Chhaya or the shadow. And being a married God, of course he has a progeny. One of his sons, is the great Lord of Death. Another is the river Yamuna. You see at once that the early settlers in the land of the Saptasindhu, should name the Yamuna, which was to them an eastern river, the Child of the Sun, a metaphor which settled her paternity for ever in Hindu Mythology.
Thus myths are formed and grow. They are by no means the special property of the Hindus, or even of the Aryan races. The evidence collected by European writers, and especially by Mr. Tylor, shew that they lie wide-spread throughout the world. Every primitive religion is a religion of myths: and the religion of the primitive Aryan was also a religion of myths. To a people in a low state of culture hardly any other religion was possible. And in a very low state of culture it is as a religion sufficient for all practical purposes. As however a people advances in culture, higher religious conceptions take the place of the primitive myths. The myths are not forgotten; they still retain a place in the national recollection of the people, but only as folk-lore. So it was with Hinduism. As religious conceptions advanced, the legend sank to a subordinate place, the front rank being taken by the great systems of religious philosophy. In a country however where literature was the exclusive occupation of a large intellectual aristocracy, everything would and did find a place in literature, and among other things, the folk-lore. Owing to the encyclopædic character of Brahmanical compilations, the folk-lore found their place in the same treatises which among other things treated of the higher religious philosophy, and in the age of degeneration and decay which followed, ignorance led to the same reverence being accorded to all that was founded within the limits of the same literary compilation. The time has come when all this must be rectified, and the sacred legends of Hinduism receive from us that treatment which is their due but no more. And the treatment which is their due is not one which should consist either in contempt or in indifference. They have a deep signification of their own. They should be lovingly and reverentially studied in order that the true Hinduism latent in them may be discovered, and treasured up in the heart, and the spurious Hinduism patent in them may be denounced and discarded. The spurious Hinduism is in their literal interpretation; the true Hinduism is in their historic interpretation. I proceed to give a few illustrations.

Let us begin with one of the worst Pauranic legends. It is that
of Indra and his relation with the wife of his spiritual preceptor. You know the legend, and I shall not take upon myself the unenviable office of narrating it. Suffice it to say that as it stands, there is scarcely anything more gross or disgusting in the whole mythical literature of the world. The highest of the Vedic Gods, the Pauranic King of Heaven is described as committing a crime revolting to the coarsest ruffian on earth; and a punishment is meted out to him the grotesque obscenity of which surpasses even the atrocity of the crime itself. The revolting drama finally closes upon the thousand eyes of Indra. The assailant of Hinduism triumphantly points to the infamous legend as a specimen of the faith of which Hinduism is composed and exhorts the doomed race to forsake the accused faith. The degenerate Hindu, who believes all things and understands nothing, hangs down his head in shame before the triumphant assailant of the creed of his fathers.

Not so the true Hindu. He sees at a glance that the myth has a far deeper signification than this false though strictly literal explanation. He ascends from the Pauranic to the Vedic Indra, and from the Vedic Indra who delights in the Soma juice and slays Vritras to the pre-Vedic times when Indra was simply the Firmament. He sees that Indra from the root was simply the . . . , a descriptive name given to the Firmaments by the early fathers of the Aryan race. The moment he lights upon the Firmament as the true Indra, he at once comprehends the legend of Indra's thousand eyes—the thousand eyes of the Starry Heavens. It is not filth, but sweet, beautiful poetry—the poetry of human infancy and if he is at all a student of classic mythology, as certainly he ought to be, he will find that the legend of Indra's thousand eyes is not the only form in which this pre-Vedic poem still survives in the world, and that there is a Hellenic version of it in the legend of the hundred-eyed Argus, and that educated Greeks made a clear recognition of the myth. But what will impress and instruct him most, is the interpretation which the true spirit of Hinduism had put upon the original myth. The Starry Heavens were only a part of the Great Being who pervades
the Universe. The thousand eyes were therefore an attribute of the Great Being—the God of Pantheism. In the Purush Sukta of the Rig-Veda he is already described as Sahasraksha—thousand-eyed. The Great Being soon developed itself into a Personal God. The Personal God is Bhagabat. The word which gives him this name signifies totality of six attributes, viz., Jnana (knowledge), Aiswaryya (Lordship) Sakti (power), Bala (strength), Virya (Heroism), and Teja ( ). He is Bhagabat, because he possesses these attributes. Hinduism attributed to him these in Infinite Perfection, by attributing to him these attributes a thousand-fold. It was an expression of reverential awe of Infinite Perfection truly characteristic of Hinduism. But unfortunately the word from which Bhagabat derived his name, had also another signification, and the first of the two meanings being mistaken for the second gave rise to the disgusting legend of Indra's crime and punishment. It is the province of the educated Hindu to restore the grand meaning of the primitive myth, and to treasure it up as true sacred History—Sacred History in the sense of a history of true Religious conception.

