

The Works of Sir William Jones

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On the Mystical Poetry of the Persians and Hindus

Published in 1792, 'On the mystical poetry of the Persians and Hindus' is an essay describing Oriental mystical poetry for Western readers. It emphasises the contemporary relevance of the allegorical tradition within both Muslim and Hindu cultures as well as the compatibility of their mysticism and religion with each other and with Christianity.

A figurative mode of expressing the fervour of devotion, or the ardent love of created spirits towards their beneficent Creator, has prevailed from time immemorial in *Asia*; particularly among the *Persian* theists, both ancient *Húshangis* and modern *Súfis*, who seem to have borrowed it from the *Indian* philosophers of the *Védánta* school; and their doctrines are also believed to be the source of that sublime, but poetical, theology, which glows and sparkles in the writings of the old *Academicks*. “*Plato* travelled into *Italy* and *Egypt*, says *Claude Fleury*, to learn the Theology of the Pagans at its fountain head:” its true fountain, however, was neither in *Italy* nor in *Egypt* (though considerable streams of it had been conducted thither by *Pythagoras* and by the family of *Misra*), but in *Persia* or *India*, which the founder of the *Italick* sect had visited with a similar design. What the *Grecian* travellers learned among the sages of the east, may perhaps be fully explained, at a season of leisure, in another dissertation; but we confine this essay to a singular species of poetry, which consists almost wholly of a mystical religious allegory, though it seems on a transient view to contain only the sentiments of a wild and voluptuous libertinism: now, admitting the danger of a poetical style, in which the limits between vice and enthusiasm are so minute as to be hardly distinguishable, we must beware of censuring it severely, and must allow it to be natural, though a warm imagination may carry it to a culpable excess; for an ardently grateful piety is congenial to the undepraved nature of man, whose mind, sinking under the magnitude of the subject, and struggling to express its emotions, has recourse to metaphors and allegories, which it sometimes extends beyond the bounds of cool reason, and often to the brink of absurdity. *Barrow*, who would have been the sublimest mathematician, if his religious turn of mind had not made him the deepest theologian of his age, describes Love as “an affection or inclination of the soul toward an object, proceeding from an apprehension and esteem of some excellence or convenience in it, as its *beauty*, worth, or utility, and producing, if it be absent, a proportionable desire, and consequently an endeavour, to obtain such a property in it, such possession of it, such an *approximation to it, or union with it*, as the thing is capable of; with a regret and displeasure in failing to obtain it, or in the want and loss of it; begetting likewise a complacence, satisfaction, and delight in its presence, possession, or enjoyment, which is moreover attended with a good will toward it, suitable to its nature; that is, with a desire, that it should arrive at, or continue in, its best state; with a delight to perceive it thrive and flourish; with a displeasure to see it suffer or decay: with a consequent endeavour to advance it in all good and preserve it from all evil.” Agreeably to this description, which consists of two parts, and was designed to comprize the tender love of the Creator towards created spirits, the great philosopher bursts forth in another place, with his usual animation and command of language, into the following panegyrick on the pious love of human souls toward the Author of their happiness: “Love is the sweetest and most delectable of all passions; and, when by the conduct of wisdom it is directed in a rational way toward a worthy, congruous, and attainable object, it cannot otherwise than fill the heart with ravishing delight: such, in all respects superlatively such, is *God*; who, infinitely beyond all other things, deserveth our affection, as most perfectly amiable and desirable; as having obliged us by innumerable and inestimable benefits; all the

good, that we have ever enjoyed, or can ever expect, being derived from his pure bounty; all things in the world, in competition with him being mean and ugly; all things, without him, vain, unprofitable, and hurtful to us. He is the most proper object of our love; for we chiefly were framed, and it is the prime law of our nature, to love him; *our soul, from its original instinct, vergeth toward him as its centre, and can have no rest, till it be fixed on him*: he alone can satisfy the vast capacity of our minds, and fill our boundless desires. He, of all lovely things, most certainly and easily may be attained; for, whereas commonly men are crossed in their affection, and their love is embittered from their affecting things imaginary, which they cannot reach, or coy things, which disdain and reject them, it is with **God** quite otherwise: He is most ready to impart himself; he most earnestly desireth and wooeth our love; he is not only most willing to correspond in affection, but even doth prevent us therein: *He doth cherish and encourage our love by sweetest influences and most consoling embraces*; by kindest expressions of favour, by most beneficial returns; and, whereas all other objects do in the enjoyment much fail our expectation, he doth ever far exceed it. Wherefore in all affectionate motions of our hearts toward **God**; in *desiring* him, or seeking his favour and friendship; in *embracing* him, or setting our esteem, our good will, our confidence on him; in *enjoying* him by devotional meditations and addresses to him; in a reflective sense of our interest and propriety in him; *in that mysterious union of spirit, whereby we do closely adhere to, and are, as it were, inserted in him*; in a hearty complacency in his benignity, a grateful sense of his kindness, and a zealous desire of yielding some requital for it, we cannot but feel very pleasant transports: indeed, that celestial flame, kindled in our hearts by the spirit of love, cannot be void of warmth; we cannot fix our eyes upon *infinite beauty*, we cannot taste infinite sweetness, we cannot cleave to infinite felicity, without also perpetually rejoicing in the first daughter of Love to **God**, Charity toward men; which, in complection and careful disposition, doth much resemble her mother; for she doth rid us from all those gloomy, keen, turbulent imaginations and passions, which cloud our mind, which fret our heart, which discompose the frame of our soul; from burning anger, from storming contention, from gnawing envy, from rankling spite, from racking suspicion, from distracting ambition and avarice; and consequently doth settle our mind in an even temper, in a sedate humour, in an harmonious order, *in that pleasant state of tranquillity, which naturally doth result from the voidance of irregular passions.*” Now this passage from **Barrow** (which borders, I admit, on quietism and enthusiastic devotion) differs only from the mystical theology of the *Súfís* and *Yógis*, as the flowers and fruits of *Europe* differ in scent and flavour from those of *Asia*, or as *European* differs from *Asiatick* eloquence: the same strain, in poetical measure, would rise up to the odes of **Spenser** on *Divine Love and Beauty*, and, in a higher key with richer embellishments, to the songs of **Hafiz** and **Jayade’va**, the raptures of the *Masnavi*, and the mysteries of the *Bhágavat*.

Before we come to the *Persians* and *Indians*, let me produce another specimen of *European* theology, collected from a late excellent work of the illustrious **M. Necker**.

“Were men animated, says he, with sublime thoughts, did they respect the intellectual power, with which they are adorned, and take an interest in the dignity of their nature, they would embrace with transport that sense of religion, which ennobles their faculties, keeps their minds in full strength, and unites them in idea with him, whose immensity overwhelms them with astonishment: *considering themselves as an emanation from that infinite Being*, the source and cause of all things, they would then disdain to be misled by a gloomy and false philosophy, and would cherish the idea of a **God**, who *created*, who *regenerates*, who *preserves* this

universe by invariable laws, and by a continued chain of similar causes producing similar effects; who pervades all nature with his divine spirit, as an universal soul, which moves, directs, and restrains the wonderful fabric of this world. The blissful idea of a **God** sweetens every moment of our time, and embellishes before us the path of life; unites us delightfully to all the beauties of nature, and associates us with every thing that lives or moves. Yes; the whisper of the gales, the murmur of waters, the peaceful agitation of trees and shrubs, would concur to engage our minds and *affect our souls with tenderness*, if our thoughts were elevated to *one universal cause*, if we recognized on all sides the work of *Him, whom we love*; if we marked the traces of his august steps and benignant intentions, if we believed ourselves actually present at the display of his boundless power and the magnificent exertions of his unlimited goodness. Benevolence, among all the virtues, has a character more than human, and a certain amiable simplicity in its nature, which seems analogous to the *first idea*, the original intention of conferring delight, which we necessarily suppose in the Creator, when we presume to seek his motive in bestowing existence: benevolence is that virtue, or, to speak more emphatically, that *primordial beauty*, which preceded all times and all worlds; and, when we reflect on it, there appears an analogy, obscure indeed at present, and to us imperfectly known, between our moral nature and a time yet very remote, when we shall satisfy our ardent wishes and lively hopes, which constitute perhaps a sixth, and (if the phrase may be used) a distant, sense. It may even be imagined, that love, the brightest ornament of our nature, love, enchanting and sublime, is a mysterious pledge for the assurance of those hopes; since love, by disengaging us from ourselves, by transporting us beyond the limits of our own being, is the first step in our progress to a joyful immortality; and, by affording both the notion and example of a cherished object distinct from our own souls, may be considered as an interpreter to our hearts of something, which our intellects cannot conceive. We may seem even to hear the Supreme Intelligence and Eternal Soul of all nature, give this commission to the spirits, which emanated from him: *Go; admire a small portion of my works, and study them; make your first trial of happiness, and learn to love him, who bestowed it; but seek not to remove the veil spread over the secret of your existence: your nature is composed of those divine particles, which, at an infinite distance, constitute my own essence; but you would be too near me, were you permitted to penetrate the mystery of our separation and union: wait the moment ordained by my wisdom; and, until that moment come, hope to approach me only by adoration and gratitude.*”

