

ART. V. *A Grammar of the Sanskrita Language, by Charles Wilkins, L.L.D. F.R.S. 4to. p. 662. London, 1808.*

A Grammar of the Sungskrit Language, composed from the works of the most esteemed Grammarians; to which are added examples for the exercise of the Student, and a complete List of the Dhatoos or Roots, by W. Carey, Teacher of the Sungskrit, Bengallee, and Mahratta Languages, in the College of Fort William. Serampore, printed at the Mission Press, folio, pp. 906, app. 108, Index 24. 1806.

Mr. Colebrooke's Grammar of the Sanskrit Language. Printed in India. Folio, pp. 236. London, Blacks, Parry and Co.

AS so much of the reputation of every country depends upon its literary productions, we may, with reason, be proud that of a language so curious, so celebrated, and until lately so inaccessible as the Sanscrit, no fewer than three Grammars, composed by Englishmen, have issued from the English press. We owe to France the translation of a Chinese Historian, and the most important elucidations of Chinese literature. We are indebted to the same country for the Zend-avesta, and Boun-Dehesch of the disciples of Zerdusht or Zoroaster: but England may in her turn claim the honour, almost undivided, of revealing to the world the venerated and long-secluded compositions of the Sanscrit. (We say, almost undivided, because the Bhagavat, one of the most important and, in some respects, the most rational of the irrational Puranas of the Bramins, having been previously translated from the Sanscrit into the Tamul and the Persian, was published in French at Paris in the year 1788.

Perhaps, however, this ought not to form an exception to our exclusive honour of being the first Europeans who have attained and communicated the Sanscrit literature, because it does not appear that this book, which was published under the title of Bagavadam, was translated by any Frenchman from the Sanscrit. The Invocation declares it to have been translated into the Tamul or Malabar dialect; and from that language the French version seems to have been made, with the help of an Indian interpreter, who, unknown to his employer, clandestinely sent a copy to the French minister.

The importance of the Sanscrit language has been long obvious to the students of Oriental literature. It has been described by Dr. Carey, the author of one of the Grammars, as the immediate parent of the Bengal, the Mahratta, the Orissa, the

Telenga, the Carnatic, the Gujurat, and the Malabar or Tamul languages. Hence a knowledge of the Sanscrit places all these in our power, as it will generally furnish the meaning of four words out of five of them all. "The peculiar Grammar," he says, 'of any one of these may be acquired in a couple of months, and then the language lies open to the student. The knowledge of four words in five enables him to read with pleasure, and renders the acquisition of the few new words, as well as the idiomatic expressions, a matter of skill rather than of labour. Thus the Orissa, though possessing a separate grammar and character, is so much like the Bengalee in the very expression, that a Bengalee Pundit is almost equal to the correction of an Orissa Proof Sheet; and the first time that I read a page of Gujurate, the meaning appeared so obvious as to render it unnecessary to ask the Pundit questions."

Another consideration has long attached us to the Sanscrit. In our philological prolusions we have occasionally amused ourselves with tracing the affinities of some of the languages of Europe and Asia: and we have been much interested to find how many words of European languages may be paralleled with similar ones in the Sanscrit; and this not merely of the Latin and Greek, which Mr. Halhed has remarked, but also of the Saxon and Welsh. It therefore cannot fail to be as interesting to the grammatical philosopher, as it will be beneficial to those who are employed in the East India service.

But although none can be more impressed than ourselves with a strong sense of the utility and importance of this language, we are by no means prepared to say with the Bramins that it is the language of the Gods; nor with Mr. Wilkins that it is a 'wonderful language'; nor even with Sir William Jones that it is more perfect than the Greek, and more excellently refined than either Greek or Latin. This indefatigable student, who first held the torch, and pointed out the path in the dark caverns of Sanscrit literature, and who created so much of that spirit of inquiry which is now so successfully exploring them, naturally spoke of his new, and mysterious favourite, with all the warmth of a first passion. Mr. Halhed gravely states its antiquity to be unfathomable*; as if we had fathomed the antiquity of any language! and Colonel Dow most devoutly believed 'that the Hindoos carry their authentic history farther back than any other nation now existing†.' We should have coincided with

* Pref. to Code of Gentoo Laws.

