

## FIRST LECTURE.

DELIVERED AT THE ROYAL INSTITUTION,  
FEBRUARY 19, 1870.

WHEN I undertook for the first time to deliver a course of lectures in this Institution, I chose for my subject the *Science of Language*. What I then had at heart was to show to you, and to the world at large, that the comparative study of the principal languages of mankind was based on sound and truly scientific principles, and that it had brought to light results which deserved a larger share of public interest than they had as yet received. I tried to convince not only scholars by profession, but historians, theologians, and philosophers, nay everybody who had once felt the charm of gazing inwardly upon the secret workings of his own mind, veiled and revealed as they are in the flowing folds of language, that the discoveries made by comparative philologists could no longer be ignored with impunity; and I submitted that after the progress achieved in a scientific study of the principal branches of the vast realm of human speech, our new science, the Science of Language, might claim by right its seat at the Round-table of the intellectual chivalry of our Age.

Such was the goodness of the cause I had then to defend that, however imperfect my own pleading, the verdict of the public has been immediate and almost unanimous. During the years that have elapsed since

the delivery of my first course of lectures, the Science of Language has had its full share of public recognition. Whether we look at the number of books that have been published for the advancement and elucidation of our science, or at the excellent articles in the daily, weekly, fortnightly, monthly, and quarterly reviews, or at the frequent notices of its results, scattered about in works on philosophy, theology, and ancient history, we may well rest satisfied. The example set by France and Germany in founding chairs of Sanskrit and Comparative Philology, has been followed of late in nearly all the universities of England, Ireland, and Scotland. We need not fear for the future of the Science of Language. A career so auspiciously begun, in spite of strong prejudices that had to be encountered, will lead on from year to year to greater triumphs. Our best public schools, if they have not done so already, will soon have to follow the example set by the universities. It is but fair that schoolboys who are made to devote so many hours every day to the laborious acquisition of languages, should now and then be taken by a safe guide to enjoy from a higher point of view that living panorama of human speech which has been surveyed and carefully mapped out by patient explorers and bold discoverers: nor is there any longer an excuse why, even in the most elementary lessons, nay I should say, why more particularly in these elementary lessons, the dark and dreary passages of Greek and Latin, of French and German grammar, should not be brightened by the electric light of Comparative Philology.

When last year I travelled in Germany I found

that lectures on Comparative Philology were attended in the universities by nearly all who study Greek and Latin. At Leipzig there were hundreds of students who crowded the lecture room of the Professor of Comparative Philology, and the classes of the Professor of Sanskrit consisted of more than fifty undergraduates, most of them wishing to acquire that amount of knowledge of Sanskrit which is absolutely necessary before entering upon a study of Comparative Grammar.

The introduction of Greek into the universities of Europe in the fifteenth century could hardly have caused a greater revolution than the discovery of Sanskrit and the study of Comparative Philology in the nineteenth. Very few indeed now take their degree of Master of Arts in Germany or would be allowed to teach at a public school, without having been examined in the principles of Comparative Philology, nay in the elements of Sanskrit grammar. Why should it be different in England? The intellectual fibre, I know, is not different in the youth of England and in the youth of Germany, and if there is but a fair field and no favour, Comparative Philology, I feel convinced, will soon hold in England too, that place which it ought to hold at every public school, in every university, and in every classical examination<sup>1</sup>.

In beginning to-day a course of lectures on the

<sup>1</sup> Since this was written, Comparative Philology has been admitted to its rightful place in the University of Oxford. In the first Public Examination candidates for Honours in Greek or Latin Literature will be examined in the elements of Comparative Philology as illustrating the Greek and Latin languages. In the final Public Examination, Comparative Philology will form a special subject, by the side of the history of Ancient Literature.

*Science of Religion*,—or I should rather say on some preliminary points that have to be settled before we can enter upon a truly scientific study of the religions of the world,—I feel as I felt when first pleading in this very place for the Science of Language.

I know that I shall have to meet determined antagonists who will deny the very possibility of a scientific treatment of religions, as formerly they denied the possibility of a scientific treatment of languages. I foresee even far more serious conflicts with familiar prejudices and deep-rooted convictions; but I feel at the same time that I am prepared to meet my antagonists, and I have such faith in their honesty and love of truth, that I doubt not of a patient and impartial hearing on their part, and of a verdict influenced by nothing but by the evidence that I shall have to place before them.

In these our days it is almost impossible to speak of religion at all, without giving offence either on the right or on the left. With some, religion seems too sacred a subject for scientific treatment; with others it stands on a level with alchemy and astrology, as a mere tissue of errors or hallucinations, far beneath the notice of the man of science.

In a certain sense, I accept both these views. Religion is a sacred subject, and whether in its most perfect or in its most imperfect form, it has a right to our highest reverence. In this respect we might learn something from those whom we are so ready to teach. I quote from the 'Declaration of Principles' by which the church founded by Keshub Chunder Sen professes to be guided. After stating that no created object shall ever be worshipped, nor any man or inferior being

or material object be treated as identical with God, or like unto God, or as an incarnation of God, and that no prayer or hymn shall be said unto or in the name of any one except God, the declaration continues:-

‘No created being or object that has been or may hereafter be worshipped by any sect shall be ridiculed or contemned in the course of the divine service to be conducted here.’

‘No book shall be acknowledged or received as the infallible Word of God: yet no book which has been or may hereafter be acknowledged by any sect to be infallible shall be ridiculed or contemned.’

‘No sect shall be vilified, ridiculed, or hated.’

It might be thought, perhaps, that these broad sentiments of religious toleration were borrowed by Keshub Chunder Sen, or rather by the founder of the Brahma-Samâj, Rammohun Roy, from Christian writers. That may be so. But they need not have gone to Europe for these truly Christian principles. They might have found them inscribed on the very rocks of India, placed there more than 2000 years ago by Asoka, who ruled from 259 to 222 B.C. Asoka, who had left the old Vedic religion, and had embraced the essential principles of Buddha's teaching, says in one of his Edicts: ‘The King Piyadasi wishes that all sects should dwell everywhere (unmolested); for all of them approve of restraint (of the senses) and purification of the soul.’ And again, ‘The King Piyadasi honours all sects, monks and householders; he honours them by liberality and various kinds of favours. . . . But there is a fundamental law for every sect, namely moderation in speech, that one should not exalt one's own sect in decrying others,

and not depreciate them lightly, but that one ought on the contrary to show always to other sects the honour due to them. In this manner one exalts one's own sect, and benefits others, while in acting otherwise one injures one's own sect, and does not benefit others. He who exalts his own sect and decries others, does it from devotion to his own sect in order to make it illustrious, but really in acting thus he only damages his own sect. Therefore peace alone is good, so that all should hear and listen gladly to the opinions of others<sup>1</sup>.

The Students of the Science of Religion should at all events endeavour not to be outdone in impartiality by this ancient king. And, as for myself, I can promise that no one who attends these lectures, be he Christian or Jew, Hindu or Mohammedan, shall hear his own way of serving God spoken of irreverently<sup>2</sup>. But true reverence does not consist in declaring a subject, because it is dear to us, to be unfit for free and honest inquiry: far from it! True reverence is shown in treating every subject, however sacred, however dear to us, with perfect confidence; without fear and without favour; with tenderness and love, by all means, but, before all, with an unflinching and uncompromising loyalty to truth.

On the other hand, I fully admit that religion has

<sup>1</sup> 'Les Inscriptions de Piyadasi,' par E. Senart, 1881, p. 174; Septième Edit; p. 249, Douzième Edit.

<sup>2</sup> My attention has been directed to a curious instance of real atavism. My great grand-father, Baselow, the founder of the *Philanthropinum*, at Dessau, wrote almost *totidem verbis* 'that in the general divine service at his school nothing should happen by word or deed, that could not be approved of by every worshipper of God, be he Christian, Jew, Mohammedan, or Deist.' See 'Archiv für Lebensbeschreibung,' p. 63; Raumer, 'Geschichte der Pädagogik,' ii. p. 274.

stood in former ages, and stands also in our own age, if we look abroad, and if we look into some of the highest and some of the lowest places at home, on a level with alchemy and astrology. There exist superstitions, little short of fetishism; and, what is worse, there exists hypocrisy, as bad as that of the Roman augurs.