I have taken here as a test case one of those legends which appear to the superficial observer one of the most atrocious of Pauranic legends. The silly contempt entertained on similar grounds by the blatant section of our half-educated countrymen, and by their half-educated European preceptors, tempt me to bring in, as further illustrations, the glorious legends of Radha and Krishna. The place of these legends,—legends, they scarcely can be said to be,—is so important that they require a separate letter by themselves and I must reserve them for detailed discussion. A single observation must here suffice, in regard not only to these, but in regard also to the cognate legends in the Tantras. I have already explained how the primitive myths of Dyaus Pitar and Prithivi Matar coalesced and developed themselves into a Dualistic Philosophy—into the doctrine of Yu and Yung among Chinese philosophers, and in the highly elaborated Sankhya doctrine of Prakriti and Purusha. In spite of its incomparable logic, and its profound analysis, the Sankhya is a cold
and dreary philosophy, a gloomy pessimism, taking an attitude of intense hostility to nature. It does not shrink from asserting that all life is misery. It sees no solution of the great problem of life, the relief from misery in nothing but knowledge. And knowledge is of value in its eyes only as furnishing the means of the dissociation of the Soul from Nature. This doctrine strikes at the root of all true Religion. It is the union of Soul with Nature—in the harmony of man with all that is outside himself—that lies true Religion. For here alone lie the sources of the Beautiful, and Truth, and Goodness. Here alone is true culture. And the lofty instinct of Hinduism, which is pre-eminently the religion of Culture, entered its protest against the barren doctrine. Legends based on previous traditions, and now elaborated and polished by gifted bards and profound philosophers were the shape into which the protest against the Pessimism of the Sankhya was thrown. These legends ran in two different grooves. One set gathered and took shape round a mythic Radha, representing Nature, with the historical Krishna representing Soul or the Purusha. The other set typified Nature in Sakti and Purusha in Siva, and were finally elaborated and systematized in the Tantras. The Radha myths represent the Religion of Love; the Sakti myths the religion of Discipline. With both Religion is Culture.

One of the most beautiful of these legends—untarnished and uncorrupted even down to the present day—is the story of the Destruction of Kama, the God of Desire. I need not give it at length; it is well known, not only to my own countrymen but even to European scholars, for it forms the subject of the most perfect poem in the Sanskrit language, the Kumar-Sambhava. In Kalidas's hands however it has received a remarkable development. Uma, the daughter of the Mountain and the heroine of the poem, represents External Nature and is the perfection of physical Beauty. But External Nature is not the whole of nature, and physical Beauty by itself it not the perfection of Beauty. The perfection of Existence is the result of the union of Nature with Soul; of the Physical with the Super Physical; of the Beauty with Truth and
Goodness; of the Human with the Divine. That is the action of the Poem—the marriage of Uma with Siva. But this union can be accomplished only through a sacrifice—the greatest feasible to nature, the sacrifice of Desire. This is the Destruction of Kama. In the poet’s view, Nature and Soul, are the two complementary parts of one Great Whole, and in their union consists the perfection of existence. Such is the last phase of the great protest of Hinduism against the pessimism of the Sankhya.

