

NOTE

This is a reprint and not a revised edition. Even the list of the subjects proposed and volumes under preparation has been included, exactly as it is in the earlier edition.

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HYMNS FROM THE
RIGVEDA

Selected and Metrically Translated

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addressed to them give rise to much beautiful and even noble imagery. The average level of literary merit is remarkably high. The most poetical hymns are those addressed to Dawn, which perhaps surpass in beauty the religious lyrics of any other literature. Some of the hymns to Indra show much graphic power in describing his conflict with the demon Vṛtra. The hymns to the Maruts, or Storm-gods, often depict with vigorous imagery the phenomena of thunder and lightning, and the mighty onset of the wind. The hymn to Parjanya (p. 52), paints with great vividness the devastating effects of the rain-storm. The hymns in praise of Varuṇa (p. 20) describe the various aspects of his sway, as moral ruler of the world, in an exalted strain of poetry. Some of the mythical dialogues set forth the situation with much beauty of language: for instance, the colloquy between Indra's messenger and the demons who drove off the cows (p. 94). The Gambler's Lament (p. 88) is a fine specimen of pathetic poetry. One of the funeral hymns (x, 18) expresses ideas connected with death (p. 86) in language of impressive and solemn beauty. One of the cosmogonic hymns (x, 129) illustrates (p. 19) how philosophical speculation can be clothed in poetry of no mean order.

CREATION

I. HYMN OF CREATION

X, 129.

METRE: TRISTUBH.

1. Non-being then existed not nor being:
There was no air, nor sky that is beyond it.
What was concealed? Wherein? In whose protection?
And was there deep unfathomable water?
2. Death then existed not nor life immortal;
Of neither night nor day was any token.
By its inherent force the One breathed windless:
No other thing than that beyond existed.
3. Darkness there was at first by darkness hidden;
Without distinctive marks, this all was water.
That which, becoming, by the void was covered,
That One by force of heat came into being.
4. Desire entered the One in the beginning:
It was the earliest seed, of thought the product.
The sages searching in their hearts with wisdom,
Found out the bond of being in non-being.
5. Their ray extended light across the darkness:
But was the One above or was it under?
Creative force was there, and fertile power:
Below was energy, above was impulse.
6. Who knows for certain? Who shall here declare it?
Whence was it born, and whence came this creation?
The gods were born after this world's creation:
Then who can know from whence it has arisen?
7. None knoweth whence creation has arisen;
And whether he has or has not produced it:

He who surveys it in the highest heaven,
He only knows, or haply he may know not.

VARUNA

The greatest of the gods of the *Rigveda*, beside Indra, is Varuṇa, though the number of hymns in which he alone (apart from Mitra) is addressed is only 12, as compared with the 250 to Indra. His physical features and activities are mentioned: he has face, eye, arms, hands and feet; he walks, drives, sits, eats and drinks. His eye, with which he observes mankind, is the sun. He sits on the strewn grass at the sacrifice. He wears a golden mantle or a shining robe. His car, drawn by well-yoked steeds, gleams like the sun. Varuṇa sits in his mansion surveying the deeds of men; and the Fathers behold him in the highest heaven. He has spies who sit around him and observe the two worlds. By his golden-winged messenger the sun is meant. He is often called a king, but especially a universal monarch. His sovereignty, his divine dominion, and his occult power (*māyā*) are specially emphasized. Varuṇa is characteristically an upholder of physical and moral order, the great maintainer of the laws of nature. He established heaven and earth, which he keeps asunder. He caused the sun to shine in heaven, and made for it a wide path. He placed fire in the waters and Soma on the rock. The wind that resounds through the air is his breath. By his ordinance the moon shining brightly moves at night, and the stars disappear by day. He is thus lord of light, both by day and by night. Varuṇa is also a regulator of the waters: he made the rivers flow; by his occult power they pour swiftly into the ocean without filling it. He is, however, more frequently connected with the atmospheric waters: thus he causes the inverted cask (the cloud) to shed its waters on heaven, earth and air, and to moisten the ground.

The fixity of his laws, which the gods themselves follow, is frequently mentioned. His power is so great that neither the birds as they fly, nor the rivers as they flow, can reach the limits of his dominion. His omni-

science is typical: he knows the flight of the birds in the sky, the path of the ships in the ocean, the course of the far-travelling wind; he beholds all the secret things that have been or shall be done, and witnesses men's truth and falsehood; no creature can even wink without his knowledge.

Varuṇa is pre-eminent among the Vedic gods as a moral ruler. His anger is aroused by sin, which he severely punishes. The fetters with which he binds sinners are characteristic of him. But he is merciful to the penitent, releasing them from sin, even that committed by their fathers, and from guilt due to thoughtlessness. Every hymn addressed to Varuṇa contains a prayer for forgiveness of sin. Varuṇa is on a footing of friendship with his worshipper, who communes with him in his heavenly mansion, and sometimes sees him with his mental eye. The righteous hope to behold in the next world Varuṇa and Yama (the god of Death), the two kings who reign together in bliss.

Varuṇa seems originally to have represented the encompassing sky. But this conception has become obscured in the *Rigveda*, because it dates from a pre-Vedic period. It goes back to the Indo-Iranian age at least; for the Ahura Mazda, the "wise spirit" of the *Avesta*, agrees closely with the Asura (divine spirit) Varuṇa in character, though not in name. It may be even older, as *Varuṇa* is perhaps identical with the Greek *ὀυρανός*, "sky." At any rate, the name appears to be derived from the root *vr̥*, to "cover" or "encompass."

II. VARUNA

VII, 88.

METRE: TRISTUBH.

1. Present to Varuṇa the gracious giver
A hymn, Vasiṣṭha, bright and very pleasant,
That he may bring to us the lofty, holy
And mighty steed that grants a thousand bounties.
2. Now having come to Varuṇa's full aspect,
I think his countenance like that of Agni;
May he, the lord, lead me to see the marvel:
The light and darkness hidden in the cavern.