In practical life it would be wrong to assume a neutral position between such conflicting views. Where we see that the reverence due to religion is violated, we are bound to protest; where we see that superstition saps the roots of faith, and hypocrisy poisons the springs of morality, we must take sides. But as students of the Science of Religion we move in a higher and more serene atmosphere. We study error, as the physiologist studies a disease, looking for its causes, tracing its influence, speculating on possible remedies of this *lepis voceros*, but leaving the application of such remedies to a different class of men, to the surgeon and the practical physician. *Diversos diversa juvant* applies here as everywhere else, and a division of labour, according to the peculiar abilities and tastes of different individuals, will always yield the best results. The student of the history of the physical sciences is not angry with the alchemists, nor does he argue with the astrologists: he rather tries to enter into their view of things, and to discover in the errors of alchemy the seeds of chemistry, and in the hallucinations of astrology a yearning and groping after a true knowledge of the heavenly bodies. It is the same with the student of the Science of Religion. He wants to find out what religion is, what foundation it has in the soul of man, and what laws it follows in its historical growth. For that

purpose the study of errors is to him more instructive than the study of that religion which he considers the true one, and the smiling augur as interesting a subject as the Roman suppliant who veiled his face in prayer, that he might be alone with his God.

The very title of the Science of Religion will jar, I know, on the ears of many persons, and a comparison of all the religions of the world, in which none can claim a privileged position, will no doubt seem to many dangerous and reprehensible<sup>1</sup>, because ignoring that peculiar reverence which everybody, down to the mere fetish worshipper, feels for his *own* religion and for his *own* God. Let me say then at once that I myself have shared these misgivings, but that I have tried to overcome them, because I would not and could not allow myself to surrender either what I hold to be the truth, or what I hold still dearer than the truth, the right of testing truth. Nor do I regret it. I do not say that the Science of Religion is all gain. No, it entails losses, and losses of many things which we hold dear. But this I will say, that, as far as my humble judgment goes, it does not entail the loss of anything that is essential to true religion, and that if we strike the balance honestly, the gain is immeasurably greater than the loss.

One of the first questions that was asked by classical scholars when invited to consider the value of the Science of Language, was, 'What shall we gain by a comparative study of languages?' Languages, it was said, are wanted for practical purposes, for speaking

<sup>1</sup> 'The so-called "Science of Religion" of the present day, with its attempts to put into competition the sacred books of India and the Holy Scriptures, is deeply to be deprecated.' Bishop of Gloucester.



and reading; and by studying too many languages at once, we run the risk of losing the firm grasp which we ought to have on the few that are really important. Our knowledge, by becoming wider, must needs, it was thought, become shallower, and the gain, if there is any, in knowing the structure of dialects which have never produced any literature at all, would certainly be outweighed by the loss in accurate and practical scholarship.

If this could be said of a comparative study of languages, with how much greater force will it be urged against a comparative study of religions! Though I do not expect that those who study the religious books of Brahmans and Buddhists, of Confucius and Laotse, of Mohammed and Nânak, will be accused of cherishing in their secret heart the doctrines of those ancient masters, or of having lost the firm hold on their own religious convictions, yet I doubt whether the practical utility of wider studies in the vast field of the religions of the world will be admitted with greater readiness by professed theologians than the value of a knowledge of Sanskrit, Zend, Gothic, or Celtic for a thorough mastery of Greek and Latin, and for a real appreciation of the nature, the purpose, the laws, the growth and decay of language was admitted, or is even now admitted, by some of our most eminent professors and teachers.

People ask, What is gained by comparison?—Why, all higher knowledge is acquired by comparison, and rests on comparison. If it is said that the character of scientific research in our age is pre-eminently comparative, this really means that our researches are now based on the widest evidence that can be ob-

tained, on the broadest inductions that can be grasped by the human mind.

What can be gained by comparison?—Why, look at the study of languages. If you go back but a hundred years and examine the folios of the most learned writers on questions connected with language, and then open a book written by the merest tiro in Comparative Philology, you will see what can be gained, what has been gained, by the comparative method. A few hundred years ago, the idea that Hebrew was the original language of mankind was accepted as a matter of course, even as a matter of faith, the only problem being to find out by what process Greek, or Latin, or any other language could have been developed out of Hebrew. The idea, too, that language was revealed, in the scholastic sense of the word, was generally accepted, although, as early as the fourth century, St. Gregory, the learned bishop of Nyssa, had strongly protested against it<sup>1</sup>. The grammatical framework of a language was either considered as the result of a conventional agreement, or the terminations of nouns and verbs were supposed to have sprouted forth like buds from the roots and stems of language; and the vaguest similarity in the sound and meaning of words was taken to be a sufficient criterion for testing their origin and their relationship. Of all this philological somnambulism we hardly find a trace in works published since the days of Humboldt, Bopp, and Grimm.

Has there been any loss here? Has it not been pure gain? Does language excite our imagination less, because we know that, though the faculty of

<sup>1</sup> 'Lectures on the Science of Language,' vol. i. p. 32.

speaking is the work of Him who works in ~~all~~ things, the invention of words for naming each object was left to man, and was achieved through the working of the human mind? Is Hebrew less carefully studied, because it is no longer believed to be a revealed language, sent down from heaven, but a language closely allied to Arabic, Syriac and ancient Babylonian, and receiving light from these cognate, and in some respects more primitive, languages, for the explanation of many of its grammatical forms, and for the exact interpretation of many of its obscure and difficult words? Is the grammatical articulation of Greek and Latin less instructive, because instead of seeing in the terminations of nouns and verbs merely arbitrary signs to distinguish the plural from the singular, or the future from the present, we can now perceive an intelligible principle in the gradual production of formal out of the material elements of language? And are our etymologies less important, because, instead of being suggested by superficial similarities, they are now based on honest historical and physiological research? Lastly, has our own language ceased to hold its own peculiar place? Is our love for our own native tongue at all impaired? Do men speak less boldly or pray less fervently in their own mother tongue, because they know its true origin and its unadorned history; because they know that everything in language that goes beyond the objects of sense, is and must be pure metaphor? Or does any one deplore the fact that there is in all languages, even in the jargons of the lowest savages, order and wisdom; nay, something that makes the world akin?

Why, then, should we hesitate to apply the comparative method, which has produced such great results in other spheres of knowledge, to a study of religion? That it will change many of the views commonly held about the origin, the character, the growth, and decay of the religions of the world, I do not deny; but unless we hold that fearless progression in new inquiries, which is our bounden duty and our honest pride in all other branches of knowledge, is dangerous in the study of religions, unless we allow ourselves to be frightened by the once famous dictum, that whatever is new in theology is false, this ought to be the very reason why a comparative study of religions should no longer be neglected or delayed.

When the students of Comparative Philology boldly adapted Goethe's paradox, '*He who knows one language knows none,*' people were startled at first; but they soon began to feel the truth which was hidden beneath the paradox. Could Goethe have meant that Homer did not know Greek, or that Shakespeare did not know English, because neither of them knew more than his own mother tongue? No! what was meant was that neither Homer nor Shakespeare knew what that language really was which he handled with so much power and cunning. Unfortunately the old verb 'to can,' from which 'canny' and 'cunning,' is lost in English, otherwise we should be able in two words to express our meaning, and to keep apart the two kinds of knowledge of which we are here speaking. As we say in German *können* is not *kennen*, we might say in English, *to can*, that is to be cunning, is not *to ken*, that is to know; and it would then become clear at once, that the most eloquent speaker and the most

gifted poet, with all their cunning of words and skilful mastery of expression, would have but little to say if asked, what really is language? The same applies to religion. *He who knows one, knows none.* There are thousands of people whose faith is such that it could move mountains, and who yet, if they were asked what religion really is, would remain silent, or would speak of outward tokens rather than of the inward nature, or of the faculty of faith.

It will be easily perceived that religion means at least two very different things. When we speak of the Jewish, or the Christian, or the Hindu religion, we mean a body of doctrines handed down by tradition, or in canonical books, and containing all that constitutes the faith of Jew, Christian, or Hindu. Using religion in that sense, we may say that a man has changed his religion, that is, that he has adopted the Christian instead of the Brahmanical body of religious doctrines, just as a man may learn to speak English instead of Hindustani.

But religion is also used in a different sense. As there is a faculty of speech, independent of all the historical forms of language, there is a faculty of faith in man, independent of all historical religions. If we say that it is religion which distinguishes man from the animal, we do not mean the Christian or Jewish religion; we do not mean any special religion; but we mean a mental faculty or disposition, which, independent of, nay in spite of sense and reason, enables man to apprehend the Infinite under different names, and under varying disguises. Without that faculty, no religion, not even the lowest worship of idols and fetishes, would be possible; and if we will

but listen attentively, we can hear in all religions a groaning of the spirit, a struggle to conceive the inconceivable, to utter the unutterable, a longing after the Infinite, a love of God. Whether the etymology which the ancients gave of the Greek word *ἄνθρωπος*, man, be true or not (they derived it from *ὁ ἀνὸς ἀθρῶν*, he who looks upward), certain it is that what makes man man, is that he alone can turn his face to heaven; certain it is that he alone yearns for something that neither sense nor reason can supply, may for something which both sense and reason by themselves are bound to deny.