† Pref. to his Hist.

the Colonel in his paragraph, had he left out the epithet 'authentic,' because as the Bramins very confidently affirm that Munnoo wrote his book rather better than seven thousand millions of years ago; and as Mr. Halhed who tells us this, also asserts that Shukeh Diew, a learned Bramin, composed a work containing the History of India during the whole of this period, we may safely believe that no 'other nation now existing,' can carry back their history much farther. We are glad to learn from Mr. Halhed that this History, the Shree Bagbut, which he very sensibly calls 'a curious History,' still subsists, and that it is so consistent, in length at least, with its subject, as to contain more than three thousand chapters. 'What,' says Mr. Halhed with some naiveté, 'shall we say to a work composed 4000 years ago, and from thence tracing mankind upwards through several millions of years*?' On transcribing this passage we felt disposed to answer it by adding three notes of admiration to his simple mark of interrogation; but the sentence which closes the next paragraph, induced us to think that this expression of our surprise might just as suitably be placed after that. 'From the premises already established, this conclusion, *at least*, may fairly be deduced, that the world does not now contain annals of more *indisputable* antiquity than those delivered down by the ancient Bramins'!!!

The Sanscrit has nearly ceased to be a spoken language. Indeed it bears much the same relation to the vernacular languages now in daily use between the Indus and the Ganges that the Latin does to the Italian, the classical Greek to the modern Greek, or the Saxon to English. But we think there can be as little reasonable doubt that it was once spoken in India, more or less universally, as there is that the Greek of Plato was used at Athens, and the Latin of Cicero at Rome. It is easy to account for its disuse in the common conversation of India. As the Bramins monopolized all literature as well as all sanctity, and forbad the lower casts, under the most dreadful penalties, some from reading and some from listening to the books which they chose to consider sacred, it became inevitable that they should form in time a language for themselves, gradually acquiring corruptions and variations from their ancient tongue. The Sanscrit was used only for writing, and therefore received a polish, an orthography and a grammar peculiar to itself, and no

* Pref. Gent. Laws.

doubt purposely made unlike the spoken dialects. It gratified the vanity of the Bramins to have an esoteric language as well as knowledge. But as they were obliged to mix in the transactions of life with their degraded countrymen, they could not but use the popular dialects in conversation. Hence Sanscrit was cultivated by the studious Bramins as a learned language, confined to themselves; while the vulgar dialect was promiscuously used by all from its general convenience. The popular dialects therefore were suffered to supersede the Sanscrit in common use.

When the Sanscrit like the hieroglyphics of Ægypt, or the written characters of China, had thus become the literary language of a peculiar class, distinct from the colloquial, it is not at all surprising that it should be made to possess many features unlike the spoken language. But in considering the merit of its particular qualities, we cannot indulge in the unbounded commendations of its admirers. We must always think that the Poems of Homer and the state of language which they display, compared with the rude history and manners of the Greeks in his time, present a phenomenon, which nothing in the Sanscrit excels in language and measure, or at all approaches in intellect and poetry. The Sanscrit compounds are sometimes happy; but this is a beauty which should be very sparingly used, or like the Asiatic metaphors, it becomes actual deformity. The Bramins employ it most licentiously. They are often so extravagant as to make the whole period of a sentence one compound, which appears to us a very barbarous practice. It reminds us of the tremendous words of the Indians of North America, (who are also fond of compounds) the enormous length of which has sometimes made us gasp for breath as we attempted to pronounce them. Nor is this habit of compounding words very favourable to perspicuity, as will appear from a verse which Mr. Wilkins has translated in his Heetopades, written in a kind of measure which the Bramins, whose diction is as gigantic as their history, call eendra-vajra, the lightning of the God of the heavens.

‘ Swa-karma-santâna-veechêshtetânee

own-work - offspring - seekings

Kâlâ-’ntarâ-’vreetta-soobhâ-’soobhânee

time - within - shut - good - not good

eehî-’va dreeshtânee mayi-va tânee

here even seen by me even those

janmâ-’ntarânêc-’va dasâ - ’phalânee

birth-within as it were stage of life fruits.

‘ The first and second lines contain but one compound word each;

each; for there is no sign of either case, gender or number, till you get to the end.' Mr. Wilkins tells us, that from this specimen we 'may judge of Sanskreet composition *in general**, and if so, we must be pardoned if we think that if it be the language of the gods, they must be such as our rude Thor and Woden, who were not very famous for either elegance or intellect.

