

THE
FIRST ASHṬĀKA, OR BOOK

OF THE

RIG-VEDA,

&c. &c.

A

RIG-VEDA-SANHITÁ.

A COLLECTION OF
ANCIENT HINDU HYMNS,
CONSTITUTING
THE FIRST ASHÁKA, OR BOOK,
OF THE
RIG-VEDA;

THE OLDEST AUTHORITY FOR THE RELIGIOUS AND SOCIAL
INSTITUTIONS OF THE HINDUS.
TRANSLATED FROM THE ORIGINAL SANSKRIT.

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INTRODUCTION.

WHEN the liberal patronage of the Court of Directors of the East-India Company enabled Dr. Max Müller to undertake his invaluable edition of the *Rig-Veda*, a wish was expressed that its appearance should be accompanied or followed, with all convenient despatch, by an English translation. As I had long contemplated such a work, and had made some progress in its execution, even before leaving India, I readily undertook to complete my labours and publish the translation.

It might else have been thought scarcely necessary to repeat a translation of the first *Ashtaka*, Ogdoad, or Eighth book of the *Rig-Veda*, as that had been already more than once accomplished, partly in English by the Rev. Mr. Stevenson and Dr. Roer, and fully in Latin by the late Dr. Rosen: a translation in French, also, by M. Langlois, extending through four *Ashtakas*, or half the *Veda*, has been recently published at Paris; but I was not aware, when I engaged to publish an English translation, that such a work had been commenced. At the same time, these translations do not seem to preclude entirely the usefulness of an English version: the earliest publication, the

work of the Rev. Mr. Stevenson, extends only to the three first hymns of the third lecture, or section, out of the eight, which the first book, or *Ashtaka*, consists of; Dr. Roer's translation is equally limited, stopping with two sections, or thirty-two hymns. Both translations were printed in India, and are procurable, with some difficulty, in this country. Dr. Rosen's translation of the first book is complete as to the text, but his premature death interrupted his annotations. Although executed with profound scholarship and scrupulous exactitude, and every way deserving of reliance as an authentic representative of the original, the Sanskrit is converted into Latin with such literal fidelity that the work scarcely admits of consecutive perusal, and is most of value as a reference; the translation is, in fact, subordinate to an edition of the text which it accompanies on the same page, and the work is designed less for general readers than for Sanskrit scholars and students of the *Veda*. The principle followed by M. Langlois is the converse of that adopted by Dr. Rosen, and he has avowedly sought to give to the vague and mysterious passages of the original, a clear, simple, and intelligible interpretation. In this it may be admitted that he has admirably succeeded; but it may be sometimes thought that he has not been sufficiently cautious in his rendering of the text, and that he has diverged from its phraseology, especially as interpreted by the native Scholiast, more widely than is advisable. The real value of the original lies not so much in its merits as a literary composition, as in the illustration which

it supplies of the most ancient Hindu system of religious worship and social organization; and unless its language be preserved as far as may be consistent with intelligibility, erroneous impressions of the facts and opinions of primitive Hinduism may be produced. It is also to be observed, that M. Langlois has made his translation from manuscript copies of the *Veda* and its commentary, which, whilst it has greatly enhanced the difficulty and labour of the task, and so far adds to the credit of the translator, suggests less confidence in the genuineness of the original, as the manuscripts are all more or less defective, than if the version had been made from a carefully-collated edition. The present translation possesses at least the advantage over its predecessors of an accurate text, and it will be the fault of the translator if he does not benefit by it. In converting the original into English, it has been his aim to adhere as strictly to the original Sanskrit as the necessity of being intelligible would allow.

It may be almost superfluous to apprise the reader, that the oldest, and nominally the most weighty, authorities of the Brahmans for their religion and institutions are the *Vedas*, of which works, four are usually enumerated: the *Rich*, or *Rig-Veda*; the *Yajush*, or *Yajur-Veda*; the *Sáman*, or *Sáma-Veda*; and the *Atharvaña*, or *Atharva-Veda*. Many passages are to be found in Sanskrit writings, some in the *Vedas* themselves, which limit the number to three,^a

^a Colebrooke on the *Vedas*.—*Asiatic Researches*, viii. 370.

and there is no doubt that the fourth, or *Atharva-Veda*, although it borrows freely from the *R̥ich*, has little in common with the others in its general character or in its style; the language clearly indicates a different and later era. It may therefore be allowably regarded rather as a supplement to three, than as one of the four *Vedas*.

Of the other three *Vedas*, each has its peculiar characteristics, although they have much in common, and they are apparently of different dates, although not separated, perhaps, by any very protracted interval. The *R̥ig-Veda* consists of metrical prayers, or hymns, termed *S̥uktas*, addressed to different divinities, each of which is ascribed to a *R̥ishi*, a holy, or inspired author. These hymns are put together with little attempt at methodical arrangement, although such as are dedicated to the same deity sometimes follow in a consecutive series. There is not much connection in the stanzas of which they are composed, and the same hymn is sometimes addressed to different divinities. There are, in the *Veda* itself, no directions for the use and application of the *S̥uktas*, no notices of the occasions on which they are to be employed, or of the ceremonies at which they are to be recited: these are pointed out by subsequent writers in *S̥ūtras*, or precepts relating to the ritual; and even for the reputed authors of the hymns, and for the deities in whose honour they are composed, we are for the most part indebted to independent authorities, especially to an *Anukramaṇikā*, or index, accompanying each *Veda*. The *Yajur-Veda* differs from the *R̥ich*, in

being more particularly a ritual, or a collection of liturgical formulæ. The prayers or invocations, when not borrowed from the *R̥ich*, are mostly brief and in prose, and are applicable to the consecration of the utensils and materials of ceremonial worship, as well as to the praise and worship of the gods. The *S̥āma-Veda* is little else than a recast of the *R̥ich*, being made up, with very few exceptions, of the very same hymns, broken into parts and arranged anew, for the purpose of being chanted on different ceremonial occasions. As far, also, as the *Atharva-Veda* is to be considered as a *Veda*, it will be found to comprise many of the hymns of the *R̥ich*.^a From the extensive manner, then, in which the hymns of the *R̥ig-Veda* enter into the composition of the other three, we must naturally infer its priority to them, and its greater importance to the history of the Hindu religion. In truth, it is to the *R̥ig-Veda* that we must have recourse principally, if not exclusively, for correct notions of the oldest and most genuine forms of the institutions, religious or civil, of the Hindus.

These remarks apply to what are termed the *Sanhitās* of the *Vedas*, the aggregate assemblage, in a single collection, of the prayers, hymns, and liturgic formulæ of which they are composed. Beside the *Sanhitās*, the designation *Veda* includes an extensive class of compositions, entitled, collectively, *Brāhmaṇa*,

^a “By the followers of the *Atharvaṇa*, the *R̥ichas*, or stanzas of the *R̥ig-Veda*, are numerous included in their own *Sanhitā* (or collection)”.—*Sāyaṇa Acharya*, Introduction, Müller's edition, p. 2.