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A General History for Colleges and High Schools
by P. V. N. Myers

Chapter One



STATUE OF BUDDHA.

PART I.

ANCIENT HISTORY.

SECTION I.—THE EASTERN NATIONS.

CHAPTER I.

INDIA AND CHINA.

I. INDIA.

— **The Aryan Invasion.** — At the time of the great Aryan migration (see p. 4), some Aryan bands, journeying from the northwest, settled first the plains of the Indus and then occupied the valley of the Ganges. They reached the banks of the latter river as early probably as 1500 B.C.

These fair-skinned invaders found the land occupied by a dark-skinned, non-Aryan race, whom they either subjugated and reduced to serfdom, or drove out of the great river valleys into the mountains and the half-desert plains of the peninsula.

— **The Origin of Castes.** — The conflict of races in Northern India gave rise to what is known as the system of castes; that is, society became divided into a number of rigid hereditary classes. There arose gradually four chief castes: (1) Brahmans, or priests; (2) warriors; (3) agriculturists and traders; and (4) serfs, or Sudras. The Brahmans were those of pure Aryan blood, while the Sudras were the despised and oppressed non-Aryan aborigines. The two middle classes, the warriors and the cultivators of the soil, were of mixed Aryan and non-Aryan blood. Below these several

castes were the Pariahs, or outcasts, the most degraded of the degraded natives.¹

The system of castes, modified however by various influences, particularly by the later system of Buddhism (see p. 111), has characterized Hindu society from the time the system originated down to the present, and is one of the most important facts of Indian history.

The Vedas. — The most important of the sacred books of the Hindus are called the Vedas. They are written in the Sanscrit language, which is believed to be the oldest form of Aryan speech. The Rig-Veda, the most ancient of the books, is made up of hymns which were composed chiefly during the long period, perhaps a thousand years or more, while the Aryans were slowly working their way from the mountains on the northwest of India across the peninsula to the Ganges. These hymns are filled with memories of the long conflict of the fair-faced Aryans with the dark-faced aborigines. The Himalayas, through whose gloomy passes the early emigrants journeyed, must have deeply impressed the wanderers, for the poets often refer to the great dark mountains.

Brahmanism. — The religion of the Indian Aryans is known as Brahmanism. This system gradually developed from the same germs as those out of which grew the Greek and Roman religions. It was at first a pure nature-worship, that is, the worship of the most striking phenomena of the physical world as intelligent and moral beings. The chief god was Dyaus-Pitar, the Heaven-Father. As this system characterized the early period when the oldest Vedic hymns were composed, it is known as the Vedic religion.

¹ At a later period, the Brahmans, in order to perpetuate their own ascendancy and to secure increased reverence for their order, incorporated among the sacred hymns an account of creation which gave a sort of divine sanction to the system of castes by representing the different classes of society to have had different origins. The Brahmans, the sacred books are made to say, came forth from the mouth of Brahma, the soldier from his arms, the farmer from his thighs, and the Sudra from his feet.

In course of time this nature-worship of the Vedic period developed into a sort of pantheism, that is, a system which identifies God with the universe. This form of the Indian religion is known as Brahmanism. Brahma, an impersonal essence, is conceived as the primal existence. Forth from Brahma emanated, as heat and light emanate from the sun, all things and all life. Banish a personal God from the universe, as some modern scientists would do, leaving nothing but nature with her original nebula, her endless cycles, her unconscious evolutions, and we have something very like Brahmanism.

A second fundamental conception of Brahmanism is that all life, apart from Brahma, is evil, is travail and sorrow. We can make this idea intelligible to ourselves by remembering what are our own ideas of this earthly life. We call it a feverish dream, a journey through a vale of sorrow. Now the Hindu regards *all* conscious existence in the same light. He has no hope in a better future; so long as the soul is conscious, so long must it endure sorrow and pain.