The multifarious and unnecessary permutations of the Sanscrit letters, answering none of the real purposes of language, the various declensions of nouns, and conjugations of verbs, numerous far beyond any perceptible utility; the giving every noun a masculine, feminine, and neuter gender, and a dual number, each declining into eight cases; these singularities and the endless distinctions and refinements of their grammar, are most frequently little else than *difficiles nugas*, the artificial tricks and amusements of literary leisure, sometimes making an improvement, but much oftener a fantastical somerset. Peculiarity and perplexity, difficulty and refinement are not always beauties; and therefore we cannot join in an unqualified admiration of the Sanscrit.

Many other circumstances concur to abate our enthusiasm for this divine language, highly as it has been extolled by the twice-born class who use it. The Bramins may have increased its euphony by some of their refinements; but the following sounds, taken from Mr. Wilkins's plates of the compound consonants, seem to give it no advantage beyond the German, in the beauties of articulation—kshu, kshry, ttry, tsth, kshl, gddh, kchh, chchlr, ndhm, nchchh, chchhw. These compounds certainly have a very hottentottish appearance. To class ri and lri among the vowels displays no good taste; and the number of nasals seems also to detract from its boasted elegance. It has a guttural nasal, a palatal nasal, and a cerebral nasal: and this palatal nasal is sometimes beautified with a consonant immediately before it, as in the root jna, and its derivatives. Mr. Wilkins says that the just articulation of this is found so difficult, and the sound so harsh, that it is frequently softened into another word. Thus the barbarous word kriptā is modified by the learned of Bengal into an easier pronounciation. Besides these heavy impeachments of the euphony of this language of the gods, there are also ten consonants followed by the aspirate h.

The character of the Sanscrit is called Devanagari, 'the

* Heetopades, p. 307.

language of the Angels.' But it appears to us by no means equal either to the Greek, the Roman, or the English written letters in its convenience, beauty, or dispatch. It has the same imperfection which pervades the Arabian and Chaldee alphabets, that the characters of many of their consonants so closely resemble each other, that perpetual mistakes arise from the hurry or inattention of transcribers. Thus the similarity of the cha, ba, and va च ब व; of the tha, ta, dha and da, ठ ट ढ; of the sa, ma and bhia, स म भ; of the pa, sha and pha, प ष फ; the ta and na, त न; and the da and nga, ड ङ must give rise to many various readings and misconceptions.

Of the three Grammars, those of Mr. Wilkins and Dr. Carey are the most complete. Mr. Colebrook's, in the copy sent from India, which is now before us, breaks off with the seventh article of the verbs of the first class unfinished. We do not know whether he has continued it. Dr. Carey and Mr. Wilkins have given us complete Grammars, except that they have not treated on the prosody of the language. It would be impertinent in us to decide on their relative merits. Dr. Carey is very full upon the verbs, and his list of the dhatoos or roots is extremely curious. His chapters on the formation of the words and the derivatives are copious and elaborate. He is every where useful, laborious, and practical.

Mr. Wilkins has also discussed these subjects, though not always so amply as the worthy and unwearied missionary. But on the whole, we must confess that the Grammar of Mr. Wilkins has attracted more of our attention, from its being the last published, and from the very ingenious manner in which he has handled the various divisions of this most complicated subject. Indeed, we think it but a just tribute to his merit and labour to say, that it is one of the best and most perspicuous Grammars that we have ever seen. His types are beautiful; they are also exact and well printed; and this is no small merit, because the imperfections of the alphabet which we have pointed out, are strongly felt in ill cut or worn types, and in thick or defective printing, as is sometimes the case with Dr. Carey's Grammar.

The Sanscrit alphabet has fifty letters, of which sixteen are vowels, including the ri and lri, both long and short. But Mr. Wilkins remarks, that the number of simple articulations may be reduced to twenty-eight: namely, five vowels and twenty-three consonants; but this reduction is on the principle, which is liable to some objection, that the long and short sounds of the vowels are the same articulations. Mr. Wilkins deducts from the con-

sonants the aspirates also, not considering them as distinct articulations. We are not quite satisfied about their assumed identity.

The Sanscrit nouns have two cases more than the Latin; that is, the Latin ablative is split into three: by, from, and in, are made distinct cases. The declensions of the Sanscrit nouns are unnecessarily numerous, and we do not see what advantage is gained by their multiplicity. Dr. Carey makes six declensions; Mr. Wilkins eight, and his eighth branches off into fourteen classes.