If these two passages were translated into *Sanscrit* and *Persian*, I am confident, that the *Védántis* and *Súfis* would consider them as an epitome of their common system; for they concur in believing, that the souls of men differ infinitely in *degree*, but not at all in *kind*, from the divine spirit, of which they are *particles*, and in which they will ultimately be absorbed; that the spirit of **God** pervades the universe, always immediately present to his work, and consequently always in substance, that he alone is perfect benevolence, perfect truth, perfect beauty; that the love of him alone is *real* and genuine love, while that of all other objects is *absurd* and illusory, that the beauties of nature are faint resemblances, like images in a mirror, of the divine charms; that, from eternity without beginning to eternity without end, the supreme benevolence is occupied in bestowing happiness or the means of attaining it; that men can only attain it by performing their part of the *primal covenant* between them

and the Creator; that nothing has a pure absolute existence but *mind* or *spirit*; that *material substances*, as the ignorant call them, are no more than gay *pictures* presented continually to our *minds* by the sempiternal Artist; that we must beware of attachment to such *phantoms*, and attach ourselves exclusively to God, who truly exists in us, as we exist solely in him; that we retain even in this forlorn state of separation from our beloved, the *idea of heavenly beauty*, and the *remembrance* of our *primeval vows*; that sweet musick, gentle breezes, fragrant flowers, perpetually renew the primary *idea*, refresh our fading memory, and melt us with tender affections; that we must cherish those affections, and by abstracting our souls from *vanity*, that is, from all but **God**, approximate to his essence, in our final union with which will consist our supreme beatitude. From these principles flow a thousand metaphors and poetical figures, which abound in the sacred poems of the *Persians* and *Hindus*, who seem to mean the same thing in substance, and differ only in expression, as their languages differ in idiom! The modern *Su'fis*, who profess a belief in the *Koran*, suppose with great sublimity both of thought and of diction, an *express contract*, on *the day of eternity without beginning*, between the assemblage of created spirits and the supreme soul, from which they were detached, when a celestial voice pronounced these words, addressed to each spirit separately, "Art thou not with thy Lord?" that is, art thou not bound by a solemn contract with him? and all the spirits answered with one voice, "Yes:" hence it is, that *alist*, or *art thou not*, and *beli*, or *yes*, incessantly occur in the mystical verses of the *Persians*, and of the *Turkish* poets, who imitate them, as the *Romans* imitated the *Greeks*. The *Hindus* describe the same covenant under the figurative notion, so finely expressed by *Isaiah*, of a *nuptial contract*; for considering **God** in the three characters of Creator, Regenerator and Preserver, and supposing the power of *Preservation* and *Benevolence* to have become incarnate in the person of *Crishna*, they represent him as married to *Ra'dha'*, a word signifying *atonement*, *pacification*, or *satisfaction*, but applied allegorically to *the soul of man*, or rather to *the whole assemblage of created souls*, between whom and the benevolent Creator they suppose that *reciprocal love*, which *Barrow* describes with a glow of expression perfectly oriental, and which our most orthodox theologians believe to have been mystically *shadowed* in the song of *Solomon*, while they admit, that, in a *literal* sense, it is an epithalamium on the marriage of the sapient king with the princess of *Egypt*. The very learned author of the prelections on sacred poetry declared his opinion, that the canticles were founded on historical truth, but involved an allegory of that sort, which he named *mystical*; and the beautiful poem on the loves of *Laili* and *Majnun* by the inimitable *Niza'mi* (to say nothing of other poems on the same subject) is indisputably built on true history, yet avowedly allegorical and mysterious; for the introduction to it is a continued rapture on *divine love*; and the name of *Laili* seems to be used in the *Masnavi* and the odes of *Hafiz* for the omnipresent spirit of **God**.

It has been made a question, whether the poems of *Hafiz* must be taken in a literal or in a figurative sense; but the question does not admit of a general and direct answer; for even the most enthusiastick of his commentators, allow, that some of them are to be taken literally, and his editors ought to have distinguished them, as our *Spenser* has distinguished his four Odes on *Love* and *Beauty*, instead of mixing the profane with the divine, by a childish arrangement according to the alphabetical order of the rhymes. *Hafiz* never pretended to more than human virtues, and it is known that he had human propensities; for in his youth he was passionately in love with a girl surnamed *Shákhí Nebàt*, or *the Branch of Sugarcane*, and the prince of *Shiraz* was his rival: since there is an agreeable wildness in the story, and since the poet himself alludes to it in one of his odes, I give it you at length from the commentary. There is a place called *Pirisebz*, or *the Green old man*, about four *Persian* leagues from the city; and a popular opinion had long prevailed, that a youth, who should pass forty successive nights in *Pirisebz* without sleep, would infallibly become an excellent poet: young *Hafiz* had accordingly made a vow, that he would serve that apprenticeship with the utmost exactness, and for thirty-nine days he rigorously discharged his duty, walking every morning before the house of his coy

mistress, taking some refreshment and rest at noon, and passing the night awake at his poetical station; but, on the fortieth morning, he was transported with joy on seeing the girl beckon to him through the lattices, and invite him to enter: she received him with rapture, declared her preference of a bright genius to the son of a king, and would have detained him all night, if he had not recollected his vow, and, resolving to keep it inviolate, returned to his post. The people of *Shiraz* add (and the fiction is grounded on a couplet of *Hafiz*), that, early next morning *an old man, in a green mantle*, who was no less a personage than *Khizr* himself, approached him at *Pirisebz* with a cup brimful of nectar, which the *Greeks* would have called the water of *Aganippe*, and rewarded his perseverance with an inspiring draught of it. After his juvenile passions had subsided, we may suppose that his mind took that religious bent, which appears in most of his compositions; for there can be no doubt that the following distichs, collected from different odes, relate to the mystical theology of the *Sufis*.

“In eternity without beginning, a ray of thy beauty began to gleam; when Love sprang into being, and cast flames over all nature;

“On that day thy cheek sparkled even under thy veil, and all this beautiful imagery appeared on the mirror of our fancies.

“Rise, my soul; that I may pour thee forth on the pencil of that supreme Artist, who comprized in a turn of his compass all this wonderful scenery!

“From the moment, when I heard the divine sentence, *I have breathed into man a portion of my spirit*, I was assured, that we were His, and He ours.

“Where are the glad tidings of union with thee, that I may abandon all desire of life? I am a bird of holiness, and would fain escape from the net of this world.

“Shed, O Lord, from the cloud of heavenly guidance one cheering shower, before the moment, when I must rise up like a particle of dry dust!

“The sum of our transactions in this universe, is nothing: bring us the wine of devotion; for the possessions of this world vanish.

“The true object of heart and soul is the glory of union with our beloved: that object really exists, but without it both heart and soul would have no existence.

“O the bliss of that day, when I shall depart from this desolate mansion; shall seek rest for my soul; and shall follow the traces of my beloved:

“Dancing, with love of his beauty, like a mote in a sun-beam, till I reach the spring and fountain of light, whence yon sun derives all his lustre!”

The couplets, which follow, relate as indubitably to human love and sensual gratifications:

“May the hand never shake, which gathered the grapes! May the foot never slip, which pressed them!

“That poignant liquor, which the zealot calls *the mother of sins*, is pleasanter and sweeter to me than the kisses of a maiden.

“Wine two years old and a damsel of fourteen are sufficient society for me, above all companies great or small.

“How delightful is dancing to lively notes and the cheerful melody of the flute, especially when we touch the hand of a beautiful girl!

“*Call for wine, and scatter flowers around: what more canst thou ask from fate?* Thus spoke the nightingale this morning: what sayest thou, sweet rose, to his precepts?