If then there is a philosophical discipline which examines into the conditions of sensuous or intuitional knowledge, and if there is another philosophical discipline which examines into the conditions of rational or conceptual knowledge, there is clearly a place for a third philosophical discipline that has to examine into the existence and the conditions of that third faculty of man, co-ordinate with, yet independent of, sense and reason, the faculty of the Infinite<sup>1</sup>, which is at the root of all religions. In German we can distinguish that third faculty by the name of *Vernunft*, as opposed to *Verstand*, reason, and *Sinn*, sense. In English I know no better name for it, than the faculty of faith, though it will have to be guarded by careful definition, in order to confine it to those objects only, which cannot be supplied either by the evidence of the senses, or by the evidence of reason, and the existence of which is nevertheless postulated by something without us

<sup>1</sup> I use the word Infinite, because it is less liable to be misunderstood than the Absolute, or the Unconditioned, or the Unknowable. On the distinction between the Infinite and the Indefinite, see Kant, 'Critique of Pure Reason,' translated by M. M., vol. ii. p. 442.

which we cannot resist. No simply historical fact can ever fall under the cognisance of faith, in our sense of the word.

If we look at the history of modern thought, we find that the dominant school of philosophy, previous to Kant, had reduced all intellectual activity to one faculty, that of the senses, '*Nihil in intellectu quod non ante fuerit in sensu*'—'Nothing exists in the intellect but what has before existed in the senses,' was their watchword; and Leibniz answered epigrammatically, but most profoundly, '*Nihil—nisi intellectus*,' 'Yes, nothing but the intellect.' Then followed Kant, who, in his 'Criticism of Pure Reason,' written ninety years ago, but not yet antiquated, proved that our knowledge requires, besides the data of sensation, the admission of the intuitions of space and time, and the categories, or, as we might call them, the laws and necessities of the understanding. Satisfied with having established the *a priori* character of the categories and the intuitions of space and time, or, to use his own technical language, satisfied with having proved the possibility of synthetic judgments *a priori*, Kant declined to go further, and he most energetically denied to the human intellect the power of transcending the finite, or the faculty of approaching the Infinite. He closed the ancient gates through which man had gazed into Infinity; but, in spite of himself, he was driven in his 'Criticism of Practical Reason,' to open a side-door through which to admit the sense of duty, and with it the sense of the Divine. This has always seemed to me the vulnerable point in Kant's philosophy, for if philosophy has to explain what is, not what ought to be, there will be and can be no

rest till we admit that there is in man a third faculty, which I call simply the faculty of apprehending the Infinite, not only in religion, but in all things; a power independent of sense and reason, a power in a certain sense contradicted by sense and reason, but yet a very real power, which has held its own from the beginning of the world, neither sense nor reason being able to overcome it, while it alone is able to overcome in many cases both reason and sense<sup>1</sup>.

According to the two meanings of the word religion, then, the science of religion is divided into two parts; the former, which has to deal with the historical forms of religion, is called *Comparative Theo-*

<sup>1</sup> As this passage has given rise to strange misunderstandings, I quote a passage from another lecture of mine, not yet published 'It is difficult at present to speak of the human mind in any technical language whatsoever, without being called to order by some philosopher or other. According to some, the mind is one and indivisible, and it is the subject-matter only of our consciousness which gives to the acts of the mind the different appearances of feeling, remembering, imagining, knowing, willing or believing. According to others, mind, as a subject, has no existence whatever, and nothing ought to be spoken of except states of consciousness, some passive, some active, some mixed. I myself have been sharply taken to task for venturing to speak, in this enlightened 19th century of ours, of different faculties of the mind,—faculties being purely imaginary creations, the illegitimate offspring of mediæval scholasticism. Now I confess I am amused rather than frightened by such pedantry. Faculty, *facultas*, seems to me so good a word that, if it did not exist, it ought to be invented in order to express the different modes of action of what we may still be allowed to call our mind. It does not commit us to more than if we were to speak of the *facilities* or *agilities* of the mind, and those only who change the forces of nature into gods or demons, would be frightened by the faculties as green-eyed monsters seated in the dark recesses of our Self. I shall therefore retain the name of faculty,' &c.

On the necessity of admitting a faculty of perceiving the Infinite I have treated more fully in my 'Lectures on the Science of Language,' vol. ii. pp. 625-632. The subject is ably discussed by Nicotra Sangro, in *L'Infinito di Max-Müller*, Catania, 1882.



logy; the latter, which has to explain the conditions under which religion, whether in its highest or its lowest form, is possible, is called *Theoretic Theology*.

We shall at present have to deal with the former only; nay it will be my object to show that the problems which chiefly occupy theoretic theology, ought not to be taken up till all the evidence that can possibly be gained from a comparative study of the religions of the world has been fully collected, classified, and analysed. I feel certain that the time will come when all that is now written on theology, whether from an ecclesiastical or philosophical point of view, will seem as antiquated, as strange, as unaccountable as the works of Vossius, Hemsterhuys, Valckenaer, and Lenep, by the side of Bopp's Comparative Grammar.

It may seem strange that while theoretical theology, or the analysis of the inward and outward conditions under which faith is possible, has occupied so many thinkers, the study of comparative theology has never as yet been seriously taken in hand. But the explanation is very simple. The materials on which alone a comparative study of the religions of mankind could have been founded were not accessible in former days, while in our own days they have come to light in such profusion that it is almost impossible for any individual to master them all.

It is well known that the Emperor Akbar (1542-1605)<sup>1</sup> had a passion for the study of religions, and that he invited to his court Jews, Christians, Mohammedans, Brahmans, and Zoroastrians, and had as many of their sacred books as he could get access to, trans-

\* See Note A, On Akbar.

lated for his own study<sup>1</sup>. Yet, how small was the collection of sacred books that even an Emperor of India could command not more than 300 years ago, compared to what may now be found in the library of any poor scholar! We have the original text of the Veda, which neither the bribes nor the threats of Akbar could extort from the Brahmans. The translation of the Veda which he is said to have obtained, was a translation of the so-called Atharva-veda, and comprised most likely the Upanishads only, mystic and philosophical treatises, very interesting, very important in themselves, but as far removed from the ancient poetry of the Veda as the Talmud is from the Old Testament, as Sufism is from the Koran. We have the Zendavesta, the sacred writings of the so-called fire-worshippers, and we possess translations of it, far more complete and far more correct than any that the Emperor Akbar obtained from Ardsher, a wise Zoroastrian whom he invited from Kirman to India<sup>2</sup>. The religion of Buddha, certainly in many respects more important than either Brahmanism, or Zoroastrianism, or Mohammedanism, is never mentioned in the religious discussions that took place every Thursday evening<sup>3</sup> at the imperial court of Delhi. Abulfazl, it is said, the minister of Akbar, could find no one to assist him in his inquiries respecting Buddhism. We possess the whole sacred canon of the Buddhists in various languages, in Pâli, Burmese, and Siamese, in Sanskrit, Tibetan, Mongolian, and Chinese,

<sup>1</sup> Elphinstone's 'History of India,' ed. Cowell, book ix. cap. 3.

<sup>2</sup> See 'Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal,' 1868, p. 14.

<sup>3</sup> See 'Ami Akbari,' transl. by Blochmann, p. 171, note 3.

and it is our fault entirely, if as yet there is no complete translation in any European tongue of this important collection of sacred books. The ancient religions of China again, that of Confucius and that of Laotse, may now be studied in excellent translations of their sacred books by anybody interested in the ancient faiths of mankind.

But this is not all. We owe to missionaries particularly, careful accounts of the religious belief and worship among tribes far lower in the scale of civilisation than the poets of the Vedic hymns, or the followers of Confucius. Though the belief of African and Melanesian savages is more recent in point of time, it may or may not represent an earlier and far more primitive phase in point of growth, and is therefore as instructive to the student of religion as the study of uncultivated dialects has proved to the student of language<sup>1</sup>.

Lastly, and this, I believe, is the most important advantage which we enjoy as students of the history of religion, we have been taught the rules of critical scholarship. No one would venture, now-a-days, to quote from any book, whether sacred or profane, without having asked these simple and yet momentous questions: When was it written? Where? and by whom? Was the author an eye-witness, or does he only relate what he has heard from others? And if the latter, were his authorities at least contemporaneous with the events which they relate, and were they

<sup>1</sup> See Tiele, 'De Plaats van de Godsdiensten der Naturvolken in de Godsdienstgeschiedenis,' Amsterdam, 1873. E. B. Tylor, 'Fortnightly Review,' 1866, p. 71.

under the sway of party feeling or any other disturbing influence? Was the whole book written at once, or does it contain portions of an earlier date; and if so, is it possible for us to separate these earlier documents from the body of the book?