Many declensions in a language tend to prove that it was in a very barbarous and confused state before it was subjected to the rules of grammar. If the Sanscrit had been at all formed on regular and scientific principles, it would never have had such a vast apparatus of inflections and conjugations.

We cannot avoid observing on the practice of declining the noun by varying its termination, (a practice not altogether unknown to our Saxon ancestors) that a great improvement was made in the present English tongue, when it gave way to the general introduction of prepositions. By these we express our meaning with precision, which cannot always be obtained by the terminal case. Thus the word *penæ* being the same in the Latin for genitive and dative singular and for nominative plural, means equally of a pen, to a pen, and pens. So in the Sanscrit

शिव stands equally for in Siva and on Siva in the masculine and neuter genders; for the dual feminine nominative two female Sivas; for the dual neuter nominative; for the accusative dual both feminine and neuter; for the vocative feminine both singular and dual; and for the vocative neuter singular. Thus one word has eleven different meanings, which you cannot discriminate by the eye, but only by the general construction of the sentence, unless you add prepositions or other words. And if you add these, and also inflect, then the inflection is a superfluity, and therefore an incumbrance.

We have been much pleased with Dr. Carey's very sensible preface. In a fair and intelligent statement, it points out the use and importance of the Sanscrit; and we cordially concur in what he has said on the subject. He has addressed his work to the Marquis Wellesley, as the founder of the college of Fort William, which he truly says 'has been the means of giving to the world many important works on Oriental literature.' We cannot omit adding, that the study of the Sanscrit was so far advanced under the protection of the Marquis, that upon his visitation

tation of the college in 1804, a declamation was pronounced in it by Mr. Cowan, and a speech by Dr. Carey. This foundation has been since abolished, and in its stead an Oriental college established at Hertford. The propriety of this change it is not for us to discuss. The letter of the Court of Directors upon it, and the answer of the Marquis are preserved in the state papers of the Asiatic Annual Register for 1805.

But although we heartily join in every recommendation of this language to the attention of the curious, we must confess that our favourable opinion does not arise from any respect we have for 'the knowledge,' which Mr. Wilkins, in his preface to his Grammar, says, 'it may be the means of acquiring, or the elegant sources of amusement it may contain:' for upon these points we are sorry to be at complete issue with him. He says that 'the lover of science, the antiquary, the historian, the moralist, the poet, and the man of taste will obtain in Sanscrit books an inexhaustible fund of information and amusement.' He has even suffered his partiality to mislead him so far as to affirm that 'those grand mythological treasures, the ancient poems called Puranas, present an endless assemblage of enchanting allegory and fable, and of the most interesting stories of ancient times, recounted in polished numbers calculated to allure the reader into the paths of religion, honor, and virtue.' Our estimation of these works falls so short of this high commendation, that we shall trespass on the patience of our readers with a few observations on the general merit of Sanscrit literature.

First in the estimation of the Bramins are the four sacred Vedas. These are considered as the fountain of all knowledge, human and divine, and are averred to have been revealed by Brahma. They seem to consist of hymns to their various deities, by different writers, of ceremonial precepts, and of occasional mythology. We are greatly indebted to Mr. Colebrooke for his Essay upon them.* But when he tells us that they have been revered by Hindoos for hundreds if not *thousands* of years, we wish he had added the evidence for his millenary computation.

Their four Upa Vedas are on medicine, music, the fabrication of arms, and their mechanical arts. The latter, the St'hapatya, may be worth inspecting; but their medicine consists

* Asiat. Researches, V. 8. p. 377. 8vo.

chiefly of charms and superstitions, and their music can excite little curiosity in Europeans.

Of their six Vedangas, three relate to their Grammar; one to the explanation of obscure phrases in the Vedas; another is on their religious ceremonies, and the most important, the Jyotish, contains their astronomy. Mr. Davis, in the second volume of the Asiatic Researches, gave some important extracts from the Surya Siddhanta, one of their most ancient treatises on the heavenly bodies: but for the most valuable criticism on their astronomical Shasters, we must refer to the Essays of Mr. Bentley, one of the most intelligent of our Indian literati, in the fifth and other volumes of the same work.