“Bring thy couch to the garden of roses, that thou mayest kiss the cheeks and lips of lovely damsels, quaff rich wine, and smell odoriferous blossoms.

“O branch of an exquisite rose-plant, for whose sake dost thou grow? Ah! on whom will that smiling rose-bud confer delight?

“The rose would have discoursed on the beauties of my charmer, but the gale was jealous, and stole her breath, before she spoke.

“In this age, the only friends, who are free from blemish, are a flask of pure wine and a volume of elegant love songs.

“O the joy of that moment, when the self-sufficiency of inebriation rendered me independent of the prince and of his minister!”

Many zealous admirers of Ha´fiz insist, that by *wine* he invariably means *devotion*; and they have gone so far as to compose a dictionary of words in the *language*, as they call it, of the *Súfis*: in that vocabulary *sleep* is explained by *meditation* on the divine perfections, and *perfume* by *hope* of the divine favour; *gales* are *illapses* of grace; *kisses* and *embraces*, the *raptures* of piety; *idolaters*, *infidels*, and *libertines* are men of the purest *religion*, and their *idol* is the Creator himself; the *tavern* is a retired oratory, and its *keeper*, a sage instructor; *beauty* denotes the *perfection* of the Supreme Being; *tresses* are the *expansion* of his glory; *lips*, the hidden mysteries of his essence; *down* on the cheek, the world of spirits, who encircle his throne; and a *black mole*, the *point* of indivisible unity; lastly, *wantonness*, *mirth*, and *ebriety*, mean religious ardour and abstraction from all terrestrial thoughts. The poet himself gives a colour in many passages to such an interpretation; and without it, we can hardly conceive, that his poems, or those of his numerous imitators, would be tolerated in a *Muselman* country, especially at *Constantinople*, where they are venerated as divine compositions: it must be admitted, that the sublimity of the *mystical allegory*, which, like metaphors and comparisons, should be *general* only, not minutely exact, is diminished, if not destroyed, by an attempt at *particular* and

distinct resemblances; and that the style itself is open to dangerous misinterpretation, while it supplies real infidels with a pretext for laughing at religion itself.

On this occasion I cannot refrain from producing a most extraordinary ode by a *Súfi* of *Bokhárà*, who assumed the poetical surname of *Ismat*: a more modern poet, by prefixing three lines to each couplet, which rhyme with the first hemistich, has very elegantly and ingeniously converted the *Kasidah* into a *Mokhammes*, but I present you only with a literal version of the original distichs:

“Yesterday, half inebriated, I passed by the quarter, where the vintners dwell, to seek the daughter of an infidel who sells wine.

“At the end of the street, there advanced before me a damsel with a fairy's cheeks, who, in the manner of a pagan, wore her tresses deshevelled over her shoulder like the sacerdotal thread. I said: *O thou, to the arch of whose eye-brow the new moon is a slave, what quarter is this and where is thy mansion?*

“She answered: *Cast thy rosary on the ground; bind on thy shoulder the thread of paganism; throw stones at the glass of piety; and quaff wine from a full goblet;*

“*After that come before me, that I may whisper a word in thine ear: thou wilt accomplish thy journey, if thou listen to my discourse.*

“Abandoning my heart and rapt in ecstasy, I ran after her, till I came to a place, in which religion and reason forsook me.

“At a distance I beheld a company, all insane and inebriated, who came boiling and roaring with ardour from the wine of love;

“Without cymbals, or lutes, or viols, yet all full of mirth and melody; without wine, or goblet, or flask, yet all incessantly drinking.

“When the cord of restraint slipped from my hand, I desired to ask her one question, but she said: *Silence!*

“*This is no square temple, to the gate of which thou canst arrive precipitately: this is no mosque to which thou canst come with tumult, but without knowledge. This is the banquet-house of infidels, and within it all are intoxicated; all, from the dawn of eternity to the day of resurrection, lost in astonishment.*

“*Depart then from the cloister, and take the way to the tavern; cast off the cloak of a dervise, and wear the robe of a libertine.*

“I obeyed; and, if thou desirest the same strain and colour with *Ismat*, imitate him, and sell this world and the next for one drop of pure wine.”

Such is the strange religion, and stranger language of the Suʿfis; but most of the Asiatick poets are of that religion, and, if we think it worth while to read their poems, we must think it worth while to understand them: their great Maulavi assures us, that “they profess eager desire, but with no carnal affection, and circulate the cup, but no material goblet; since all things are spiritual in their sect, all is mystery within mystery;” consistently with which declaration he opens his astonishing work, entitled the Masnavi, with the following couplets:

Hear, how yon reed in sadly-pleasing tales
Departed bliss and present wo bewails!
‘With me, from native banks untimely torn,
‘Love-warbling youths and soft-ey’d virgins mourn.
‘O! Let the heart, by fatal absence rent,
‘Feel what I sing, and bleed when I lament:
‘Who roams in exile from his parent bow’r,
‘Pants to return, and chides each ling’ring hour.
‘My notes, in circles of the grave and gay,
‘Have hail’d the rising, cheer’d the closing day:
‘Each in my fond affections claim’d a part,
‘But none discern’d the secret of my heart.
‘What though my strains and sorrows slow combin’d!
‘Yet ears are slow, and carnal eyes are blind.

‘Free through each mortal form the spirits roll,
‘But sight avails not. Can we see the soul?’
Such notes breath’d gently from yon vocal frame:
Breath’d said I? no; ’twas all enliv’ning flame.
’Tis love, that fills the reed with warmth divine;
’Tis love, that sparkles in the racy wine.
Me, plaintive wand’rer from my peerless maid,
The reed has fir’d, and all my soul betray’d.
He gives the bane, and he with balsam cures;
Afflicts, yet soothes; impassions, yet allures.
Delightful pangs his am’rous tales prolong;
And Laili’s frantick lover lives in song.
Not he, who reasons best, this wisdom knows:
Ears only drink what rapt’rous tongues disclose.
Nor fruitless deem the reed’s heart-piercing pain:
See sweetness dropping from the parted cane.
Alternate hope and fear my days divide:
I courted Grief, and Anguish was my bride.
Flow on, sad stream of life! I smile secure:
Thou livest; Thou, the purest of the pure!

Rise, vig'rous youth! be free; be nobly bold:
Shall chains confine you, though they blaze with gold?
Go; to your vase the gather'd main convey:
What were your stores? The pittance of a day!
New plans for wealth your fancies would invent;
Yet shells, to nourish pearls, must lie content.
The man, whose robe love's purple arrows rend
Bids av'rice rest and toils tumultuous end.
Hail, heav'nly love! true source of endless gains!
Thy balm restores me, and thy skill sustains.

Oh, more than Galen learn'd, than Plato wise!
My guide, my law, my joy supreme arise!
Love warms this frigid clay with mystick fire,
And dancing mountains leap with young desire.
Blest is the fowl, that swims in seas of love,
And long the life sustain'd by food above.
With forms imperfect can perfection dwell?
Here pause, my song; and thou, vain world, farewell.

A volume might be filled with similar passages from the *Súfi* poets; from Sa'ib, Orfí, Mi'r Khosrau, Ja'mi, Hazi'n, and Sa'bik, who are next in beauty of composition to Ha'fiz and Sadi, but next at a considerable distance; from Mesíhi, the most elegant of their *Turkish* imitators; from a few *Hindi* poets of our own times, and from Ibnul Fa'rad, who wrote mystical odes in *Arabick*; but we may close this account of the *Súfis* with a passage from the third book of the *Bustan*, the declared subject of which is *divine love*; referring you for a particular detail of their metaphysics and theology to the *Dabistan* of Mohsani Fani, and to the pleasing essay, called the *Junction of two Seas*, by that amiable and unfortunate prince, Da'ra' Shecu'h:

“The love of a being composed, like thyself, of water and clay, destroys thy patience and peace of mind; it excites thee, in thy waking hours with minute beauties, and engages thee, in thy sleep, with vain imaginations: with such real affection dost thou lay thy head on her foot, that the universe, in comparison of her, vanishes into nothing before thee; and, since thy gold allures not her eye, gold and mere earth appear equal in thine. Not a breath dost thou utter to any one else, for with her thou hast no room for any other; thou declarest that her abode is in thine eye, or, when thou closest it, in thy heart; thou hast no fear of censure from any man; thou hast no power to be at rest for a moment; if she demands thy soul, it runs instantly to thy lip; and if she waves a cimeter over thee, thy head falls immediately under it. Since an absurd love, with its basis on air, affects thee so violently, and commands with a sway so despotic, canst thou wonder, that they, who walk in the true path, are drowned in the sea of mysterious adoration? They disregard life through affection for its giver; they abandon the world through remembrance of its maker; they are inebriated with the melody of amorous complaints; they remember their beloved, and resign to him both this life and the next. Through remembrance of God, they shun all mankind: they are so enamoured of the cup-bearer, that they spill

the wine from the cup. No panacea can heal them, for no mortal can be apprized of their malady; so loudly has rung in their ears, from eternity without beginning, the divine word *alest*, with *beli*, the tumultuous exclamation of all spirits. They are a sect fully employed, but sitting in retirement; their feet are of earth, but their breath is a flame: with a single yell they could rend a mountain from its base; with a single cry they could throw a city into confusion: like wind, they are concealed and move nimbly; like stone, they are silent, yet repeat **God's** praises. At early dawn their tears flow so copiously as to wash from their eyes the black powder of sleep: though the courser of their fancy ran so swiftly all night, yet the morning finds them left behind in disorder: night and day are they plunged in an ocean of ardent desire, till they are unable, through astonishment, to distinguish night from day. So enraptured are they with the beauty of Him, who decorated the human form, that with the beauty of the form itself, they have no concern; and, if ever they behold a beautiful shape, they see in it the mystery of **God's** work.

“The wise take not the husk in exchange for the kernel; and he, who makes that choice, has no understanding. He only has drunk the pure wine of unity, who has forgotten, by remembering **God**, all things else in both worlds.”

Let us return to the *Hindus*, among whom we now find the same emblematical theology, which *Pythagoras* admired and adopted. The loves of **Crishna** and **Radha**, or the reciprocal attraction between the divine goodness and the human soul, are told at large in the tenth book of the *Bhágavat*, and are the subject of a little *Pastoral Drama*, entitled *Gítagóvinda*: it was the work of **Jayade´va**, who flourished, it is said, before **Calidas**, and was born, as he tells us himself, in **Cenduli**, which many believe to be in *Calinga*; but, since there is a town of a similar name in *Berdwan*, the natives of it insist that the finest lyric poet of *India* was their countryman, and celebrate in honour of him an annual jubilee, passing a whole night in representing his drama, and in singing his beautiful songs. After having translated the *Gítagóvinda* word for word, I reduced my translation to the form, in which it is now exhibited; omitting only those passages, which are too luxuriant and too bold for an *European* taste, and the prefatory ode on the ten incarnations of **Vishnu**, with which you have been presented on another occasion: the phrases in *Italicks*, are the *burdens* of the several songs; and you may be assured, that not a single image or idea has been added by the translator.

On the Persians

Delivered 19 February, 1789.

GENTLEMEN,

I turn with delight from the vast mountains and barren deserts of *Turan*, over which we travelled last year with no perfect knowledge of our course, and request you now to accompany me on a literary journey through one of the most celebrated and most beautiful countries in the world; a country, the history and languages of which, both ancient and modern, I have long attentively studied, and on which I may without arrogance promise you more positive information, than I could possibly procure on a nation so disunited and so unlettered as the Tartars: I mean that, which Europeans improperly call *Persia*, the name of a single province being applied to the whole Empire of *Iran*, as it is correctly denominated by the present natives of it, and by all the learned *Muselmans*, who reside in these *British* territories. To give you an idea of its largest boundaries, agreeably to my former mode of describing *India*, *Arabia*, and *Tartary*, between which it lies, let us begin with the source of the great *Assyrian* stream, *Euphrates*, (as the *Greeks*, according to their custom, were pleased to miscall the *Forat*) and thence descend to its mouth in the Green Sea, or *Persian Gulf*, including in our line some considerable districts and towns on both sides the river; then coasting *Persia*, properly so named, and other Iranian provinces, we come to the delta of the *Sindhu* or *Indus*; whence ascending to the mountains of *Cashghar*, we discover its fountains and those of the *Jaihun*, down which we are conducted to the *Caspian*, which formerly perhaps it entered, though it lose itself now in the sands and lakes of *Khwarezm*: we next are led from the sea of *Khozar*, by the banks of the *Cur*, or *Cyrus*, and along the *Caucasean* ridges, to the shore of the *Euxine*, and thence, by the several *Grecian* seas, to the point, whence we took our departure, at no considerable distance from the *Mediterranean*. We cannot but include the lower *Asia* within this outline, because it was unquestionably a part of the *Persian*, if not of the old *Assyrian*, Empire; for we know, that it was under the dominion of *Caikhosrau*; and *Diodorus*, we find, asserts, that the kingdom of *Troas* was dependent on *Assyria*, since *Priam* implored and obtained succours from his Emperor *Teutames*, whose name approaches nearer to *Tahmu'ras*, than to that of any other *Assyrian* monarch. Thus may we look on *Iran* as the noblest *Island*, (for so the *Greeks* and the *Arabs* would have called it), or at least as the noblest *peninsula*, on this habitable globe; and if *M. Bailly* had fixed on it as the *Atlantis* of *Plato*, he might have supported his opinion with far stronger arguments than any, that he has adduced in favour of *New Zembla*: if the account, indeed, of the *Atlantes* be not purely an *Egyptian*, or an *Utopian*, fable, I should be more inclined to place them in *Iran* than in any region, with which I am acquainted.

It may seem strange, that the ancient history of so distinguished an Empire should be yet so imperfectly known; but very satisfactory reasons may be assigned for our ignorance of it: the principal of them are the superficial knowledge of the *Greeks* and *Jews*, and the loss of *Persian* archives or historical compositions. That the *Grecian* writers, before *Xenophon*, had *no* acquaintance with *Persia*, and that *all* their accounts of it are *wholly* fabulous, is a paradox too extravagant to be seriously maintained; but their connection with it in war or peace had, indeed, been generally confined to bordering kingdoms under feudatory princes; and the first *Persian* Emperor, whose life and character they seem to have known with tolerable accuracy, was the great *Cyrus*, whom I call, without fear of contradiction, *Caikhosrau*; for I shall then only doubt that the *Khosrau* of *Firdausi*' was the *Cyrus* of the first *Greek* historian, and the *Hero* of the oldest political and moral romance, when I doubt that