Take again one of the minor myths. Many primitive races have believed, and still believe that the passage to the other world lies across the water. It is a widely spread myth. The classic Styx and Acheron are familiar even to the Hindu student of European literature. There was even a time when the very island whose queen is India’s Empress was believed by people living on the continent to be the home of the Dead—who were supposed to be ferried over the channel by mysterious ferrymen rising at dead of night at the summons of some supernatural messenger. The Hindu myth corresponding to it is that of the Baitarani. Mummery and superstition can hardly go further than the length to which this interpretation and corruption of this legend have led. An insignificant stream bearing this name was met with in Orissa and notwithstanding that the ancient Scriptures locate the Baitarani at the Portals of Death, in utter darkness, ("Yama Dware mahaghoore tapta Baitarani Nadi")—the little stream in Orissa was at once identified with the terrible gulf between the two worlds. Even at the present day thousand of pilgrims flock every year to the little town of Jajapur, and there anticipate in life-time the solemn ordeal of the passage to the other world by a pleasant trip across the dry and sandy bed of the little river. The solemn farce is played out in earnest, and the whole is made exquisitely rich by the addition of a cow to the scene of whose tail, the pilgrim takes a firm hold as an aid in his perilous voyage. The anticipations of peril, I am glad to say, are in a few cases realized in the shape of a few smart kicks from the bovine guide.

Now the unfortunate pilgrims might have spared themselves all
this mummery if they had for a moment reflected on the meaning of
the word Baitarani. It cannot possibly mean that which is crossed,
though it may mean that by means of which we cross; it may mean,
I say, because the simpler form, tārani still means that by means of
which we cross namely, a boat. But on the face of it, the word
Baitarani, is a derivative from Bītarana, the act of giving away, and
the whole meaning of the Hindu legend is that in deeds of charity
lies the easiest passage from this world to the next.

I might go on multiplying instances to any length. Owing to the
vast bulk of the written religious literature of India, India is richer
than almost any other religion. It is impossible to treat exhaustively
of this vast body of legends within the compass of a single treatise,
and it is beyond the scope of the present to treat of any large number
of them. My object in this chapter has been to illustrate by means
of a few typical passage, the nature of the ground which these legends
occupy in Hinduism. A few additional observations in the legends I
reserve for the next chapter.
CHAPTER V

I shall be misleading the reader, if I led him to believe that all the Pauranic or other legends are capable of the same treatment as the foregoing. It would be neither even true that they are all merely later developments of primitive myths. A very large number of them are simply history—the record of past events exaggerated, inaccurate, and perverted accounts they may be—but nevertheless resting on a genuine basis of tradition. The history of the Pandavas, and that of Rama, are now universally admitted to be legendary history. They form no part of the Hindu religion—they are either history or poetry. With two remarkable exceptions the legendary heroes are nowhere the objects of worship. The two exceptions I mean are Rama and Krishna. The legends of Krishna do form the basis of a considerable portion of Hindu faith, and will require separate treatment. In the Rama legends there is nothing which is not either secular history or secular poetry; and in the Ramayana of Valmiki it is rarely that Rama appears in the character of a Divine Being. I shall have to return to Rama on a future occasion.

Euhemerism has by no means been absent from India, and many attempts have been made to explain, both etymologically and metaphysically many of the Hindu legends as allegories. Rama, for instance, is Goodness or Virtue, Sita, Purity, Ravana, Wickedness, and so on. It is needness to say that such efforts are perfectly worthless. I think similar ingenuity will enable any clever schoolboy to prove that the history of the Sikh wars is an allegory. Tej Singh and Lal Singh and Gulab Singh and Ranjit Singh and Hardinge and other names will serve his purpose admirably. Yet it is nevertheless true that a very large number of legends in the Puranas and other sacred books of the Hindus, perhaps the majority of such legends are allegories,—many of them are allegories of the very highest poetical merit or philosophical
value. Primitive myths are rarely allegorical, and all attempts at allegorical explanations of these are unscientific. But the case is different when, in a highly cultured society, poets and philosophers undertake to teach wisdom in parables. The Puranas were compilations embodied in which are nice allegories. I shall refer here as conspicuous instances to the Buddhistic legends explained with such remarkable ability by Dr. Rajendra Lala Mitra in his work on Buddha Gaya, and to the purely Hindu legends similarly treated by Babu Bhudev Mukherjee in his beautiful little book "Pushpanjali." That a legend should be an allegory is a matter so easily understood that I do not consider it necessary to burden this work with illustrations.