Of their Upangas, the most important are the eighteen Puranas. One of these, the Bagavadam, was published in French, as mentioned above, and Epitomes, with large extracts of two others, the Sheeve Pooran and the Brehme Viverte Pooran, have been lately published in English. That they are very curious specimens of Braminical mythology, must be allowed: the very nonsense with which they abound, is, in this respect, interesting; but as to any other merit, our apprehension is so blunt, that we cannot perceive it, and must therefore leave it to be discovered and enjoyed by those who have either a more refined taste or a sharper appetite.

The Nyaya may be said to comprise the logical treatises. The Mimansa are on their moral and religious duties, and the Dherma Sastra comprehend the institutes of Menu and the Glosses upon it. Sir William Jones obliged us with a translation of the Menu, and Mr. Colebrooke's Digest of Hindu law contains very valuable specimens of the comments upon it. When to these we add their two sacred epic poems, The Ramayuna and The Mahabharat, the first of which will be the subject of a subsequent article in our Review, we shall have noticed the most venerated part of what is called the ancient Sanscrit literature. The Tragedy of Sacontala, and some of their Odes are in a different style of composition, and more worthy of notice; but are much more modern than was at first supposed.

But are these works 'an inexhaustible fund of information to the lover of science, the antiquary, the historian, the moralist, the poet, and the man of taste?'

We are assured by Mr. Davis,* not only that it is the ridiculous belief of the common Bramins that eclipses are occasioned

* *Asiat. Researches*, V. 2. p. 572.

by the intervention of the monster Rahu, but also that this belief is founded on explicit and positive declarations contained in the Vedas and Puranas, the divine authority of which no devout Hindu can dispute. The later Bramins, who have learned a truer science from other sources, endeavour to allegorize the head and tail of the monster into the position of the moon's nodes; but in obedience to their Vedas and Puranas, say that certain things might have been so formerly, and may be so still, but for astronomical purposes astronomical rules must be followed. Nerasiha in his commentary, shews, that by Rahu and Cetu, the head and tail of the monster, could only be meant the position of the moon's nodes and the quantity of her latitude, but he does not therefore deny the reality of Rahu and Cetu: on the contrary, he says 'that their actual existence and presence in eclipses ought to be believed, and may be maintained as an article of faith without any prejudice to astronomy.' Here are clearly common sense and increased modern knowledge struggling against ancient absurdity and the nonsense of those books which have been so unduly extolled.

Again—The Puranas state the circumference of the earth to be 500 millions of yojanas, or, as Lieutenant Wilford expresses it in our measurement, 2,456,000,000 British miles. Considering that the actual circumference does not exceed 24,000 miles, this fact shews that their geographical knowledge is about as valuable as their historical and biographical. Some of their later students, enlightened as we conceive by foreign tuition, admit the absurdity of their ancient calculation, and to reconcile their improved ideas with their sacred doctrines, ingeniously suppose that the yojan stated in the Surya Siddhanta, contains 100,000 of those meant in the Puranas. But lest this hypothesis should not be relished, as too contradictory to the obvious meaning of the Puranas, it is added, with similar ingenuity, that perhaps the earth was really of the size they mention in some former period !*

Can these works afford 'an inexhaustible fund of information to the lover of science, the antiquarian, and the historian,' which talk of mountains† 491 miles high; of a King reigning 27,000 years; of Vaisvaswatu having lived 3,892,888 years ago, and of his reign lasting 1,728,000 years‡,—of an island in

* As. Res. v. 2. p. 259.

† As. Res.

‡ Sir W. Jones, in Asiat. Res. v. 2, p. 126.

the middle of the earth 400,000 French leagues long and as many broad, and of a mountain in that 400,000 leagues high and 32,000 wide, of other mountains 40,000 and 280,000 leagues high? These latter wonders are in the Bagavadam, and in the same Purana we read of another island which is 800,000 French leagues in extent, with a tree 4,400 leagues high. But it would be tedious to pore long over these 'enchancing' books, for by and by we find an island which is 3,200,000 leagues in extent; and another surrounded by a sea of milk, rather more than 12 millions of leagues in circumference!* This delirious nonsense, is as wearisome to repeat as disgusting to read. The composers of such stuff must have known that they were uttering falsehoods, and have had some strange enjoyment in doing so,—and yet the Bramins have the assurance to teach these things as sacred truths,—the people have the credulity to believe them—and we, in the eighteenth century, surrounded with philosophy, have the complaisance to praise the books which contain them, to doubt the truth of our settled chronology on their account, and even to frame new systems of Geology, History, and Geography, to correct our old-fashioned notions by their new light!