Louis *Quatorze* and Lewis *the Fourteenth* were one and the same *French King*: it is utterly incredible, that two different princes of *Persia* should each have been born in a foreign and hostile territory; should each have been doomed to death in his infancy by his maternal grandfather in consequence of portentous dreams, real or invented; should each have been saved by the remorse of his destined murderer, and should each, after a similar education among herdsmen, as the son of a herdsman, have found means to revisit his paternal kingdom, and having delivered it, after a long and triumphant war, from the tyrant, who had invaded it, should have restored it to the summit of power and magnificence. Whether so romantick a story, which is the subject of an Epick Poem, as majestic and entire as the *Iliad*, be historically true, we may feel perhaps an inclination to doubt; but it cannot with reason be denied, that the outline of it related to a single Hero, whom the *Asiatics*, conversing with the father of European history, described according to their popular traditions by his true name, which the *Greek* alphabet could not express: nor will a difference of names affect the question; since the *Greeks* had little regard for truth, which they *sacrificed* willingly to the *Graces* of their language, and the nicety of their ears; and, if they could render foreign words melodious, they were never solicitous to make them exact; hence they probably formed *Cambyses* from *Ca'mbakhsh*, or *Granting desires*, a title rather than a name, and *Xerxes* from *Shi'ru'yi*, a Prince and warrior in the *Shahnamah*, or from *Shi'rsha'h*, which might also have been a title; for the *Asiatick* Princes have constantly assumed new titles or epithets at different periods of their lives, or on different occasions; a custom, which we have seen prevalent in our own times both in *Iran* and *Hindustan*, and which has been a source of great confusion even in the scriptural accounts of Babylonian occurrences: both *Greeks* and *Jews* have in fact accommodated *Persian* names to their own articulation; and both seem to have disregarded the native literature of *Iran*, without which they could at most attain a general and imperfect knowledge of the country. As to the *Persians* themselves, who were contemporary with the *Jews* and *Greeks*, they must have been acquainted with the history of their own times, and with the traditional accounts of past ages; but for a reason, which will presently appear, they chose to consider *Cayu'mers* as the founder of the empire; and, in the numerous distractions, which followed the overthrow of *Da'ra'*, especially in the great revolution on the defeat of *Yezdegird*, their civil histories were loft, as those of *India* have unhappily been, from the solicitude of the priests, the only depositaries of their learning, to preserve their books of law and religion at the expense of all others: hence it has happened, that nothing remains of genuine *Persian* history before the dynasty of *Sa'sa'n*, except a few rustick traditions and fables, which furnished materials for the *Shahnamah*, and which are still supposed to exist in the *Pahlavi* language. The annals of the *Pishdadi*, or *Assyrian*, race must be considered as dark and fabulous; and those of the *Cayani* family, or the *Medes* and *Persians*, as heroick and poetical; though the lunar eclipses, said to be mentioned by *Ptolemy*, fix the time of *Gushtasp*, the prince, by whom *Zera'tusht* was protected: of the *Parthian* kings descended from *Arshac* or *Arsaces*, we know little more than the names; but the *Sasani's* had so long an intercourse with the Emperors of *Rome* and *Byzantium*, that the period of their dominion may be called an historical age. In attempting to ascertain the beginning of the *Assyrian* empire, we are deluded, as in a thousand instances, by names arbitrarily imposed: it had been settled by chronologers, that the first monarchy established in *Persia* was the *Assyrian*; and *Newton*, finding some of opinion, that it rose in the first century after the Flood, but unable by his own calculations to extend it farther back than *seven hundred and ninety* years before *Christ*, rejected part of the old system and adopted the rest of it; concluding, that the *Assyrian* Monarchs began to reign about two hundred years after *Solomon*, and that, in all preceding ages, the government of *Iran* had been divided into several petty states and principalities. Of this opinion I confess myself to have been; when, disregarding the wild chronology of the *Muselmans* and *Gabrs*, I had allowed the utmost natural duration to the reigns of eleven *Pishdadi* kings, without being able to add more than a hundred years to *Newton's* computation. It seemed, indeed, unaccountably strange, that, although *Abraham* had found a regular monarchy in *Egypt*, although the kingdom of *Yemen* had just pretensions to very high

antiquity, although the *Chinese*, in the twelfth century before our era, had made approaches at least to the present form of their extensive dominion, and although we can hardly suppose the first *Indian* monarchs to have reigned less than three thousand years ago, yet *Persia*, the most delightful, the most compact, the most desirable country of them all, should have remained for so many ages unsettled and disunited. A fortunate discovery, for which I was first indebted to Mir Muhammed Husain, one of the most intelligent *Muselmans* in *India*, has at once dissipated the cloud, and cast a gleam of light on the primeval history of *Iran* and of the human race, of which I had long despaired, and which could hardly have dawned from any other quarter.

The rare and interesting tract on *twelve different religions*, entitled the *Dabistan*, and composed by a *Mohammedan* traveller, a native of *Cashmir*, named Mohsan, but distinguished by the assumed surname of Fa'ni', or *Perishable*, begins with a wonderfully curious chapter on the religion of Hu'shang, which was long anterior to that of Zeratusht, but had continued to be secretly professed by many learned *Persians* even to the author's time; and several of the most eminent of them, dissenting in many points from the *Gabrs*, and persecuted by the ruling powers of their country, had retired to *India*; where they compiled a number of books, now extremely scarce, which Mohsan had perused, and with the writers of which, or with many of them, he had contracted an intimate friendship: from them he learned, that a powerful monarchy had been established for ages in *Iran* before the accession of Cayu'mers, that it was called the *Mahabadian* dynasty, for a reason which will soon be mentioned, and that many princes, of whom seven or eight only are named in the *Dabistan*, and among them Mahbul, or Maha' Beli, had raised their empire to the zenith of human glory. If we can rely on this evidence, which to me appears unexceptionable, the *Iranian* monarchy must have been the oldest in the world; but it will remain dubious, to which of the three stocks, *Hindu*, *Arabian*, or *Tartar*, the first Kings of *Iran* belonged, or whether they sprang from a *fourth* race distinct from any of the others; and these are questions, which we shall be able, I imagine, to answer precisely, when we have carefully inquired into the *languages* and *letters*, *religion* and *philosophy*, and incidentally into the *arts* and *sciences*, of the ancient *Persians*.

I. In the new and important remarks, which I am going to offer, on the ancient *languages* and *characters* of *Iran*, I am sensible, that you must give me credit for many assertions, which on this occasion it is impossible to prove; for I should ill deserve your indulgent attention, if I were to abuse it by repeating a dry list of detached words, and presenting you with a vocabulary instead of a dissertation; but, since I have no system to maintain, and have not suffered imagination to delude my judgement; since I have habituated myself to form opinions of men and things from *evidence*, which is the only solid basis of *civil*, as *experiment* is of *natural*, knowledge; and since I have maturely considered the questions which I mean to discuss; you will not, I am persuaded, suspect my testimony, or think that I go too far, when I assure you, that I will assert nothing positively, which I am not able satisfactorily to demonstrate. When Mohammed was born, and Anu'shirava'n; whom he calls *the Just King*, sat on the throne of *Persia*, two languages appear to have been generally prevalent in the great empire of *Iran*; that of the *Court*, thence named *Deri*, which was only a refined and elegant dialect of the *Parsi*, so called from the province, of which *Shiraz* is now the capital, and that of the learned, in which most books were composed, and which had the name of *Pahlavi*, either from the *heroes*, who spoke it in former times, or from *Pahlu*, a tract of land, which included, we are told, some considerable cities of *Irak*: the ruder dialects of both were, and, I believe, still are, spoken by the rusticks in several provinces; and in many of them, as *Herat*, *Zabul*, *Sistan* and others, distinct idioms were vernacular, as it happens in every kingdom of great extent. Besides the *Parsi* and *Pahlavi*, a very ancient and abstruse tongue was known to the priests and philosophers, called *the language of the Zend*, because a book on religious and moral duties, which they held sacred, and which bore that name,

had been written in it; while the *Pazend*, or comment on that work, was composed in *Pahlavi*, as a more popular idiom; but a learned follower of Zera'tusht, named Bahman, who lately died at *Calcutta*, where he had lived with me as a *Persian* reader about three years, allured me, that the *letters* of his prophet's book were properly called *Zend*, and the *language*, *Avesta*, as the words of the *Veda*'s are *Sanscrit*, and the characters, *Nagari*; or as the old *Saga*'s and poems of *Iseland* were expressed in *Runick* letters: let us however, in compliance with custom, give the name of *Zend* to the sacred language of *Persia*, until we can find, as we shall very soon, a fitter appellation for it. The *Zend* and the old *Pahlavi* are almost extinct in *Iran*; for among six or seven thousand *Gabrs*, who reside chiefly at *Yezd*, and in *Cirman*, there are very few, who can read *Pahlavi*, and scarce any, who even boast of knowing the *Zend*; while the *Parsi*, which remains almost: pure in the *Shahnamah*, has now become by the intermixture of numberless *Arabick* words, and many imperceptible changes, a new language exquisitely polished by a series of fine writers in prose and verse, and analogous to the different idioms gradually formed in *Europe* after the subversion of the *Roman* empire: but with modern *Persian* we have no concern in our present inquiry, which I confine to the ages, that preceded the *Mohammedan*. Having twice read the works of *Firdausi* with great attention, since I applied myself to the study of old *Indian* literature, I can assure you with confidence, that hundreds of *Parsi* nouns are pure *Sanscrit*, with no other change than such as may be observed in the numerous *bhashas*, or vernacular dialects, of *India*; that very many *Persian* imperatives are the roots of *Sanscrit* verbs; and that even the moods and tenses of the *Persian* verb substantive, which is the model of all the rest, are deducible from the *Sanscrit* by an easy and clear analogy: we may hence conclude, that the *Parsi*, was derived, like the various *Indian* dialects, from the language of the *Brahmans*; and I must add, that in the pure *Persian* I find no trace of any *Arabian* tongue, except what proceeded from the known intercourse between the *Persians* and *Arabs*, especially in the time of *Bahram*, who was educated in *Arabia*, and whose *Arabick* verses are still extant, together with his heroick line in *Deri*, which many suppose to be the first attempt at *Persian* versification in *Arabian* metre: but, without having recourse to other arguments, *the composition of words*, in which the genius of the *Persian* delights, and which that of the *Arabick* abhors, is a decisive proof, that the *Parsi* sprang from an *Indian*, and not from an *Arabian*, stock. Considering languages as mere instruments of knowledge, and having strong reasons to doubt the existence of genuine books in *Zend* or *Pahlavi* (especially since the well-informed author of the *Dabistan* affirms the work of Zera'tusht to have been lost, and its place supplied by a recent compilation) I had no inducement, though I had an opportunity, to learn what remains of those ancient languages; but I often conversed on them with my friend Bahman, and both of us were convinced after full consideration, that the *Zend* bore a strong resemblance to *Sanscrit*, and the *Pahlavi* to *Arabick*. He had at my request translated into *Pahlavi* the fine inscription, exhibited in the *Gulistan*, on the diadem of *Cyrus*; and I had the patience to read the list of words from the *Pazend* in the appendix to the *Farhangi Jehangiri*: this examination gave me perfect conviction, that the *Pahlavi* was a dialect of the *Chaldaick*; and of this curious fact I will exhibit a short proof. By the nature of the *Chaldean* tongue most words ended in the first long vowel like *shemia*, heaven; and that very word, unaltered in a single letter, we find in the *Pazend*, together with *lailia*, night, *meya*, water, *nira*, fire, *matra*, rain, and a multitude of others, all *Arabick* or *Hebrew* with a *Chaldean* termination: so *zamar*, by a beautiful metaphor from *pruning trees*, means in *Hebrew* to *compose verses*, and thence, by an easy transition, to *sing* them; and in *Pahlavi* we see the verb *zamruniten*, to *sing*, with its forms *zamrunemi*, I *sing*, and *zamrunid*, he *sang*; the verbal terminations of the *Persian* being added to the *Chaldaick* root. Now all those words are integral parts of the language, not adventitious to it like the *Arabick* nouns and verbals engrafted on modern *Persian*; and this distinction convinces me, that the dialect of the *Gabrs*, which they pretend to be that of Zera'tusht, and of which Bahman gave me a variety of written specimens, is a late invention of their priests, or subsequent at least to the *Muselman* invasion; for, although it may be possible, that a few of their sacred books were preserved, as he used to assert, in sheets of lead or

