

THE STORY OF RELIGIONS

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The story of religions by E. D. Price

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E. D. PRICE

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OF RELIGIONS**

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BY THE
REV. E. D. PRICE, F.G.S.



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PREFACE

IN this brief outline of the Story of Religions, the aim of the writer has been to indicate the leading principles which underlie the great religions of the world ; to show how these beliefs have arisen, and how they have developed in the history of mankind. The various forms of ritual and worship associated with each cult are sketched out, and an attempt is made to show the influence which each particular form of faith has exercised upon the national and private life of its adherents.

While claiming that the Supreme Deity is the source of all Truth, no attempt has been made to dogmatise on any controverted points of faith or practice. The *facts* connected with the religions of the world are set forth as clearly as possible, but the *inferences* to be drawn from such facts must be left to the individual judgment of each reader of this little book.



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HINDUISM

THE gradual development of the Hindu religion may be traced from the religious books or Shastras of the Brahmans. The oldest of these are the Vedas, written in Sanskrit, the most ancient and most important being the Rig-Veda, containing more than a thousand hymns, in ten books. Of such books, eight begin with hymns addressed to Agni, "the god of fire"; the other two with hymns to Indra, "the god of rain." The other Vedas are the Yajur-Veda, the Sama-Veda, and the Atharva-Veda.

A Veda is divided into three parts: Mantra (or Sanhita), hymns of prayer and praise; Brahmana, a statement of ritual, usually in prose, intended for the instruction of the Brahmans in sacrificial ceremonies; and Upanishad, mystical doctrine, supplemental to the Brahmana, chiefly prose.

More recent in date of composition are the Sutras, or "strings," which summarise and give the essence of the doctrines in short connected sentences. The Sutras are not regarded as inspired or revealed literature.

The Rig-Veda is, as mentioned above, of very great antiquity. It was probably composed somewhere between 1500 B.C. and 1000 B.C. The word

"Veda" itself refers to Divine knowledge, imagined as proceeding like breath from the self-existent Spirit, and inspiring a class of sages, called Rishis; and thus it is held to this day to be absolutely infallible.

The natural forces first deified were those of the sky and air, generalised under one simple personification, that of the sky Dyaus, as Dyaush-pitar, "Heavenly Father," the Zeus of Greece, and the Jupiter, or Dies-piter of Rome, with whom was associated the goddess Aditi, or "the vast Expanse," personifying universal Nature or Being, and who became later the mother of the Adityas, the secondary deities of the heavenly sphere—originally seven in number, but subsequently increased to twelve—representing the various phases of the sun in the months of the year.

Varuna, "the encompassing sky," the Ouranos (Uranus) of the Greeks, corresponds in some of his attributes to Ahura Mazda of Zoroastrianism. He was the son of Aditi, and in some of the hymns is addressed as the Supreme Being. Subsequently he became the special deity presiding over the ocean. With him was closely connected Mitra, the Mithra of the Persians, "god of day," and many of the attributes of Varuna are those also of Mitra.

Other separately deified forces of Nature are Indra, Agni, and Surya. The first of these, "the god of the clear blue sky," is the god who encounters and overcomes drought, and dispenses rain and dew. He is represented as riding in a golden chariot drawn by golden steeds, and holding in his hand a thunderbolt. Libations of Soma, to which we shall presently refer, are specially acceptable to