A study of the original documents on which the principal religions of the world profess to be founded, carried on in this spirit, has enabled some of our best living scholars to distinguish in each religion between what is really ancient and what is comparatively modern; between what was the doctrine of the founders and their immediate disciples, and what were the afterthoughts and, generally, the corruptions of later ages. A study of these later developments, of these later corruptions, or, it may be, improvements, is not without its own peculiar charm, and is full of practical lessons; yet, as it is essential that we should know the most ancient forms of every language, before we proceed to any comparisons, it is indispensable also that we should have a clear conception of the most primitive form of every religion, before we proceed to determine its own value, and to compare it with other forms of religious faith. Many an orthodox Mohammedan, for instance, will relate miracles wrought by Mohammed; but in the Koran Mohammed says, distinctly, that he is a man like other men. He disdains to work miracles, and appeals to the great works of Allah, the rising and setting of the sun, the rain that fructifies the earth, the plants that grow, and the living souls that are born into the world—who can tell whence?—as the real signs and wonders in the eyes of a true believer. ‘I am only a warner,’ he says; ‘I cannot show you a sign—a miracle—

except what ye see every day and night, Signs are with 'God'.

The Buddhist legends teem with miserable miracles attributed to Buddha and his disciples—miracles which in wonderfulness certainly surpass the miracles of any other religion: yet in their own sacred canon a saying of Buddha's is recorded, prohibiting his disciples from working miracles, though challenged to do so by the multitudes, who required a sign that they might believe. And what is the miracle that Buddha commands his disciples to perform? 'Hide your good deeds,' he says, 'and confess before the world the sins you have committed.' That is the true miracle of Buddha.

Modern Hinduism rests on the system of caste as on a rock which no arguments can shake: but in the Vedas, the highest authority of the religious belief of the Hindus, no mention occurs of the complicated system of castes, such as we find it in *Manu*: nay, in one place, where the ordinary classes of the Indian, or any other society, are alluded to, viz. the priests, the warriors, the citizens, and the slaves, all are represented as sprung alike from Brahman, the source of all being.

It would be too much to say that the critical sifting of the authorities for a study of each religion has been already fully carried out. There is work enough still to be done. But a beginning, and a very successful beginning, has been made, and the results thus brought to light will serve as a wholesome caution to everybody who is engaged in religious researches. Thus,

<sup>1</sup> 'The Speeches and Table-talk of the Prophet Mohammed,' by Stanley Lane-Poole, 1882, *Introd.* p. xxxvi and xli.

if we study the primitive religion of the Veda, we have to distinguish most carefully, not only between the hymns of the Rig-veda on one side, and the hymns collected in the Sâma-veda, Yagur-veda, and Atharva-veda on the other, but critical scholars distinguish with equal care between the more ancient and the more modern hymns of the Rig-veda itself, so far as even the faintest indications of language, of grammar, or metre enable them to do so.

In order to gain a clear insight into the motives and impulses of the founder of the worship of Ahuramazda, we must chiefly, if not entirely, depend on those portions of the Zendavesta which are written in the Gâthâ dialect, a more primitive dialect than that of the rest of the sacred code of the Zoroastrians.

In order to do justice to Buddha, we must not mix the practical portions of the Tripitaka, the Dharma, with the metaphysical portions, the Abhidharma. Both, it is true, belong to the sacred canon of the Buddhists; but their original sources lie in very different latitudes of religious thought.

We have in the history of Buddhism an excellent opportunity for watching the process by which a canon of sacred books is called into existence. We see here, as elsewhere, that during the lifetime of the teacher, no record of events, no sacred code containing the sayings of the master was wanted. His presence was enough, and thoughts of the future, and more particularly, of future greatness, seldom entered the minds of those who followed him. It was only after Buddha had left the world, that his disciples attempted to recall the sayings and doings of their departed friend and master. At that time everything that seemed to

redound to the glory of Buddha, however extraordinary and incredible, was eagerly welcomed, while witnesses who would have ventured to criticise or reject unsupported statements, or to detract in any way from the holy character of Buddha, had no chance of even being listened to<sup>1</sup>. And when, in spite of all this, differences of opinion arose, they were not brought to the test by a careful weighing of evidence, but the names of 'unbeliever' and 'heretic' (*nāstika*, *pāśhanda*) were quickly invented in India as elsewhere, and bandied backwards and forwards between contending parties, till at last, when the doctors disagreed, the help of the secular power had to be invoked, and kings and emperors assembled councils for the suppression of schism, for the settlement of an orthodox creed, and for the completion of a sacred canon. We know of King Asoka, the contemporary of Seleucus, sending his royal missive to the assembled elders, and telling them what to do, and what to avoid, warning them also in his own name of the apocryphal or heretical character of certain books which, as he thinks, ought not to be admitted into the sacred canon<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> 'Mahāvansa,' p. 12, *Nānehi tatha vatthabbam* iv, 'it cannot be allowed to other priests to be present.'

<sup>2</sup> The following is Professor Kern's translation of the Second Bairat Rock Inscription, containing the rescript which Asoka addressed to the Council of Magadha: 'King Priyadarsin of Magadha greets the Assembly (of Clerics) and wishes them welfare and happiness. Ye know, Sirs, how great is our reverence and affection for the Triad which is called *Buddha* (the Master), *Faith*, and *Assembly*. All that our Lord Buddha has spoken, my Lords, is well spoken. Wherefore, Sirs, it must indeed be regarded as having indisputable authority, so the true faith shall last long. Thus, my Lords, I honour in the first place these religious works:—Summary of the Discipline, The Supernatural Powers of the Master (or of the Masters), The Terrors of the Future, The Song of the Hermit, The Sūtra on Asceticism, The Question of Upatishya, and the Admonition of Rāhula concerning Falsehood,

We here learn a lesson, which is confirmed by the study of other religions, that canonical books, though they furnish in most cases the most ancient and most authentic information within the reach of the student of religion, are not to be trusted implicitly, nay, that they must be submitted to a more searching criticism and to more stringent tests than any other historical books. For that purpose the Science of Language has proved in many cases a most valuable auxiliary. It is not easy to imitate ancient language so as to deceive the practised eye of the grammarian, even if it were possible to imitate ancient thought that should not betray to the historian its modern origin. A forged book, like the *Ezour-vedā*, which deceived even Voltaire, and was published by him as 'the most precious gift for which the West was indebted to the East,' could hardly impose again on any Sanskrit scholar of the present day. This most precious gift from the East to the West, is about the silliest book that can be read by the student of religion, and all one can say in its defence is that the original writer never meant it as a forgery, never intended it for the purpose for which it was used by Voltaire.

I may add that a book which has lately attracted considerable attention, *La Bible dans l'Inde*, by M. Jaccoliot, belongs to the same class of books. Though the passages from the sacred books of the Brahmans

uttered by our Lord Buddha. These religious works, Sirs, I wish that the monks and nuns, for the advancement of their good name, should uninterruptedly study and remember, as also the laics of the male and female sex. For this end, my Lords, I cause this to be written, and have made my wish evident.' See *Indian Antiquary*, vol. v, p. 257; Cunningham, '*Corpus Inscript. Indic.*' p. 132; Oldenberg, '*Vinaya-pitaka*,' vol. i, Introd. p. xl.



are not given in the original, but only in a very poetical French translation, no Sanskrit scholar would hesitate for one moment to say that they are forgeries, and that M. Jaccoliot, the President of the Court of Justice at Chandernagore, has been deceived by his native teacher. We find many childish and foolish things in the Veda, but when we read the following line, as an extract from the Veda:

*'La femme c'est l'âme de l'humanité,—*

it is not difficult to see that this is the folly of the nineteenth century, and not of the childhood of the human race. M. Jaccoliot's conclusions and theories are such as might be expected from his materials<sup>1</sup>.

With all the genuine documents for studying the history of the religions of mankind that have lately been brought to light, and with the great facilities which a more extensive study of Oriental languages has afforded to scholars at large for investigating the deepest springs of religious thought all over the world, a comparative study of religions has become a necessity. If we were to shrink from it, other nations and other creeds would take up the work. A lecture was lately delivered at Calcutta, by the minister of the Âdi-Samâj (i. e. the Old Church), 'On the Superiority of Hinduism to every other existing Religion.' The lecturer held that Hinduism was superior to all other religions, 'because it owed its name to no man; because it acknowledged no mediator between God and man; because the Hindu worships God, in the intensely devotional sense, as the soul of the soul; because the Hindu alone can

<sup>1</sup> See Selected Essays, vol. ii., p. 468 sq.

worship God at all times, in business and pleasure, and everything; because, while other Scriptures inculcate the practice of piety and virtue for the sake of eternal happiness, the Hindu Scriptures alone maintain that God should be worshipped for the sake of God alone, and virtue practised for the sake of virtue alone; because Hinduism inculcates universal benevolence, while other faiths merely refer to man; because Hinduism is non-sectarian (believing that all faiths are good if the men who hold them are good), non-proselytizing, pre-eminently tolerant, devotional to an entire abstraction of the mind from time and sense, and the concentration of it on the Divine; of an antiquity running back to the infancy of the human race, and from that time till now influencing in all particulars the greatest affairs of the State and the most minute affairs of domestic life<sup>1</sup>.