copper at the bottom of wells near *Yezd*, yet as the conquerors had not only a spiritual, but a political, interest in persecuting a warlike, robust, and indignant race of irreconcilable conquered subjects, a long time must have elapsed, before the hidden scriptures could have been safely brought to light, and few, who could perfectly understand them, must then have remained; but, as they continued to profess among themselves the religion of their forefathers, it became expedient for the *Mubeds* to supply the lost or mutilated works of their legislator by new compositions, partly from their imperfect recollection, and partly from such moral and religious knowledge, as they gleaned, most probably, among the *Christians*, with whom they had an intercourse. One rule we may fairly establish in deciding the question, whether the books of the modern *Gabrs* were anterior to the invasion of the *Arabs*: when an *Arabick* noun occurs in them changed only by the spirit of the *Chaldean* idiom, as *werta*, for *werd*, a rose, *daba*, for *dhahab*, gold, or *deman*, for *zeman*, time, we may allow it to have been ancient *Pahlavi*; but, when we meet with verbal nouns or infinitives, evidently formed by the rules of *Arabian* grammar, we may be sure, that the phrases, in which they occur, are comparatively modern; and not a single passage, which *Bahman* produced from the books of his religion, would abide this test.

We now come to the language of the *Zend*; and here I must impart a discovery, which I lately made, and from which we may draw the most interesting consequences. *M. Anquetil*, who had the merit of undertaking a voyage to *India*, in his earliest youth, with no other view than to recover the writings of *Zera'tusht*, and who would have acquired a brilliant reputation in *France*, if he had not sullied it by his immoderate vanity and virulence of temper, which alienated the good will even of his own countrymen, has exhibited in his work, entitled *Zendavesta*, two vocabularies in *Zend* and *Pahlavi*, which he had found in an approved collection of *Rawayat*, or *Traditional Pieces*, in modern *Persian*: of his *Pahlavi* no more needs be said, than that it strongly confirms my opinion concerning the *Chaldaick* origin of that language; but, when I perused the *Zend* glossary, I was inexpressibly surprized to find, that six or seven words in ten were pure *Sanscrit*, and even some of their inflexions formed by the rules of the *Vyacaran*; as *yushmacam*, the genitive plural of *yushmad*. Now *M. Anquetil* most certainly, and the *Persian* compiler most probably, had no knowledge of *Sanscrit*; and could not, therefore, have invented a list of *Sanscrit* words: it is, therefore, an authentick list of *Zend* words, which had been preserved in books or by tradition; and it follows, that the language of the *Zend* was at least a dialect of the *Sanscrit*, approaching perhaps as nearly to it as the *Pracrit*, or other popular idioms, which we know to have been spoken in *India* two thousand years ago. From all these facts it is a necessary consequence, that the oldest discoverable languages of *Persia* were *Chaldaick* and *Sanscrit*; and that, when they had ceased to be vernacular, the *Pahlavi* and *Zend* were deduced from them respectively, and the *Parsi* either from the *Zend*, or immediately from the dialect of the *Brahmans*; but all had perhaps a mixture of *Tartarian*; for the best lexicographers assert, that numberless words in ancient *Persian* are taken from the language of the *Cimmerians*, or the *Tartars* of *Kipchak*; so that the *three* families, whose lineage we have examined in former discourses, had left visible traces of themselves in *Iran*, long before the *Tartars* and *Arabs* had rushed from their deserts, and returned to that very country, from which in all probability they originally proceeded, and which the *Hindus* had abandoned in an earlier age, with positive commands from their legislators to revisit it no more. I close this head with observing, that no supposition of a mere political or commercial intercourse between the different nations will account for the *Sanscrit* and *Chaldaick* words, which we find in the old *Persian* tongues; because they are, in the first place, too numerous to have been introduced by such means, and, secondly, are not the names of exotick animals, commodities, or arts, but those of material elements, parts of the body, natural objects and relations, affections of the mind, and other ideas common to the whole race of man.

If a nation of *Hindus*, it may be urged, ever possessed and governed the country of *Iran*, we should find on the very ancient ruins of the temple or palace, now called *the throne of Jemshi'd*, some inscriptions in *Devanagari*, or at least in the characters on the stones at *Elephanta*, where the sculpture is unquestionably *Indian*, or in those on the *Staff of Fi'ru'z Sha'h*, which exist in the heart of *India*; and such inscriptions we probably should have found, if that edifice had not been erected after the migration of the *Brahmans* from *Iran*, and the violent schism in the *Persian* religion, of which we shall presently speak; for, although the popular name of the building at *Istakhr*, or *Persepolis*, be no certain proof that it was raised in the time of *Jemshi'd*, yet such a fact might easily have been preserved by tradition, and we shall soon have abundant evidence, that the temple was posterior to the reign of the *Hindu* monarchs: the *cypresses* indeed, which are represented with the figures in procession, might induce a reader of the *Shahnamah* to believe, that the sculptures related to the new faith introduced by *Zera'tusht*; but, as a cypress is a beautiful ornament, and as many of the figures appear inconsistent with the reformed adoration of fire, we must: have recourse to stronger proofs, that the *Takhti Jemshi'd* was erected after *Cayu'mers*. The building has lately been visited, and the characters on it examined, by Mr. *Francklin*; from whom we learn, that *Niebuhr* has delineated them with *great* accuracy: but without such testimony I should have suspected the correctness of the delineation; because the Danish traveller has exhibited two inscriptions in modern *Persian*, and one of them from the same place, which cannot have been exactly transcribed: they are very elegant verses of *Niza'mi'* and *Sadi'* on the instability of human greatness, but so ill engraved or so ill copied, that, if I had not had them nearly by heart, I should not have been able to read them; and M. *Rousseau* of *Isfahan*, who translated them with shameful inaccuracy, must have been deceived by the badness of the copy; or he never would have created a new king *Wakam*, by forming one word of *Jem* and the particle prefixed to it. Assuming, however, that we may reason as conclusively on the characters published by *Niebuhr*, as we might on the monuments themselves, were they now before us, we may begin with observing, as *Chardin* had observed on the very spot, that they bear no resemblance whatever to the letters used by the *Gabrs* in their copies of the *Vendidad*: this I once urged, in an amicable debate with *Bahman*, as a proof, that the *Zend* letters were a modern invention; but he seemed to hear me without surprize, and insisted, that the letters, to which I alluded, and which he had often seen, were monumental characters never used in books, and intended either to conceal some religious mysteries from the vulgar, or to display the art of the sculptor, like the embellished *Cusick* and *Nagari* on several *Arabian* and *Indian* monuments. He wondered, that any man could seriously doubt the antiquity of the *Pahlavi* letters; and in truth the inscription behind the horse of *Rustam*, which *Niebuhr* has also given us, is apparently *Pahlavi*, and might with some pains be decyphered: that character was extremely rude, and seems to have been written, like the *Roman* and the *Arabick*, in a variety of hands; for I remember to have examined a rare collection of old *Persian* coins in the Museum of the great Anatomist, *William Hunter*, and, though I believed the legends to be *Pahlavi*, and had no doubt, that they were coins of *Parthian* kings, yet I could not read the inscriptions without wasting more time, than I had then at command, in comparing the letters and ascertaining the proportions, in which they severally occurred. The gross *Pahlavi* was improved by *Zera'tusht* or his disciples into an elegant and perspicuous character, in which the *Zendavesta* was copied; and both were written from the right hand to the left like other *Chaldaick alphabets*; for they are manifestly both of *Chaldean origin*; but the *Zend* has the singular advantage of expressing all the long and short vowels, by distinct marks, in the body of each word, and all the words are distinguished by full points between them; so that, if modern *Persian* were unmixed with *Arabick*, it might be written in *Zend* with the greatest convenience, as any one may perceive by copying in that character a few pages of the *Shahnamah*. As to the unknown inscriptions in the palace of *Jemshi'd*, it may reasonably be doubted, whether they contain a system of letters, which any nation ever adopted: in five of them the letters, which are separated by points, may be reduced to forty, at least I can distinguish no more essentially different; and they all seem to be regular variations