This conception of all conscious existence as necessarily and always evil, leads naturally to the doctrine that it is the part of wisdom and of duty for man to get rid of consciousness, to annihilate himself, in a word, to commit soul-suicide. Brahmanism teaches that the only way to extinguish self and thus get rid of the burden of existence, is by re-absorption into Brahma. But this return to Brahma is dependent upon the soul's purification, for no impure soul can be re-absorbed into the primal essence. The necessary freedom from passion and the required purity of soul can best be attained by self-torture, by a severe mortification of the flesh; hence the asceticism of the Hindu devotee.

As only a few in each generation reach the goal, it follows that the great majority of men must be born again, and yet again, until all evil has been purged away from the soul and eternal repose found in Brahma. He who lives a virtuous life is at death born into some higher caste, and thus he advances towards the longed-for end. The evil man, however, is born into a lower caste, or

perhaps his soul enters some unclean animal. This doctrine of re-birth is known as the transmigration of souls (metempsychosis).

Only the first three classes are admitted to the benefits of religion. The Sudras and the outcasts are forbidden to read the sacred books, and for any one of the upper classes to teach a serf how to expiate sin is a crime.

Buddhism. — In the fifth century before our era, a great teacher and reformer, known as Buddha, or Gautama (died about 470 B.C.), arose in India. He was a prince, whom legend represents as being so touched by the universal misery of mankind, that he voluntarily abandoned the luxury of his home, and spent his life in seeking out and making known to men a new and better way of salvation. He condemned the severe penances and the self-torture of the Brahmans, yet commended poverty and retirement from active life as the best means of getting rid of desire and of attaining *Nirvana*, that is, the repose of unconsciousness.



STATUE OF BUDDHA.

Buddha admitted all classes to the benefits of religion, the poor outcast as well as the high-born Brahman, and thus Buddhism was a revolt against the earlier harsh and exclusive system of Brahmanism. It holds somewhat the same relation to Brahmanism that Christianity bears to Judaism.

Buddhism gradually gained the ascendancy over Brahmanism; but after some centuries the Brahmans regained their power, and by the eighth century after Christ, the faith of Buddha was driven out of almost every part of India. But Buddhism has a profound missionary spirit, like that of Christianity, Buddha having com-

manded his disciples to make known to all men the way to Nirvana ; and consequently during the very period when India was being lost, the missionaries of the reformed creed were spreading the teachings of their master among the peoples of all the countries of Eastern Asia, so that to-day Buddhism is the religion of almost one third of the human race. Buddha has probably nearly as many followers as both Christ and Mohammed together.

During its long conflict with Buddhism, Brahmanism was greatly modified, and caught much of the gentler spirit of the new faith, so that modern Brahmanism is a very different religion from that of the ancient system ; hence it is usually given a new name, being known as Hinduism.¹

Alexander's Invasion of India (327 B.C.). — Although we find obscure notices of India in the records of the early historic peoples of Western Asia, yet it is not until the invasion of the peninsula by Alexander the Great in 327 B.C. that the history of the Indian Aryans comes in significant contact with that of the progressive nations of the West. From that day to our own its systems of philosophy, its wealth, and its commerce have been more or less important factors in universal history. Greece carried on an intellectual commerce with this country ; Rome, and the Italian republics of the Middle Ages, a more material but not less important trade. Columbus was seeking a short all-sea route to this country when he found the New World. And in the upbuilding of the imperial greatness of the England of to-day, the wealth and trade of India have played no inconsiderable part.

2. CHINA.

General Remarks: the Beginning. — China is the seat of a very old civilization, older perhaps than that of any other land save Egypt ; yet Chinese affairs have not until recently exerted any appreciable influence upon the general current of history.

¹ Among the customs introduced into Brahmanism during this period was the rite of Suttee, or the voluntary burning of the widow on the funeral pyre of her husband.

All through ancient and mediæval times the country lay, vague and mysterious, in the haze of the world's horizon. During the Middle Ages the land was known to Europe under the name of Cathay.