A Science of Religion, based on an impartial and truly scientific comparison of all, or at all events, of the most important, religions of mankind, is now only a question of time. It is demanded by those whose voice cannot be disregarded. Its title, though implying as yet a promise rather than a fulfilment, has become more or less familiar in Germany, France, and America; its great problems have attracted the eyes of many inquirers, and its results have been anticipated either with fear or with delight. It becomes therefore the duty of those who have devoted their life to the study of the principal religions of the world in their original documents, and who value religion and reverence it in whatever form it may present itself, to take possession of this new territory in

<sup>1</sup> See 'Times,' Oct. 27, 1872.

the name of true science, and thus to protect its sacred precincts from the inroads of those who think that they have a right to speak on the ancient religions of mankind, whether those of the Brahmans, the Zoroastrians, or Buddhists, or those of the Jews and Christians, without ever having taken the trouble of learning the languages in which their sacred books are written. What should we think of philosophers writing on the religion of Homer, without knowing Greek, or on the religion of Moses, without knowing Hebrew?

I do not wonder at Mr. Matthew Arnold<sup>1</sup> speaking scornfully of *La Science des Religions*, and I fully agree with him that such statements as he quotes would take away the breath of a mere man of letters. But are these statements supported by the authority of any scholars? Has anybody who can read either the Vedas or the Old and New Testaments in the original ever maintained that 'the sacred theory of the Aryas passed into Palestine from Persia and India, and got possession of the founder of Christianity and of his greatest apostles, St. Paul and St. John; becoming more perfect, and returning more and more to its true character of a "transcendent metaphysic," as the doctors of the Christian Church developed it?' Has Colebrooke, or Lassen, or Bournouf, ever suggested 'that we Christians, who are Aryas, may have the satisfaction of thinking that the religion of Christ has not come to us from the Semites, and that it is in the hymns of the Veda and not in the Bible that we are to look for the primordial source of any religion; that the theory of Christ is the theory of the

<sup>1</sup> 'Literature and Dogma,' p. 117.

Vedic Agni, or *fire*; that the Incarnation represents the Vedic solemnity of the production of *fire*, symbol of fire of every kind, of all movement, life, and thought; that the Trinity of Father, Son, and Spirit is the Vedic Trinity of Sun, Fire, and Wind; and God finally a cosmic unity.' Mr. Arnold quotes indeed the name of Burnouf, but he ought to have known that Eugène Burnouf has left no son and no successor.

Those who would use a comparative study of religions as a means for lowering Christianity by exalting the other religions of mankind, are to my mind as dangerous allies as those who think it necessary to lower all other religions in order to exalt Christianity. Science wants no partisans. I make no secret that true Christianity, I mean the religion of Christ, seems to me to become more and more exalted the more we know and the more we appreciate the treasures of truth hidden in the despised religions of the world. But no one can honestly arrive at that conviction, unless he uses honestly the same measure for all religions. It would be fatal for any religion to claim an exceptional treatment, most of all for Christianity. Christianity enjoyed no privileges and claimed no immunities when it boldly confronted and confounded the most ancient and the most powerful religions of the world. Even at present it craves no mercy, and it receives no mercy from those whom our missionaries have to meet face to face in every part of the world. Unless Christianity has ceased to be what it was, its defenders should not shrink from this new trial of strength, but should encourage rather than depreciate the study of comparative theology.

And let me remark this, in the very beginning, that no other religion, with the exception, perhaps, of early Buddhism, would have favoured the idea of an impartial comparison of the principal religions of the world—would ever have tolerated our science. Nearly every religion seems to adopt the language of the Pharisee rather than that of the Publican. It is Christianity alone which, as the religion of humanity, as the religion of no caste, of no chosen people, has taught us to study the history of mankind, as our own, to discover the traces of a divine wisdom and love in the development of all the races of the world, and to recognise, if possible, even in the lowest and crudest forms of religious belief, not the work of the devil, but something that indicates a divine guidance, something that makes us perceive, with St. Peter, 'that God is no respecter of persons, but that in every nation he that feareth him and worketh righteousness is accepted with him.'

In no religion was there a soil so well prepared for the cultivation of Comparative Theology as in our own. The position which Christianity from the very beginning took up with regard to Judaism, served as the first lesson in comparative theology, and directed the attention even of the unlearned to a comparison of two religions, differing in their conception of the Deity, in their estimate of humanity, in their motives of morality, and in their hope of immortality, yet sharing so much in common that there are but few of the psalms and prayers in the Old Testament in which a Christian cannot heartily join even now, and but few rules of morality which he ought not even now to obey. If we have once learnt to see in the exclusive

religion of the Jews a preparation of what was to be the all-embracing religion of humanity, we shall feel much less difficulty in recognising in the mazes of other religions a hidden purpose; & wandering in the desert, it may be, but a preparation also for the land of promise.

A study of these two religions, the Jewish and the Christian, such as it has long been carried on by some of our most learned divines, simultaneously with the study of Greek and Roman mythology, has, in fact, served as a most useful preparation for wider inquiries. Even the mistakes that have been committed by earlier scholars have proved useful to those who followed after; and, once corrected, they are not likely to be committed again. The opinion, for instance, that the pagan religions were mere corruptions of the religion of the Old Testament, once supported by men of high authority and great learning, is now as completely surrendered as the attempts of explaining Greek and Latin as corruptions of Hebrew<sup>1</sup>.

The theory again, that there was a primeval preternatural revelation granted to the fathers of the human race, and that the grains of truth which catch our eye when exploring the temples of heathen idols, are the scattered fragments of that sacred heirloom,—the seeds that fell by the wayside or upon stony places—would find but few supporters at present; no more, in fact, than the theory that there was in the beginning one complete and perfect primeval language,

<sup>1</sup> Tertullian, 'Apolog.' xlvii: 'Unde haec, oro vos, philosophis aut poetis tam consimilia? Non nisi de nostris sacramentis: si de nostris sacramentis, ut de prioribus, ergo fideliora sunt nostra magisque credenda, quorum imagines quoque fidem inveniunt.' See Hardwick, 'Christ and other Masters,' vol. i. p. 17.

broken up in later times into the numberless languages of the world.

Some other principles, too, have been established within this limited sphere by a comparison of Judaism and Christianity with the religions of Greece and Rome, which will prove extremely useful in guiding us in our own researches. It has been proved, for instance, that the language of antiquity is not like the language of our own times; that the language of the East is not like the language of the West; and that, unless we make allowance for this, we cannot but misinterpret the utterances of the most ancient teachers and poets of the human race. The same words do not mean the same thing in Anglo-Saxon and English, in Latin and French: much less can we expect that the words of any modern language should be the exact equivalents of words belonging to an ancient Semitic language, such as the Hebrew of the Old Testament.

Ancient words and ancient thoughts, for both go together, have in the Old Testament not yet arrived at that stage of abstraction in which, for instance, active powers, whether natural or supernatural, can be represented in any but a personal and more or less human form. When we speak of a temptation from within or from without, it was more natural for the ancients to speak of a tempter, whether in a human or in an animal form; when we speak of the ever-present help of God, they call the Lord their rock, and their fortress, their buckler, and their high tower. They even speak of 'the Rock that begat them' (Deut. xxxii. 18), though in a very different sense from that in which Homer speaks of the rock

from whence man has sprung. What with us is a heavenly message, or a godsend, was to them a winged messenger; what we call divine guidance, they speak of as a pillar of a cloud, to lead them the way, and a pillar of light to give them light; a refuge from the storm, and a shadow from the heat. What is really meant is no doubt the same, and the fault is ours, not theirs, if we wilfully misinterpret the language of ancient prophets, if we persist in understanding their words in their outward and material aspect only, and forget that before language had sanctioned a distinction between the concrete and the abstract, between the purely spiritual as opposed to the coarsely material, the intention of the speakers comprehended both the concrete and the abstract, both the material and the spiritual, in a manner which has become quite strange to us, though it lives on in the language of every true poet. Unless we make allowance for this mental parallax, all our readings in the ancient skies will be, and must be, erroneous. Nay, I believe it can be proved that more than half of the difficulties in the history of religion owe their origin to this constant misinterpretation of ancient language by modern language, of ancient thought by modern thought, particularly whenever the word has become more sacred than the spirit.

That much of what seems to us, and seemed to the best among the ancients, irrational and irreverent in the mythologies of India, Greece, and Italy can thus be removed, and that many of their childish fables can thus be read again in their original child-like sense, has been proved by the researches of Comparative Mythologists. The phase of language which gives rise, inevitably, we may say, to these misunder-



standings, is earlier than the earliest literary documents. Its work in the Aryan languages was done before the time of the Veda, before the time of Homer, though its influence continues to be felt to a much later period.