and compositions of a straight line and an angular figure like the head of a javelin, or a leaf (to use the language of botanists) *hearted and lanced*. Many of the *Runick* letters appear to have been formed of similar elements; and it has been observed, that the writing at *Persepolis* bears a strong resemblance to that, which the *Irish* call *Ogham*: the word *Agam* in *Sanscrit* means *mysterious knowledge*; but I dare not affirm, that the two words had a common origin, and only mean to suggest, that, if the characters in question be really alphabetical, they were probably secret and sacerdotal, or a mere cypher, perhaps, of which the priests only had the key. They might, I imagine, be decyphered, if the language were certainly known; but, in all the other inscriptions of the same sort, the characters are too complex, and the variations of them too numerous, to admit an opinion, that they could be symbols of articulate sounds; for even the *Nagari* system, which has more distinct letters than any known alphabet, consists only of forty-nine simple characters, two of which are mere substitutions, and four of little use in *Sanscrit* or in any other language; while the more complicated figures, exhibited by *Niebuhr*, must be as numerous at least as the *Chinese* keys, which are the signs of *ideas* only, and some of which resemble the old *Persian* letters at *Istakhr*: the *Danish* traveller was convinced from his own observation, that they were written from the left hand, like all the characters used by *Hindu* nations; but I must leave this dark subject, which I cannot illuminate, with a remark formerly made by myself, that the square *Chaldaick* letters, a few of which are found on the *Persian* ruins, appear to have been originally the same with the *Devanagari*, before the latter were enclosed, as we now see them, in angular frames.

II. The primeval religion of *Iran*, if we rely on the authorities adduced by *Mohsani Fa'ni'*, was that, which *Newton* calls the oldest (and it may justly be called the noblest) of all religions; “a firm belief, that One Supreme God made the world by his power, and continually governed it by his providence; a pious fear, love, and adoration of Him; a due reverence for parents and aged persons; a fraternal affection for the whole human species, and a compassionate tenderness even for the brute creation.” A system of devotion so pure and sublime could hardly among mortals be of long duration; and we learn from the *Dabistan*, that the popular worship of the *Iranians* under *Hu'shang* was purely *Sabian*; a word, of which I cannot offer any certain etymology, but which has been deduced by grammarians from *Saba*, a *host*, and, particularly the *host of heaven*, or the *celestial bodies*, in the adoration of which the *Sabian* ritual is believed to have consisted: there is a description, in the learned work just mentioned, of the several *Persian* temples dedicated to the Sun and Planets, of the images adored in them, and of the magnificent processions to them on prescribed festivals, one of which is probably represented by sculpture in the ruined city of *Jemshi'd*; but the planetary worship in *Persia* seems only a part of a far more complicated religion, which we now find in these *Indian* provinces; for *Mohsan* assures us, that, in the opinion of the best informed *Persians*, who professed the faith of *Hu'shang*, distinguished from that of *Zera'tusht*, the first monarch of *Iran* and of the whole earth was *Maha'ba'd*, a word apparently *Sanscrit*, who divided the people into four orders, the *religious*, the *military*, the *commercial*, and the *fertile*, to which he assigned names unquestionably the same in their origin with those now applied to the four primary classes of the *Hindus*. They added, that He received from the creator, and promulgated among men, a *sacred book in a heavenly language*, to which the *Muselman* author gives the *Arabick* title of *desatir*, or regulations, but the original name of which he has not mentioned; and that *fourteen* *Maha'ba'ds* had appeared or would appear in human shapes for the government of this world: now when we know, that the *Hindus* believe in *fourteen* *Menu's*, or celestial personages with similar functions, the *first* of whom left a book of *regulations*, or *divine ordinances*, which they hold equal to the *Veda*, and the language of which they believe to be that of the Gods, we can hardly doubt, that the first corruption of the purest and oldest religion was the system of *Indian* Theology, invented by the *Brahmans* and prevalent in these territories, where the book of *Maha'ba'd* or *Menu* is at this hour the standard of all religious and moral duties. The accession of

Cayu'mers to the throne of *Persia*, in the eighth or ninth century before Christ, seems to have been accompanied by a considerable revolution both in government and religion: he was most probably of a different race from the *Mahabadians*, who preceded him, and began perhaps the new system of national faith, which *Hu'shang*, whose name it bears, completed; but the reformation was partial; for, while they rejected the complex polytheism of their predecessors, they retained the laws of *Maha'ba'd*, with a superstitious veneration for the sun, the planets, and fire; thus resembling the *Hindu* sects, called *Saura's* and *Sagnica's*, the second of which is very numerous at *Banares*, where many *agnihotra's* are continually blazing, and where the *Sagnica's*, when they enter on their sacerdotal office, kindle, with two pieces of the hard wood *Semi*, a fire which they keep lighted through their lives for their nuptial ceremony, the performance of solemn sacrifices, the obsequies of departed ancestors, and their own funeral pile. This remarkable rite was continued by *Zera'tusht*; who reformed the old religion by the addition of genii, or angels, presiding over months and days, of new ceremonies in the veneration shown to fire, of a new work, which he pretended to have received from heaven, and, above all, by establishing the actual adoration of One Supreme Being: he was born, according to *Mohsan*, in the district of *Rai*; and it was He, not, as *Ammianus* asserts, his protector *Gushtasb*, who travelled into *India*, that he might receive information from the *Brahmans* in theology and ethicks. It is barely possible, that *Pythagoras* knew him in the capital of *Irak*; but the *Grecian* sage must then have been far advanced in years, and we have no certain evidence of an intercourse between the two philosophers. The reformed religion of *Persia* continued in force, till that country was subdued by the *Muselmans*; and, without studying the *Zend*, we have ample information concerning it in the modern *Persian* writings of several, who professed it. *Bahman* always named *Zera'tusht*, with reverence; but he was in truth a pure Theist, and strongly disclaimed any adoration of the *fire* or other elements: he denied, that the doctrine of two coeval principles, supremely good and supremely bad, formed any part of his faith; and he often repeated with emphasis the verses of *Firdausi* on the prostration of *Cyrus* and his paternal grandfather before the blazing altar: "Think not, that they were adorers of fire; for that element was only an exalted object, on the lustre of which they fixed their eyes; they humbled themselves a whole week before GOD; and, if thy understanding be ever so little exerted, thou must acknowledge thy dependence on the being supremely pure." In a story of *Sadi*, near the close of his beautiful *Bustan*, concerning the idol of *So'mana't'h*, or *Maha'de'va*, he confounds the religion of the *Hindus* with that of the *Gabrs*, calling the *Brahmans* not only *Moghs*, (which might be justified by a passage in the *Mesnavi*) but even readers of the *Zend* and *Pazend*: now, whether this confusion proceeded from real or pretended ignorance, I cannot decide, but am as firmly convinced, that the doctrines of the *Zend* were distinct from those of the *Veda*, as I am that the religion of the *Brahmans*, with whom we converse every day, prevailed in *Persia* before the accession of *Cayu'mers*, whom the *Parsi's*, from respect to his memory, consider as the first of men, although they believe in an *universal deluge* before his reign.