The beginning of the Chinese nation was a band of Turanian wanderers who came into the basin of the Yellow River, from the West, probably prior to 3000 B.C. These immigrants gradually pushed out the aborigines whom they found in the land, and laid the basis of institutions that have endured to the present day.

Dynastic History. — The government of China since the remotest times has been a parental monarchy. The Emperor is the father of his people. But though an absolute prince, still he dare not rule tyrannically: he must rule justly, and in accordance with the ancient customs and laws.

The Chinese have books that purport to give the history of the different dynasties that have ruled in the land from a vast antiquity; but these records are largely mythical and legendary. Everything is confused and uncertain until we reach the eighth or seventh century before our era; and even then we meet with little of interest in the dynastic history of the country until we come to the reign of Che Hwang-te (246–210 B.C.). This energetic ruler strengthened and consolidated the imperial power, and executed great works of internal improvement, such as roads and canals. As a barrier against the incursions of the Huns, he began the erection of the celebrated Chinese Wall, a great rampart extending for about 1500 miles along the northern frontier of the country.¹

From the strong reign of Che Hwang-te to the end of the period

¹ The Great Wall is one of the most remarkable works of man. "It is," says Dr. Williams, "the only artificial structure which would arrest attention in a hasty survey of the globe." It has been estimated that there is more than seventy times as much material in the wall as there is in the Great Pyramid of Cheops, and that it represents more labor than 100,000 miles of ordinary railroad. It was begun in 214 and finished in 204 B.C. It is twenty-five feet wide at base, and from fifteen to thirty feet high. Towers forty feet high rise at irregular intervals. In some places it is a mere earthen rampart; in others it is faced with brick; and then again it is composed of stone throughout.

covered by ancient history, Chinese dynastic records present no matters of universal interest that need here occupy our attention.

Chinese Writing.—It is nearly certain that the art of writing was known among the Chinese as early as 2000 B.C. The system employed is curiously cumbrous. In the absence of an alphabet, each word of the language is represented upon the written page by means of a symbol, or combination of symbols; this, of course, requires that there be as many symbols, or characters, as there are words in the language. The number sanctioned by good use is about 25,000; but counting obsolete characters, the number amounts to over 50,000. A knowledge of 5000 or 6000 characters, however, enables one to read and write without difficulty. The task of learning even this number might well be hopeless, were it not that many of the characters bear a remote resemblance to the objects for which they stand, and when once explained, readily suggest the thing or idea represented. The nature of the characters shows conclusively that the Chinese system of writing, like that of all others with which we are acquainted, was at first purely hieroglyphical, that is, the characters were originally simply rude outline pictures of material objects. Time and use have worn them to their present form.

This Chinese system of representing thought, cumbrous and inconvenient as it is, is employed at the present time by one third of the human race.

Printing from blocks was practised in China as early as the sixth century of our era, and printing from movable types as early as the tenth or eleventh century, that is to say, about four hundred years before the same art was invented in Europe.

Chinese Literature : Confucius and Mencius.—The most highly prized portion of Chinese literature is embraced in what is known as the Five Classics and the Four Books, called collectively the *Nine Classics*. The Five Classics are among the oldest books in the world. For some of the books an antiquity of 3000 years is claimed. The books embrace chronicles, political and ethical maxims, and numerous odes. One of the most important of the

Classics is the so-called Book of Rites, said to date from 1200 B.C.

The Four Books are of later origin than the Five Classics, having been written about the fifth and fourth centuries before the Christian era; yet they hardly yield to them in sacredness in the eyes of the Chinese. The first three of the series are by the pupils of the great sage and moralist Confucius (551-478 B.C.), and the fourth is by Mencius (371-288 B.C.), a disciple of Confucius, and a scarcely less revered philosopher and ethical teacher. The teachings of the Four Books may be summed up in the simple precept, "Walk in the Trodden Paths." Confucius was not a prophet, or revealer; he laid no claims to a supernatural knowledge of God or of the hereafter; he said nothing of an Infinite Spirit, and but little of a future life. His cardinal precepts were obedience to superiors, reverence for the ancients, and imitation of their virtues. He himself walked in the old paths, and thus added the force of example to that of precept. He gave the Chinese the Golden Rule, stated negatively: "What you do not want done to yourself, do not do to others."