The other Puranas are not more rational. If we take the Sheeve Purana, we find Bramah, one of their chief deities, giving this account of his origin. He says, that from the navels of the first man and woman sprang a lotus flower several thousand miles long, and that from this lotus he came into existence. He then reflected 'with vast astonishment,' who he was and whence he had come. He at last wisely determined, that as he came into existence from the lotus flower this must be his creator, and therefore travelled a hundred years towards its root; but as he could not reach that, he turned about and travelled a hundred years upwards, and yet could not get out. At last Vishnu appeared to him, with whom he quarrelled and was going to fight, when the other god, Siva, who is here made the Supreme, appeared and prevented the combat. Vishnu then, for a thousand years, in the shape of a boar, descended to Patal; and Brahma, in the figure of a goose, wandered to the world above.

* We suspect that Mr. Halhed's Shree Bagbut is no other than this Bagavadam—and, if so, it displays some congruity of taste in the Braminical author to make his geography as enormous as his history.

In the same Purana we read of a mountain making an image and drawing the figure of a letter on paper; of the god Siva's cutting off one of Bramha's five heads for some impoliteness of speech, and of the head's constantly pursuing Siva till he came in sight of a certain ling. We cannot decently explain what is meant by a ling, yet we have them in abundance in this book, and are told, that he who rising early shall repeat the names of twelve of them, will be freed from all his crimes and obtain his desire.

The Brahme Viverte Purana appears to have no other end than to assert the merit of living at Benares, and it pursues its subject in a series of dull, though fantastic absurdities. We particularise these three Puranas, because they have appeared in an European dress. We wish the two latter had been fully translated.

It is of some importance to give these cursory specimens of the contents of the Puranas, because together with the two sacred poems, they seem to comprise all that the Bramins have of ancient history. Lieutenant Wilford tells us that these intelligent men discountenance both historical and geographical books. 'This,' he adds, 'they have often acknowledged to me, saying, *They have the Puranas; what do they want more?*'* Such a remark suits the taste and intellect of a people whose poets, according to Mr. Wilkins, have made the Goose the emblem of eloquence and elegance.†

Their Bibliography is on a par with their Geography and Chronology. 'If it were worth while,' says Sir William Jones, 'to calculate the age of Menu's institutes according to the Bramins, we must multiply 4,320,000 years by six times seventy-one, and add to the product the numbers of years already past in the seventh Manwantara‡.' Surely it is more reasonable to extract sun-beams from cucumbers with the philosophers of Laputa, than to take our history or our chronology from the writings of the Bramins.

Yet it is amazing to see, in the dissertations and publications of most of our Asiatic gentlemen, how anxious they are to accredit more or less of these absurd antiquities. Although nothing has ever appeared in the world with the characters of wilful and wanton falsehood more grossly palpable; although the fictitious Histories of Amius of Viterbo, Jeffery of Monmouth, and Archbishop Turpin, are probable and reason-

* As. Res. vol. 8, p. 268. † Heetopades, p. 296. ‡ As. Res. v. 2, p. 116.

able in comparison, yet have the Braminical antiquities been listened to with a respect, and repeated with a credulity in the highest degree discreditable to a reasoning age. In vain had our most learned and scientific scholars during the last two centuries, by their Herculean labours, settled the chronology of the world, and of ancient history, on just and true foundations; in vain had the historiographers of the various countries of Europe at last emancipated themselves from the wild fables of ostentatious vanity, and determined the antiquities of their several nations by precise and authentic boundaries. These desirable objects had scarcely been obtained with laudable, but in some cases painful, sacrifices of national vanity, when a sudden assault was made upon our chronological repose by the phantoms of Hindostan. Even enlightened men, misled by other theories and other wishes, caught a revolutionary mania, and one of them received the fantastic apparitions with such fond credulity, that he wrote volumes to assure us that not only our history but our geography must be subverted; and that Siberia, now the region of eternal snows, was once the scene of an equatorial summer, and the source of human civilization! The follies of former times were revived: and the dreamer of Sweden, Olaus Rudbeck, found, in the eighteenth century, a competitor for the laurels of visionary history in a Parisian philosopher.