With the religion of the old *Persians* their *philosophy* (or as much as we know of it) was intimately connected; for they were assiduous observers of the luminaries, which they adored, and established, according to *Mohsan*, who confirms in some degree the fragments of *Berosus*, a number of artificial cycles with distinct names, which seem to indicate a knowledge of the period, in which the equinoxes appear to revolve: they are said also to have known the most wonderful powers of nature, and thence to have acquired the fame of magicians and enchanters; but I will only detain you with a few remarks on that metaphysical theology, which has been professed immemorially by a numerous sect of *Persians* and *Hindus*, was carried in part into *Greece*, and prevails even now among the learned *Muselmans* who sometimes avow it without reserve. The modern philosophers of this persuasion are called *Sufi's*, either from the *Greek* word for a *sage*, or from the *woollen* mantle, which they used to wear in some provinces of *Persia*: their fundamental tenets are, that nothing exists absolutely but GOD: that the

human soul is an emanation from his essence, and, though divided for a time from its heavenly source, will be finally re-united with it; that the highest possible happiness will arise from its reunion, and that the chief good of mankind, in this transitory world, consists in as perfect an *union* with the Eternal Spirit as the incumbrances of a mortal frame will allow; that, for this purpose, they should break all *connexion* (or *taalluk*, as they call it), with extrinsick objects, and pass through life without *attachments*, as a swimmer in the ocean strikes freely without the impediment of clothes; that they should be straight and free as the cypress, whose fruit is hardly perceptible, and not sink under a load, like fruit-trees *attached* to a trellis; that, if mere earthly charms have power to influence the soul, the *idea* of celestial beauty must overwhelm it in extatick delight; that, for want of apt words to express the divine perfections and the ardour of devotion, we must borrow such expressions as approach the nearest to our ideas, and speak of *Beauty* and *Love* in a transcendent and mystical sense; that, like a *reed* torn from its native bank, like *wax* separated from its delicious honey, the soul of man bewails its disunion with *melancholy musick*, and sheds burning tears, like the lighted taper, waiting passionately for the moment of its extinction, as a disengagement from earthly trammels, and the means of returning to its Only Beloved. Such in part (for I omit the minuter and more subtil metaphysicks of the *Sufi's*, which are mentioned in the *Dabistan*) is the wild and enthusiastick religion of the modern *Persian* poets, especially of the sweet *Ha'fiz* and the great *Maulavi*: such is the system of the *Vedanti* philosophers and best lyrick poets of *India*; and, as it was a system of the highest antiquity in both nations, it may be added to the many other proofs of an immemorial affinity between them.

III. On the ancient monuments of Persian sculpture and architecture we have already made such observations, as were sufficient for our purpose; nor will you be surprized at the diversity between the figures at *Elephanta*, which are manifestly *Hindu*, and those at *Persepolis*, which are merely *Sabian*, if you concur with me in believing, that the *Takhti Jemshid* was erected after the time of *Cayu'mers*, when the *Brahmans* had migrated from *Iran*, and when their intricate mythology had been superseded by the simpler adoration of the planets and of fire.

IV. As to the *sciences* or *arts* of the old *Persians*, I have little to say; and no complete evidence of them seems to exist. *Mohsan* speaks more than once of ancient verses in the *Pahlavi* language; and *Bahman* assured me, that some scanty remains of them had been preserved: their musick and painting, which *Niza'mi* celebrated, have irrecoverably perished; and in regard to *Ma'ni'*, the painter and impostor, whose book of drawings called *Artang*, which he pretended to be divine, is supposed to have been destroyed by the *Chinese*, in whose dominions he had sought refuge, the whole tale is too modern to throw any light on the questions before us concerning the origin of nations and the inhabitants of the primitive world.

Thus has it been proved by clear evidence and plain reasoning, that a powerful monarchy was established in *Iran* long before the *Assyrian*, or *Pishdadi*, government; that it was in truth a *Hindu* monarchy, though, if any chuse to call it *Cusian*, *Casdean*, or *Scythian*, we shall not enter into a debate on mere names; that it subsisted many centuries, and that its history has been ingrafted on that of the *Hindus*, who founded the monarchies of *Ayodhya* and *Indraprestha*; that the language of the first *Persian* empire was the mother of the *Sanscrit*, and consequently of the *Zend*, and *Parsi*, as well as of *Greek*, *Latin*, and *Gothick*; that the language of the *Assyrians* was the parent of *Chaldaick* and *Pahlavi*, and that the primary *Tartarian* language also had been current in the same empire; although, as the *Tartars* had no books or even letters, we cannot with certainty trace their unpolished and variable idioms. We discover, therefore in *Persia*, at the earliest dawn of history, the *three* distinct races of men, whom we described on former occasions as possessors of *India*, *Arabia*, *Tartary*; and, whether they were collected in *Iran* from distant regions, or diverged from it, as from a common centre, we

shall easily determine by the following considerations . Let us observe in the first place the central position of *Iran*, which is bounded by *Arabia*, by *Tartary*, and by *India*; whilst *Arabia* lies contiguous to *Iran* only, but is remote from *Tartary*, and divided even from the skirts of *India* by a considerable gulf; no country, therefore , but *Persia* seems likely to have sent forth its colonies to all the kingdoms of *Asia*: the *Brahmans* could never have migrated from *India* to *Iran*, because they are expressly forbidden by their oldest existing laws to leave the region, which they inhabit at this day; the *Arabs* have not even a tradition of an emigration into *Persia* before *Mohammed*, nor had they indeed any inducement to quit their beautiful and extensive domains; and, as to the *Tartars*, we have no trace in history of their departure from their plains and forests, till the invasion of the *Medes*, who, according to etymologists, were the sons of *Madaï*, and even they were conducted by princes of an *Assyrian* family. The *three* races, therefore, whom we have already mentioned, (and more than three we have not yet found) migrated from *Iran*, as from their common country; and thus the *Saxon* chronicle, I presume from good authority, brings the first inhabitants of *Britain* from *Armenia*; while a late very learned writer concludes, after all his laborious researches, that the *Goths* or *Scythians* came from *Persia*; and another contends with great force, that both the *Irish* and old *Britons* proceeded severally from the borders of the *Caspian*; a coincidence of conclusions from different media by persons wholly unconnected, which could scarce have happened, if they were not grounded on solid principles. We may therefore hold this proposition firmly established, that *Iran*, or *Persia* in its largest sense, was the true centre of population, of knowledge, of languages, and of arts; which, instead of travelling westward only, as it has been fancifully supposed, or eastward, as might with equal reason have been asserted, were expanded in all directions to all the regions of the world, in which the *Hindu* race had settled under various denominations: but, whether *Asia* has not produced other races of men, distinct from the *Hindus*, the *Arabs*, or the *Tartars*, or whether any apparent diversity may not have sprung from an intermixture of those three in different proportions, must be the subject of a future inquiry. There is another question of more immediate importance, which you, gentlemen, only can decide: namely, "by what means we can preserve our Society from dying gradually away, as it has advanced gradually to its present (shall I say flourishing or languishing?) state." It has subsisted five years without any expense to the members of it, until the first volume of our Transactions was published; and the price of that large volume, if we compare the different values of money in *Bengal* and in *England*, is not more than equal to the *annual* contribution towards the charges of the Royal Society by each of its fellows, who may not have chosen to compound for it on his admission: this I mention, not from an idea that any of us could object to the purchase of one copy at least, but from a wish to inculcate the necessity of our common exertions in promoting the sale of the work both here and in *London*. In vain shall we meet, as a literary body, if our meetings shall cease to be supplied with original dissertations and memorials; and in vain shall we collect the most interesting papers, if we cannot publish them occasionally without exposing the Superintendents of the Company's press, who undertake to print them at their own hazard, to the danger of a considerable loss: by united efforts the *French* have compiled their stupendous repositories of universal knowledge; and by united efforts only can we hope to rival them, or to diffuse over our own country and the rest of *Europe* the lights attainable by our *Asiatick Researches*.