Is it likely that the Semitic languages, and, more particularly, Hebrew, should, as by a miracle, have escaped altogether the influence of a process which is inherent in the very nature and growth of language, and which, in fact, may rightly be called an infantine disease, against which no precautions can be of any avail?

I hold indeed that the Semitic languages, for reasons which I explained on a former occasion, have suffered less from mythology than the Aryan languages; yet we have only to read the first chapters of Genesis in order to convince ourselves, that we shall never understand its ancient language rightly, unless we make allowance for the influence of ancient language on ancient thought. If we read, for instance, that after the first man was created, one of his ribs was taken out, and that rib made into a woman, every student of ancient language sees at once that this account must not be taken in its bare, literal sense. We need not dwell on the fact that in the first chapter of Genesis a far less startling account of the creation of man and woman had been given. What could be simpler, and therefore truer, than: 'So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them. And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it?' The question then is, how, after this account of the creation of

man and woman, could there be a second account of the creation of man, of his lone estate in the garden of Eden, and of the removal of one of his ribs, which was to be made into a help meet for him?

Those who are familiar with the genius of ancient Hebrew, can hardly hesitate as to the original intention of such traditions. Let us remember that when we, in our modern languages, speak of the self-same thing, the Hebrews speak of the bone (אֵצֶמֶת), the Arabs of the eye of a thing. This is a well known Semitic idiom, and it is not without analogies in other languages. 'Bone' seemed a telling expression for what we should call the innermost essence; 'eye' for what we should call the soul or self of a thing. In the ancient hymns of the Veda, too, a poet asks: 'Who has seen the first-born, when he who had no bones, i.e. no form, bore him that had bones?' i.e. when that which was formless assumed form, or, it may be, when that which had no essence, received an essence? And he goes on to ask: 'Where was the life, the blood, the soul of the world? Who sent to ask this from any that knew it?' In the ancient language of the Veda, bone, blood, breath, are all meant to convey more than what we should call their material meaning; but in course of time, the Sanskrit *āman*, meaning originally breath, dwindled away into a mere pronoun, and came to mean self. The same applies to the Hebrew *'etzem*. Originally meaning bone, it came to be used at last as a mere pronominal adjective, in the sense of self or same.

After these preliminary explanations, we can well understand that, while if speaking and thinking in a modern language Adam might have been made to say

to Eve, 'Thou art the same as I am,' such a thought would in ancient Hebrew be expressed by: 'Thou art bone of my bone, and flesh of my flesh.' Let such an expression be repeated for a few generations only, and a literal, that is to say, a material and deceptive interpretation, would soon spring up, and people would at last bring themselves to believe that the first woman was formed from the bone of the first man, or from a rib, for the simple reason, it may be, because it could better be spared than any other bone. Such a misunderstanding, once established, retained its place on account of its very strangeness, for a taste for the unintelligible springs up at a very early time, and threatens to destroy among ancient nations the power of appreciating whatever is simple, natural, and wholesome. Thus only can it be explained that the account of the creation of the woman obtained its place in the second chapter, though in clear opposition to what had been said in the first chapter of Genesis<sup>1</sup>.

It is not always possible to solve these ancient riddles, nor are the interpretations which have been attempted by various scholars always right. The only principle I stand up for is this, that misunderstandings of this kind are inevitable in ancient languages, and that we must be prepared to meet with them in the religions of the Semitic as well as of the Aryan nations.

Let us take another Semitic religion, the ancient religion of Babylon, as described to us in the fragments of Berosus. The similarities between that religion and the religion of the Jews are not to be mistaken, but such is the contrast between the sim-

<sup>1</sup> See 'Selected Essays,' vol. ii. p. 456.

plicity of the Bible language and the wild extravagance of the Babylonian theogonies, that it requires some courage to guess at the original outlines behind the distorted features of a hideous caricature.

We have no reason to doubt the accuracy of Berosus in describing the religion of the Babylonians, at least for the time in which he lived. He was a Babylonian by birth, a priest of the temple of Belus, a contemporary of Alexander the Great. He wrote the History of the Chaldeans, in Greek, evidently intending it to be read by the Greek conquerors, and he states in his first book that he composed it from the registers, astronomical and chronological, which were preserved at Babylon, and which comprised a period of 200,000 years (150,000, according to the Syncellus). The history of Berosus is lost. Extracts from it had been made by Alexander Polyhistor, in the first century before our era; but his work too is lost. It still existed, however, at the time when Eusebius (270-340) wrote his *Chronicon*, and was used by him in describing the ancient history of Babylon. But the *Chronicle* of Eusebius, too, is lost, at least in Greek, and it is only in an Armenian translation of Eusebius that many of the passages have been preserved to us, which refer to the history of Babylon, as originally described by Berosus. This Armenian translation was published in 1818, and its importance was first pointed out by Niebuhr<sup>2</sup>. As we possess large extracts from Eusebius, preserved

<sup>1</sup> Bunsen, - *Egypt*, iv. p. 364.

<sup>2</sup> Eusebii Pamphili Cæsariensis Episcopi *Chronicon Bipartitum*, nunc primum ex Armeniaco textu in Latinum conversum, opera P. Jo. B. Aucher; Venetiis, 1818.

by Georgius the Syncellus, i. e. the concellaneus, or cell-companion, the Vice-patriarch of Constantinople, who wrote a Chronography about 800 A. D., it is possible in several places to compare the original Greek text with the Armenian, and thus to establish the trustworthiness of the Armenian translation.

Berosus thus describes the Babylonian traditions of the creation<sup>1</sup>:

'There was a time in which all was darkness and water, and in these were generated monstrous creatures, having mixed forms; men were born with two and some with four wings, with two faces, having one body, but two heads, a man's and a woman's, and bearing the marks of male and female nature; and other men with the legs and horns of goats, or with horses' feet, and having the hind quarters of horses, but the fore part of men, being in fact like Hippocentaurs. Bulls also were produced having human heads, and dogs with four bodies, having fishes' tails springing from their hinder parts; and horses with dogs' heads, and men and other creatures, having heads and bodies of horses, but tails of fishes; and other creatures having the shape of all sorts of beasts. Besides these, fishes, and reptiles, and snakes and many other wonderful and strange beings, one having the appearance of the other, the images of which are to be seen in the temple of Belus. At the head of all was a woman, called *Omorka*<sup>2</sup> (Armen. *Marcaja*), which

<sup>1</sup> Eusebii Chronicon, vol. i. p. 228 'Fragmenta Historicorum,' vol. II. p. 497.

<sup>2</sup> According to Lenczmann ('Deluge,' p. 30) *Beth Um-Urak*. In modern Armenian, *Am-arg* is said to mean mother-earth. Prof. Dietrich explained the word as *homer-kai*, the matter of the egg. See Bunsen's 'Egypt,' iv. p. 150.

is said to be *Thalath*<sup>1</sup> in Chaldean, and translated in Greek, *Thalassa* (or sea). When all these were thus together, *Belus* came and cut the woman in two: and one half of her he made the earth, and the other half the sky; and he destroyed all the creatures that were in her. But this account of nature is to be understood allegorically. For when all was still moist, and creatures were born in it, then the god (*Belus*) cut off his own head, and the gods mixed the blood that flowed from it with the earth, and formed men; wherefore men are rational, and participate in the divine intelligence.'

And *Belus*, whom they explain as *Zeus* (and the Armenians as *Aramazd*), cut the darkness in two, and separated earth and heaven from each other, and ordered the world. And animals which could not bear the power of the light, perished. And *Belus*, when he saw the desert and fertile land, commanded one of the gods to cut off his head, to mix the earth with the blood flowing from it, and to form men and beasts that could bear the air. And *Belus* established also the stars, and the sun, and the moon, and the five planets.'

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Sayce writes to me: 'Perhaps Lenormant is right in correcting Θαλάτθ (when compared with the Ταυθέ or Ταυθροφ of Damascius) into Θαυάτθ, that is, the Assyrian *Tāhamtu* or *Tamtu*, the sea, the Heb. תַּיְמָת. In this case the correspondence of the Babylonian account with Genesis i. 2 will be even greater.' Bunsen explained *Talādeth* from the Hebrew *yalad*, as meaning 'laying eggs.' Bunsen's 'Egypt,' vol. iv p. 150. Dr. Haupt ('Die Sumerische-akkadische Sprache,' p. 276) points out that *m* in Sumer-Accadian dwindled down to *v*, and that the same change may be observed in Assyrian also. Thus the Assyrian *Tāmdū*, sea (= *tahmatu*, or *tj'āmdu*, *t'āmtu*, stat. constr. *t'āmat*; cf. Hebrew *tehom*) is represented as *Tauθέ* by Damascius, 'Questiones de primis principiis,' ed. Kopp. p. 384), and *Damkina*, the wife of *Ēa*, as *Δαύκη*.