But what I specially wish the reader to guard against is the tendency to regard all explanations of legends as allegorical. I have known instances in which philological explanations of Sun-myths have led to their being characterized as "Solar allegories." There are others again who confound the case of a historical person taken to be the representative of a principle, with allegories in which principles are personified and invested with a historical significance. The explanations of the legend of Radha and Krishna given in the preceding chapter, may from this confusion, be mistaken to be allegorical. It is the very reverse of allegorical. The distinction is that in the one case, abstractions are personified; and that in the other persons with a historical existence come to be vested with the attributes of abstractions.

Thus we find among the legends of Hinduism, legends some of which are pure native myths. Others again are philosophical legends developed out of primitive myths. A third and a very large class of legends are pure history, or poetry super-added to history; and a fourth class are pure allegories. There is still however a fifth class, and these are very numerous and important. They will be found to be neither pure myth, nor pure history, nor philosophy, nor allegory but all together. They have been generally formed by the agglomeration of various kinds of legends round a nucleus, and present composite structures which it is always easy to pull down and take to
pieces. As an instance in point, I call attention to the story of the ten incarnations of Vishnu.

Vishnu himself is a central figure in Hinduism, and forms one of its essentials. The same may be said of the doctrine of Incarnation. Both Vishnu and the doctrine of incarnation will require from us a careful examination in a more advance stage of this enquiry. At present we are concerned with the legends only. His incarnations are ten. One Kalkin is still unborn. He is therefore the subject of a prophecy—rather than of a legend—the hope of an oppressed people rather than a dead figure in their Pantheon. Of the remaining nine, five only are Divine Manifestations in the human shape; in three others the God assumed the forms of brutes, and in one he was half-man and half-brute. Rationalizers are not wanting who see in this a foreshadowing of the modern doctrine of the Evolution of the most perfect form of life from the lowest in the manifestation of Him who, on the Pantheistic side of Hinduism, is himself the Universe. The first manifestation was that of the Fish, and this, say, is one of the lowest forms of life—one purely aquatic. The next was the Tortoise—an amphibious animal, which, though it really presents no advance upon the vertebrate organization of the fish, may easily have been thought to do so by primitive theorizers. The third is the Boar an unquestionable advance from fish and tortoise to a mammal. And the fourth is the link—the missing link which modern Evolutionists will be delighted to find, between the lower mammalia and man. He is here half-brute and half-man, the Narasinha. The fifth manifestation is human, and here the Evolutionists point out, there is gradual progress from a low type of humanity to its highest perfection. The fifth manifestation, Yamana, though human, is only an ugly dwarf, with no special gifts. The sixth Parasuram, is physically a great advance upon the dwarf. He is a powerful warrior, but there his merits end. He has no moral side. He is the murderer of his own mother, and the ruthless slayer of the whole Kshatriya race. The seventh manifests high moral qualities in addition to physical prowess. Ram Chandra is at once a model son, model husband, model brother, model friend,
a model warrior and a model ruler. But all this any ordinarily gifted human being properly educated, can attain to. Rama still wants the highest attribute of humanity—genius. This manifests itself in the crowning eighth Incarnation, Krishna. His is the genius which conquers without fighting, crushes hosts of wicked rulers by the power of human combinations alone, founds empires, on the basis of virtue and of truth and rules the whole world without even the ordinary title of a petty sovereignty. Here however the chain suddenly snaps—the gradation is lost;—for according to the Hindu view, Buddha, the ninth Avatara is a deluder and tempter. According to the more liberal ideas of Europe, he is however, “the wisest and greatest of the Hindus” (Rhys Davids on Buddhism).

All this is ingenious, no doubt, but unfortunately evidence is wanting to show that such an illustration of the Doctrine of Evolution—so little likely to be dreamt of by the ancient Brahmins, was the real object of the legends of the Ten Avatars. In order to arrive at the true genesis of the legend, we have to consider at what stage of Hinduism, it had its birth, and then to look for the pre-existing materials out of which it could have been shaped.