We have hitherto mentioned only the reveries of the orthodox Bramins. If from these we proceed to other Hindu sects, as for instance, to the numerous sect of the Jains, it is literally going farther and faring worse. We there hear of a period of two thousand millions of millions of oceans of years; of men living ten millions of years, &c. &c.* Well might Mr. Colebrooke say that 'the Jainas are still more extravagant in their inventions than the prevailing sects of Hindus, absurd as these are in their fables.' But when we reflect that on the faith of books containing such monstrous reveries as those we have noticed, the simple and probable chronology of the Hebrews has been deserted by many, though strictly coinciding with all the authentic remains of ancient history, we cannot but perceive with regret, how many can swallow the camel with ease who can find no room for the gnat!

It is in this spirit of credulous incredulity, that it has been

* *As. Researches*, vol. 9, p. 313, 314.

gravely proposed* as a *serious* question, whether Moses did not borrow from the Bramins!

But we are happy to hail the dawn of reason which is beginning to appear in the minds of our oriental literati, and it is to hasten the advancing day that we have indulged in this critique. The name of Mr. Bentley will descend with great distinction to posterity for his intelligent criticism on the antiquity of the Braminical books and their astronomical computations. It was a bold undertaking to be the first to break the spell of credulity which was lulling Europe into such an unphilosophical lethargy. But he will soon find himself rewarded by his success. We are satisfied that the venerated books of the Bramins need only to be translated, in order to enable every man who can read, to discover their imposture; but till these translations appear, the researches of Mr. Bentley and those of our Sanscrit students, who follow his footsteps, will be wanted to undeceive such as have been hitherto deluded. Lieutenant Wilford, who is familiar with the Puranas, and has personally experienced the frauds of the modern Bramins, has so far advanced in the progress to true criticism and common sense, as to tell us that ‘with regard to history the Hindus really have nothing but romances†.’ He says ‘their works, whether historical or geographical, are most extravagant compositions, in which little regard indeed is paid to truth.—In their treatises on geography they seem to view the globe through a prism as if adorned with the liveliest colours. Mountains are of solid gold, bright like ten thousand suns, and others are of precious gems. Some of silver borrow the mild and dewy beams of the moon. There are rivers and seas of liquid amber, clarified butter, milk, curds, and intoxicating liquors. Geographical truth is sacrificed to a symmetrical arrangement of countries, mountains, lakes, and rivers, with which they are highly delighted. There are two geographical systems among the Hindus. The first and most ancient is according to the Puranas, in which the earth is considered as a convex surface gradually sloping towards the borders and surrounded by the ocean. The second and modern system is that adopted by astronomers, and certainly the worst of the two. The Pauranics considering the earth as a flat surface, or nearly

* See the advertisement to the fifth volume of the Asiatic Researches.

† As. Res. vol. 8, p. 269.

‘ so, their knowledge does not extend much beyond the old
 ‘ continent or the superior hemisphere ; but astronomers being
 ‘ acquainted with the globular shape of the earth, and of course
 ‘ with an inferior hemisphere, were under the necessity of
 ‘ borrowing largely from the superior part in order to fill up
 ‘ the inferior one. Thus their astronomical knowledge, in-
 ‘ stead of being of service to geography, has augmented the
 ‘ confusion, distorted and dislocated every part, every country,
 ‘ in the old continent*.’

Even Mr. H. Colebrooke, who still looks at these books with an eye of favour, in his last Essay confesses that, ‘ The
 ‘ mythology of the orthodox Hindus, their present chronology
 ‘ adapted to astronomical periods, their legendary tales, their
 ‘ mystical allegories, are abundantly extravagant†.’ We there-
 fore hope that the day will soon arrive when Sanscrit literature will be read with the spirit of rational criticism, and the bold pretensions of the Bramins to an immeasurable antiquity, and the wild dates of their compositions be examined with a scepticism proportioned to their extravagance and obvious untruth.

Mr. Wilkins’s preface to his Sanscrit Grammar has led us into these observations. But we have no desire to withhold from him or Mr. Colebrooke, or the other gentlemen who have employed themselves in studying this language and its literature, the commendations to which they are intitled. Though objectionable on the grounds we have mentioned, the Sanscrit books are still subjects of great curiosity, and it will be a high obligation to the world to put them into an English dress. We do not believe that even the Vedas are nearly so old as the poems of Homer, and we are satisfied that some of the Puranas are very modern. But still it is clear that they contain many fragments of ancient traditions which are worth exploring, and at all events they present us with a specimen of one of the ancient languages of the world.