Nothing can be at first sight more senseless and confused than this Babylonian version of the genesis of the earth and of man; yet, if we examine it more carefully, we can still distinguish the following elements:

1. In the beginning there was darkness and water.

In Hebrew: Darkness was upon the face of the deep.

2. The heaven was divided from the earth.

In Hebrew: Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters . . . . . And God called the firmament Heaven; . . . . . and God called the dry land Earth.

3. The stars were made, and the sun and the moon, and the five planets.

In Hebrew: And God made two great lights; the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night; he made the stars also.

4. Animals of various kinds were created.

5. Men were created.

It is in the creation of animals in particular that the extravagant imagination of the Babylonians finds its widest scope. It is said that the images of these creatures are to be seen in the temple of Belus, and as their description certainly agrees with some of the figures of gods and heroes that may now be seen in the British Museum, it is not unlikely that the Babylonian story of the creation of these monsters may have arisen from the contemplation of the ancient idols in the temples of Babylon. But this would still leave the original conception of such monsters unexplained.

The most important point, however, is this, that

the Babylonians represented man as participating in divine intelligence. The symbolical language in which they express this idea is no doubt horrible and disgusting, but let us recollect that the Hebrew symbol, too, 'that God breathed into man's nostrils the breath of life,' is after all but another weak attempt at expressing the same idea,—an idea so exalted that no language can ever express it without loss or injury.

In order to guess with some hope of success at the original meaning of ancient traditions, it is absolutely necessary that we should be familiar with the genius of the language in which such traditions took their origin. Languages, for instance, which do not denote grammatical gender, will be free from many mythological stories which in Sanskrit, Greek, and Latin are inevitable. Dr. Bleek, the indefatigable student of African languages, has frequently dwelt on this fact. In the Preface to his *Comparative Grammar of the South-African Languages*, published in 1862, he says:

'The forms of a language may be said to constitute in some degree the skeleton frame of the human mind whose thoughts they express . . . How dependent, for example, the highest products of the human mind, the religious ideas and conceptions of even highly civilized nations, may be upon this manner of speaking has been shown by Max-Muller, in his essay on *Comparative Mythology* (*Oxford Essays*, 1856)<sup>1</sup>. This will become still more evident from our African researches. The primary cause of the ancestor worship of the one race (Kafirs, Negroes, and Polynesians), and of the sidereal worship, or of those forms

<sup>1</sup> 'Chips from a German Workshop,' vol. ii. pp. 1-146.



of religion which have sprung from the veneration of heavenly bodies, of the other (Hottentots, North-African, Semitic, and Aryan nations), is supplied by the very forms of their languages. The nations speaking Sex-denoting languages are distinguished by a higher poetical conception, by which human agency is transferred to other beings, and even to inanimate things, in consequence of which their personification takes place, forming the origin of almost all mythological legends. This faculty is not developed in the Kafir mind, because not suggested by the form of their language, in which the nouns of persons are not (as in the Sex-denoting languages) thrown together with those of inanimate beings into the same classes or genders, but are in separate classes, without any grammatical distinction of sex<sup>1</sup>.

If therefore, without possessing a knowledge of the Zulu language, I venture on an interpretation of an account of creation that has sprung up in the thought and language of the Zulus, I do so with great hesitation, and only in order to show, by one instance at least, that the religions of savages, too, will have to

<sup>1</sup> See also his Preface to the second volume of the Comparative Grammar, published 1869. Mr. E. B. Tylor has some valuable remarks on the same subject, in his article on the Religion of Savages, in the Fortnightly Review, 1866, p. 80. Looked at from a higher point of view, it is, of course, not language, as such, which dominates the mind, but thought and language are only two manifestations of the same energy, mutually determining each other. Failing to perceive this, one has to take refuge, like Tylor, with the old so-called anthropological theory, as the apparent source of all mythology. But this gives only a tautological, not a genetic explanation of mythology. There is an important difference between the inevitable and the extrinsic affections of the genius of language. The deepest source of mythology lies in the former, and must be carefully distinguished from the later sporadic diseases of language.

submit hereafter to the same treatment which we apply to the sacred traditions of the Semitic and Aryan nations. I should not be at all surprised if the tentative interpretation which I venture to propose, were proved to be untenable by those who have studied the Zulu dialects, but I shall be much more ready to surrender my interpretation, than to lose the conviction that there is no solid foundation for the study of the religions of savages except the study of their languages.

How impossible it is to arrive at anything like a correct understanding of the religious sentiments of savage tribes without an accurate and scholarlike knowledge of their dialects, is best shown by the old controversy whether there are any tribes of human beings entirely devoid of religious sentiments or no. Those who, for some reason or other, hold that religious sentiments are not essential to human nature, find little difficulty in collecting statements of travellers and missionaries in support of their theory. Those who hold the opposite opinion find no more difficulty in rebutting such statements<sup>1</sup>. Now the real point to settle before we adopt the one or the other view is, what kind of authority can be claimed by those whose opinions we quote; did they really know the language, and did they know it, not only sufficiently well to converse on ordinary subjects, but to enter into a friendly and unreserved conversation on topics on which even highly educated people are so apt to misunderstand each other? We want informants, in fact, like Dr. Callaway, Dr. Bleek, men

<sup>1</sup> See Schelling, *Werke*, vol. i. p. 72; and Mr. E. B. Tylor's reply to Sir John Lubbock, '*Primitive Culture*,' vol. i. p. 381.

who are both scholars and philosophers. Savages are shy and silent in the presence of white men, and they have a superstitious reluctance against mentioning even the names of their gods and heroes. Not many years ago it was supposed, on what would seem to be good authority, that the Zulus had no religious ideas at all; at present our very Bishops have been silenced by their theological inquiries.

Captain Gardiner, in his Narrative of a Journey to the Zoolu Country undertaken in 1835, gives the following dialogue:

'Have you any knowledge of the power by whom the world was made? When you see the sun rising and setting, and the trees growing, do you know who made them and who governs them?'

TPAI, a Zulu (after a little pause, apparently deep in thought),—'No; we see them, but cannot tell how they come; we suppose that they come of themselves.'

A. 'To whom then do you attribute your success or failure in war?'

TPAI. 'When we are not successful, and do not take cattle, we think our father (*Itongo*) has not looked upon us.'

A. 'Do you think your father's spirits (*Amatongo*) made the world?'

TPAI. 'No.'

A. 'Where do you suppose the spirit of man goes after it leaves the body?'

TPAI. 'We cannot tell.'

A. 'Do you think it lives for ever?'

TPAI. 'That we cannot tell; we believe that the spirit of our forefathers looks upon us when we go

to war; but we do not think about it at any other time.'

A. 'You admit that you cannot control the sun or the moon, or even make a hair of your head to grow. Have you no idea of any power capable of doing this?'

TPAI 'No; we know of none: we know that we cannot do these things, and we suppose that they come of themselves.'

It may seem difficult to find a deeper shade of religious darkness than is pictured in this dialogue. But now let us hear the account which the Rev. Dr. Callaway<sup>1</sup> gives of the fundamental religious notions which he, after a long residence among the various clans of the Zulus, after acquiring an intimate knowledge of their language, and, what is still more important, after gaining their confidence, was able to extract from their old men and women. They all believe, first of all, in an ancestor of each particular family and clan, and also in a common ancestor of the whole race of man. That ancestor is generally called the Unkulunkulu, which means the great-great-grandfather<sup>2</sup>. When

<sup>1</sup> Dr. Callaway, 'Unkulunkulu,' p. 54

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. p. 48. *Unkulunkulu*, the word by which God is rendered in Zulu, is derived, according to Bleek, by reduplication of a (nasalised) form of the 9th class from the adjective stem -kulu (great, large, old, u-ku-kula, to grow, etc.), and seems to mean originally a great-great-grandfather, or the first ancestor of a family or tribe, though perhaps the unnasalised form *u-kulukulu* is at present more usual in this signification. Then it was applied by metaphor to that being from whom everything was derived, who according to the Zulu tradition has created all men, animals, and other things to whom life and death are due, &c. In Inhambane the word for God, derived from the same root is *Muluŋgulu*; in Ki-hiŋu, Ki-kamba, and Kinika it is *Muluŋgu*; in Ki-suaheli, *Mlungu*; in Makua, *Mulungo* or *Muluko*; in Sofala, *Murungu*; in Tette, *Murungo* or *Morungo*; in the Ku-suaheli dialect

pressed as to the father of this great-great-grandfather, the general answer of the Zulus seems to be that he 'branched off from a reed,' or that he 'came from a bed of reeds.'