And here the inclusion of Buddha himself among the Ten is of signal service to the inquirers. The inclusion of Buddha among the Incarnations of Vishnu implies not only that the legend was posterior to the age of Buddha, but that it must have been formed at a period when the ascendancy of his religion was compelling the Brahmanas to conciliate and if possible to absorb it in their own; and this brings down the birth of the legend to comparatively modern times. It would be of course unscientific to assume that the doctrine of Vishnu’s incarnation did not exist prior to the inclusion of Buddha among the Avatars. The great historical personages who are included among the Ten had no doubt from a time considerably anterior to the inclusion of Buddha in the series had taken their place in the popular estimation as Incarnations of Vishnu. These were Krishna, Rama and Parasurama, the destroyer of the Kshatriya race. A fourth Buddha was now added. These four gathered round themselves
certain pre-existing myths which had received theological expansion. The most remarkable of these is the legend of Vamana. In the Satapatha Brahmana Vishnu is described as Vaman or Dwarf. This probably was a development of that paradox in the Purusha Sukta, where the Purusha is described as "filling space no larger than span". Further Vishnu is described in the hymns of the Rigveda (1. 22, 17, 1, p. 15) as making three steps. There it is nothing but pure poetry. Vishnu, the Universal Permeater is the Sun. The three steps represent his morning, his mid-day and his evening course. The poetry formulated itself in the course of time, by a process presently to be explained, into a magnificent physiologaty; and the physiologaty into polytheism. Vishnu was transformed from a Sun-God into One of the Supreme Trinity. He now represented the sustaining principle of the Universe; and his three steps covered the three Worlds, the world of the Gods (Swarga), the World of mortals (Martya), and the nether world (Patala). Bali, a pious and powerful Asura, had displaced gods and men from the dominion of Heaven and Earth. It was the Province of Vishnu, as the Regulating Principle, to readjust the condition of things. He then came down to Earth, and took the form of a Brahman Dwarf. At a great sacrifice celebrated by Bali where immense largesses were being given, the little Brahmana went to beg. His petition was most humble. Little as he was, he asked for only so much land as he could cover with three steps of his little feet. This was readily granted. The first step however covered the whole Heavens, and the second the whole Earth. Then the astonished monarch recognised Vishnu in this all-pervading Being, and things then adjusted themselves smoothly. It is impossible not to recognise in this legend the three steps of the Vedic Vishnu, transformed so as to correspond to the more modern conception of Vishnu himself.

Similarly indications exist, in regard to the Fish, the Tortoise and the Boar incarnations that these two were founded on ancient Vedic legends and grouped round Vishnu, the Preserving deity in more modern times.

The whole character of the Legends of the Incarnation of Vishnu
ought to be now clear. Great men in history had received, from the lustre of their deeds, and perhaps for even better reasons, divine honours and had been accepted by the people as incarnations of the Deity. The existence of this popular belief enabled later philosophers to give expression to a philosophical dogma. The Vedic religion had been a worship of the powers of Nature—a theory of the government of the Universe by the interposition of Supernatural Will. As culture advanced, the existence of an Order of nature, of fixed and immutable laws governing the very phenomena which hitherto had been believed to be controlled by the Will of a Supernatural Being or Beings. Even from the midst of Vedic hymns dimly shines forth the conception of a great Rūta, binding fast the actions of gods and men*. With the rise of Scepticism the government of the Universe by law became clear and definite. The philosophers, while yielding to the spirit of orthodoxy a nominal recognition of the authority of the Vedas, studied the universe only as governed by physical and moral laws. The founder of the Nyaya philosophy announced almost in the very language employed by John Stuart more than two thousand years after him—the great law of Causation—the invariable antecedence and sequence of events as the sole possible explanation of the production of phenomena †.