During the reign of Che Hwang-te (see p. 13), Chinese literature suffered a great disaster. That despot, for the reason that the teachers in their opposition to him were constantly quoting the ancient writings against his innovations, ordered the chief historical books to be destroyed, and sentenced to death any one who should presume to talk about the proscribed writings, or even allude to the virtues of the ancients in such a way as to reflect upon his reforms. The contumacious he sent to work upon the Great Wall. But the people concealed the books in the walls of their houses, or better still hid them away in their memories; and in this way the priceless inheritance of antiquity was preserved until the storm had passed.

Influence of this Literature and of the Sage Confucius. — It would be impossible to exaggerate the influence which the Nine Classics have had upon the Chinese nation. For more than 2000 years these writings have been the Chinese Bible. And as all of the

Four Books, though they were not written by Confucius, yet bear the impress of his mind and thought, just as the Gospels teach the mind of Christ, a large part of this influence must be attributed to the life and teachings of that great Sage. His influence has been greater than that of any other teacher, excepting Christ and perhaps Buddha. His precepts, implicitly followed by his countrymen, have shaped their lives from his day to the present.

The moral system of Confucius, making, as it does, filial obedience and a conformity to ancient customs primary virtues, has exalted the family life among the Chinese and given a wonderful stability to Chinese society. Chinese children are the most obedient and reverential to parents of any children in the world, and the Chinese Empire is the only one in all history that has prolonged its existence from ancient times to the present.

But along with much good, one great evil has resulted from this blind, servile following of the past. The Chinese in strictly obeying the injunction to walk in the old ways, to conform to the customs of the ancients, have failed to mark out any new footpaths for themselves. Hence their lack of originality, their habit of imitation: hence the unchanging, unprogressive character of Chinese civilization.

Education and Civil Service Competitive Examinations. — China has a very ancient educational system. The land was filled with schools, academies, and colleges more than a thousand years before our era, and education is to-day more general among the Chinese than among any other pagan people. A knowledge of the sacred books is the sole passport to civil office and public employment. All candidates for places in the government must pass a competitive examination in the Nine Classics. This system is practically the same in principle as that which we, with great difficulty, are trying to establish in connection with our own civil service.

The Three Religions, — Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism. — There are three leading religions in China, — Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism. The great Sage Confucius is revered

and worshipped throughout the Empire. He holds somewhat the same relation to the system that bears his name that Christ holds to that of Christianity. Taoism takes its name from Tao, which is made, like Brahma in Brahmanism, the beginning of all things. It is a very curious system of mystical ideas and superstitious practices. Buddhism was introduced into China about the opening of the Christian era, and soon became widely spread.

There is one element common to all these religions, and that is the worship of ancestors. Every Chinese, whether he be a Confucianist, a Taoist, or a Buddhist, reverences his ancestors, and prays and makes offerings to their spirits.

Policy of Non-Intercourse. — The Chinese have always been a very self-satisfied and exclusive people. They have jealously excluded foreigners and outside influence from their country. The Great Wall with which they have hedged in their country on the north, is the symbol of their policy of isolation. Doubtless this characteristic of the Chinese has been fostered by their geographical isolation; for great mountain barriers and wide deserts cut the country off from communication with the rest of the Asiatic continent. And then their reverence for antiquity has rendered them intolerant of innovation and change. Hence, in part, the unwillingness of the Chinese to admit into their country railroads, telegraphs, and other modern improvements. For them to adopt these new-fangled inventions, would be like our adopting a new religion. Such a departure from the ways and customs of the past has in it, to their way of thinking, something akin to disrespect and irreverence for ancestors.