Here, I cannot help, suspecting that language has been at work spinning mythology. In Sanskrit the word (parvan) which means originally a knot or joint in a cane, comes to mean a link, a member; and, transferred to a family, it expresses the different shoots and scions that spring from the original stem. The name for stem or race and lineage in Sanskrit is *vamsa*, which originally means a reed, a bamboo-cane. In the Zulu language a reed is called *uthlanga*, strictly speaking a reed which is capable of throwing out offshoots<sup>1</sup>. It comes thus metaphorically to mean a source of being. A father is the *uthlanga* of his children, who are supposed to have branched off from him. Whatever notions at the present day the ignorant among the natives may have of the meaning of this tradition, so much seems to be generally admitted, even among Zulus, that originally it could not have been intended to teach that men sprang from a real reed<sup>2</sup>. 'It cannot be doubted,' Dr. Callaway writes, 'that the word alone has come down to the people, whilst the meaning has been lost.'

of Mombas, *Mwigo*; in the Ki-pokomo, *Mwigo*; in Otyi-Herero, *Mukuru*; see Bleek, 'Comparative Grammar,' §§ 389-394. In Herero *tata Mukuru* is our father *Mukuru*; see Kolbe's 'English-Herero Dictionary,' s. v. God.

<sup>1</sup> Dr. Callaway, 'Unkulunkulu,' p. 2, note.

<sup>2</sup> In Herero, 'tata memu, i Mukuru' means, 'we have been created, i. e. broken out of the omumborombonga (creation-tree) in Herero fashion by Mukuru; see Kolbe's 'English-Herero Dictionary,' s. v. God.

The interpretation which I venture to propose of this Zulu myth is this:—The Zulus may have said originally that they were all offshoots of a reed, using reed in the same sense in which *vanṣa* is used in Sanskrit, and meaning therefore no more than that they all were children of one father, members of one race. As the word *uthlanga*, which came to mean race, retained also its original meaning, viz. reed, people, unaccustomed to metaphorical language and thought, would soon say that men came from a reed, or were fetched from a bed of reeds, while others would take *Uthlanga* for a proper name and make him the ancestor of the human race. Among some Zulu tribes we actually find that while *Unkulunkulu* is the first man, *Uthlanga* is represented as the first woman<sup>1</sup>. Among other tribes where *Unkulunkulu* was the first man, *Uthlanga* became the first woman (p. 58).

Every nation, every clan, every family requires sooner or later an ancestor. Even in comparatively modern times the Britons, or the inhabitants of Great Britain, were persuaded that it was not good to be without an ancestor, and they were assured by Geoffrey of Monmouth that they might claim descent from Brutus. In the same manner the Hellenes, or the ancient inhabitants of Hellas, claimed descent from Hellen. The name of Hellenes, originally restricted to a tribe living in Thessaly<sup>2</sup>, became in time the name of the whole nation<sup>3</sup>, and hence it was but natural that *Æolos*, the ancestor of the *Æolians*,

<sup>1</sup> Dr. Callaway, 'Unkulunkulu,' p. 58. According to the Popol Vuh the first woman was created from the marrow of a reed see 'Selected Essays,' ii. p. 394.

<sup>2</sup> Hom. II. 2. 684.

<sup>3</sup> Thucyd. i. 3.

*Doros*, the ancestor of the Dorians, and *Xuthos*, the father of Achæos and Ion; should all be represented as the sons of Hellen. So far all is intelligible, if we will only remember that this is the technical language of the heraldic office of ancient Greece.

But very soon the question arose, who was the father of Hellen, the ancestor of the Greeks, or, according to the intellectual horizon of the ancient Greeks, of the whole human race? If he was the ancestor of the whole human race, or the first man, he could only be the son of Zeus, the supreme god, and thus we find that Hellen is by some authorities actually called the son of Zeus. Others, however, give a different account. There was in Greece, as in many countries, the tradition of a general deluge by which every living being had been destroyed, except a few who escaped in a boat, and who, after the flood had subsided, repopled the earth. The person thus saved, according to Greek traditions, was called *Deukalion*, the ruler of Thessaly, the son of Prometheus. Prometheus had told him to build a ship and furnish it with provisions, and when the flood came, he and his wife Pyrrha were the only people who escaped.

Thus it will be seen that the Greeks had really two ancestors of the human race, Hellen and Deukalion, and in order to remove this difficulty, nothing remained but to make Hellen the son of Deukalion. All this is perfectly natural and intelligible, if only we will learn to speak, and not only to speak, but also to think the language of the ancient world.

The story then goes on to explain how Deukalion

became the father of all the people on earth; that he and his wife Pyrrha were told to throw stones (or the bones of the earth) backward behind them; and that these stones became men and women. Now here we have clearly a myth or a miracle,—a miracle, too, without any justification, for if Pyrrha was the wife of Deukalion, why should not Hellen be their son? All becomes clear, if we look at the language in which the story is told. Pyrrha means the Red, and was originally a name for the red earth. As the Hellenes claimed to be indigenous or autochthonic, born of the earth where they lived, Pyrrha, the red Earth, was naturally called their mother, and being the mother of the Hellenes, she must needs be made the wife of Deukalion, the father of the Hellenes. Originally, however, Deukalion, like Manu in India, was represented as having alone escaped from the deluge, and hence the new problem how, without a wife, he could have become the father of the people? It was in this perplexity, no doubt, that the myth arose of his throwing stones behind him, and these stones becoming the new population of the earth. The Greek word for people was *λαός*, that for stones *λίθες*;—hence what could be more natural, when children asked, whence the *λαός* or the people of Deukalion came, than to say that they came from *λίθες* or stones<sup>1</sup>?

I might give many more instances of the same kind, all showing that there was a meaning in the

<sup>1</sup> The North American Indians told Roger Williams, that 'they had it from their fathers, that *Kautantouwit* made one man and woman of a stone, which dialking, he broke them in pieces, and made another man and woman of a tree, which were the fountain of all mankind.' 'Publications of Narragansett Club,' vol. i. p. 158.



most meaningless traditions of antiquity, all showing, what is still more important, that these traditions, many of them in their present state absurd and repulsive, regain a simple, intelligible, and even beautiful character if we divest them of the crust which language in its inevitable decay has formed around them.

We never lose, we always gain, when we discover the most ancient intention of sacred traditions, instead of being satisfied with their later aspect, and their modern misinterpretations. Have we lost anything if, while reading the story of Hephæstos splitting open with his axe the head of Zeus, and Athene springing from it, full armed, we perceive behind this savage imagery, Zeus as the bright Sky, his forehead as the East, Hephæstos as the young, not yet risen Sun, and Athene as the Dawn, the daughter of the Sky, stepping forth from the fountain-head of light—

Γλαυκῶπις, with eyes like an owl (and beautiful they are);

Παρθένος, pure as a virgin;

Χρύσεια, the golden;

Ἄκρεια, lighting up the tops of the mountains, and her own glorious Parthenon in her own favourite town of Athens;

Παλλὰς, whirling the shafts of light;

Ἄλεια, the genial warmth of the morning;

Πρόμαχος, the foremost champion in the battle between night and day;

Πάνοπλος, in full armour, in her panoply, of light, driving away the darkness of night, and rousing men to a bright life, to bright thoughts, to bright endeavours?

Would the Greek gods lose in our eyes if, instead of believing that Apollon and Artemis murdered the twelve children of Niobe, we perceived that Niobe was, in a former period of language, a name of snow and winter, and that no more was intended by the ancient poet than that Apollon and Artemis, the vernal deities, must slay every year with their darts the brilliant and beautiful, but doomed children of the Snow? Is it not something worth knowing, worth knowing even to us, after the lapse of four or five thousand years, that before the separation of the Aryan race, before the existence of Sanskrit, Greek, or Latin, before the gods of the Veda had been worshipped, and before there was a sanctuary of Zeus among the sacred oaks of Dodona, one supreme Deity had been found, had been named, had been invoked by the ancestors of our race, and had been invoked by a name which has never been excelled by any other name, Dyaus, Zeus, Jupiter, Tyr,—all meaning originally light and brightness, a concept which on one side became materialized as sky, morning, and day, while on the other it developed into a name of the bright and heavenly beings, the Devas, as one of the first expressions of the Divine?

No, if a critical examination of the ancient language of our own religion leads to no worse results than those which have followed from a careful interpretation of the petrified language of ancient India and Greece, we need not fear; we shall be gainers, not losers. Like an old precious metal, the ancient religion, after the rust of ages has been removed, will come out in all its purity and brightness: and the image which it discloses will be the image of the

Father; the Father of all the nations upon earth; and the superscription, when we can read it again, will be, not in Judæa only, but in the languages of all the races of the world, the Word of God, revealed, where alone it can be revealed,—revealed in the heart of man.