Though the Sanscrit be neither so ancient nor so curious as the Hebrew—it certainly is one of the Parent languages of Asia. In this light it may be contemplated as on a level with the Russian, the Welsh, and the Saxon, which represent so many other families of languages, and which therefore are worthy to be preserved and studied. What languages have emanated from

* As. Res. 271, 272.

† Ib. vol. 9, p. 295.

each of these, or from some more remote ancestor of each, it is certainly highly curious to trace, as well as to observe the degree of affinity which the elder parents discover to each other. As far as our researches have extended, all the languages of Europe and Asia have a very strong degree of consanguinity; they all point to some great original tongue which has been broken to pieces, and whose fragments have been scattered round the world by the dispersion and diffusion of its primeval population. This is the fact which the Mosaic history implies, and the more fully we explore the ancient state of the various languages of the world, the more this interesting circumstance seems to be confirmed. But this is an immense subject which demands lucubrations of no common difficulty and no small extent, and probably one life would hardly suffice for its complete elucidation.

We cannot close this article without recommending that the Vedas and the Puranas should be fully translated like the Bagavadam. It is only by a close and minute comparison of the different books with each other, that the nature and origin of their traditions can be ascertained or their value appreciated. When extracts only are given, the literati of Europe can judge but imperfectly,—the most valuable parts are often left behind. Nor will the works be less acceptable, because they may abound with extravagant fictions. In this case the publication often removes a cloud of mysterious wonder, which an ignorance of its real nature has permitted to intervene. We all know the tone in which the *Zendavesta* was mentioned while it remained inaccessible in its vernacular language. It was equalled with the Jewish and Christian scriptures, the value of which was depreciated by the solemn assurance that other nations had also their sacred books; their *Zendavestas*, their *Sadders*, and their *Shasters*, meriting as much attention as those which we had hitherto exclusively venerated. The *Zendavesta* was at last translated and published, and the bubble of wonder burst, because every one who could read might see that it was an unmeaning chaos of grave, but fantastic nonsense. The sacred writings of the Bramins have been long mentioned with the same phrases of solemn wonder, which would still have misled the public if the translations and extracts of them, which have successively appeared, had not discovered their puerility and imposture. It is therefore important that the Sanscrit books, which have been held up as so sacred and so ancient, and which some of our *learned* Orientalists obviously prefer to the Jewish histo-
rian,

rian, should be given to Europe in the languages familiar to every one; that we may not be blinded by the erroneous admiration of credulous and misjudging enthusiasts, but be enabled to criticise fairly and judge impartially for ourselves.

ART. VI. *A Translation of the Georgics of Publius Virgilius Maro, with the Original Text, and Notes critical and illustrative of Ancient and Modern Husbandry.* By Wm. Stawell, A. M. Rector of Kilmalooda, in the Diocese of Cork. pp. 487. cr. 8vo. London, Longman. 1808.

The Georgics of P. Virgilius Maro, translated into English Blank Verse. By James R. Deare, L.L.B. pp. 138, foolscap 8vo. Longman, London, 1808.

THOUGH the reading population of this country has been long on the advance, the number of classical scholars by no means increases in the same proportion. An indifference to classical learning seems indeed to be gaining ground in society; and many parents direct their children's education to that acquirement, more in compliance with custom, than from any conviction of its utility. It is, indeed, to be regretted that merely verbal studies should so often encroach upon a period of life fitted for the attainment of more useful sciences; and it would be easy to point out, and declaim against, the defects which will be found in the system of our great schools, notwithstanding their general utility and excellence. But we feel, in common with every Englishman, a partiality approaching to veneration for that discipline which is consecrated by long usage, and guarded by bulwarks co-eval almost with the constitution of the country;—which has produced men that would do honour to the best times of the world, and to which, with all its faults, the country is so deeply indebted. We contend only for the fact, that, even in those foundations, where amplest provision is made, and most time is devoted to the acquisition of the learned languages, the experiment fails in the greater number of instances; and that, compared with the whole amount of readers in Great Britain, the proportion of classical scholars is