In the presence of this Law, the belief in supernatural interference in the Government of the world naturally faded away as it has done in modern Europe. Orthodox Brahmana theologians had to face, two thousand years ago, the same problem which perplex orthodox Christian theologians of the present day—the reconciliation of law with interposition of Divine Will. And the orthodox Brahmana theologians two thousand years ago had recourse to the same argument to which orthodox Christian theologians have recourse at the present day. God interferes, not by suspending or modifying his laws by a fiat of his Will but by second causes, that is, by controlling one set of laws by the operation of another set. I care not to discuss how the

* See Max Müller, Hibbert Lectures p. 235-244.
† Anyatha Siddhi Sanyasyaniyata Parihara Mātva Karanamatam.
argument is stated in Europe, or what is its worth. What is of
timportance to us is, that orthodox Brahmana theologians maintained
that God interfere for the benefit of his creatures by working with the
help of his own laws. And it was that he might save the world
in accordance with Law that he took form as Man or Beast. It
is by perfectly human means and in human ways that Rama destroyed
Ravana and his race, and it was equally by human means and in human
ways that Krishna destroyed Kansa and Sisupala, and
built up the Empire of the Pandavas. So with Vamana, Parasu-
ram and Buddha, and it is to be with Kalkin, the future conqueror
of the Mlechchhas. Even in the lower Incarnations, where the form
taken is not that of man, but beast, the same congruity with the Laws
of nature is preserved. As Fish, as Tortoise, or as Boar, the Deity
works out his ends in accordance with the laws of existence peculiar
to those animals. The Man-Lion at first appears to offer an exception,
which is explainable, and which no doubt was due to the pre-existing
character of the legend into which it had to be fitted into the new
theory.

The legends of the Ten incarnations, form, then a group arranged
out of pre-existing materials, historical or mythical with a view to
illustrate the mutual compatibility of the two theories of the Universe
which have always been in conflict with each other during the
progressive course of civilization. The modern Hindu, with his
superior culture, may accept or reject the doctrine of such compatibi-
licity according to his light, or may accept or reject the illustrations as
suitable or unsuitable. His rejection of the doctrine or of its
illustrations need not take away from him his faith in Hinduism, which
should rest on higher and firmer grounds than the acceptability of the
legends of Hinduism.

Let us now reveiw the results to which our examination of the
legends of Hinduism have led us. We have examined only a few
out of a countless multitude, a few drops of water from the vast depths
of an interminable ocean. It may take a life-time, and a life-time
may not suffice to survey even an appreciable fraction of these bound-
less fields; no such task falls within the scope of the present work. I could deal here with a few typical instances, but I am confident that all will yield readily to the same mode of treatment. It would be presumption in me to say that I have studied all existing legends of Hinduism, or even that am acquainted with, have made their meaning clear to me. But what I can say is that all that I have diligently studied in an enquiring spirit, have been found to be intelligible.

The results then to which our brief review of Hindu legends has led is this. There are legends which are primitive nature—myths, still existing in their primitive form, or developed into a higher and more ornate character. There are again legends which are only tarditional history, more or less embellished by the art of the poet, the decorateness being often borrowed from supernatural regions. Thirdly, there are legends, which are poetry pure and simple, in the form of allegory or fable. Lastly, there are legends which are of a composite character containing within it more than one of these elements and bearing traces of manipulation by the theologian and the philosopher.

The modern Hindu may often pronounce, and pronounce with justice, that the myths are simple and uninstructive, the history unauthentic, the poetry insipid, the philosophy false theology in disguise. And if he is not led away by prejudices fostered by his European education—prejudices which habit has made in him stronger than those imbibed with his mother's milk, he will see in these legends which belong to Hinduism but do not constitute Hinduism, much that is beautiful, much that is really instructive, much that is calculated to save him yet from the effects of that deadliest of moral poison—the intense materialism of modern Europe. They serve to embellish, to beautify, to explain and to illustrate the belief of his forefathers. Left for thousands of years to form the sole occupation of an idle literary class, they have run to waste, and now form a dense impenetrable jungle in the dark recesses of which vile things grow and flourish. The way must be cleared, the rank and noxious undergrowth, and the vile things that grow and flourish beneath it must be swept away. That
should perish which is fit to perish, but do not in your anger sweep away with it that which deserves to live. Search through all the vaunted literature of Europe—rich as she is in literary treasure, and find me something which is equal to the Hindu legend of Dhruba, of Prahlad, of Savitri, the wife of Satyaban, of Harishchandra, and moderate your contempt for the wisdom of ages, and study with becoming reverence the outcome of centuries of patient thought.