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THE WORKS
OF
SIR WILLIAM JONES.

ON THE
CHRONOLOGY OF THE HINDUS.

WRITTEN IN JANUARY, 1788,

BY

THE PRESIDENT.

THE great antiquity of the *Hindus* is believed so firmly by themselves, and has been the subject of so much conversation among *Europeans*, that a short view of their Chronological System, which has not yet been exhibited from certain authorities, may be acceptable to those, who seek truth without partiality to receive opinions, and without regarding any consequences, that may result from their inquiries; the consequences, indeed, of truth cannot but be desirable, and no reasonable man will apprehend any danger to society from a general diffusion of its light; but we must not suffer our-

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selfes to be dazzled by a false glare, nor mistake enigmas and allegories for historical verity. Attached to no system, and as much disposed to reject the *Mosaick* history, if it be proved erroneous, as to believe it, if it be confirmed by sound reasoning from indubitable evidence, I propose to lay before you a concise account of *Indian* Chronology, extracted from *Sanscrit* books, or collected from conversations with *Pandits*, and to subjoin a few remarks on their system, without attempting to decide a question, which I shall venture to start, “ whether it is “ not in fact the same with our own, but embellished and obscured by the fancy of their “ poets and the riddles of their astronomers.”

One of the most curious books in *Sanscrit*, and one of the oldest after the *Véda's*, is a tract on *religious and civil duties*, taken, as it is believed, from the oral instructions of MENU, son of BRAHMA', to the first inhabitants of the earth: a well-collated copy of this interesting law-tract is now before me: and I begin my dissertation with a few couplets from the first chapter of it: “ The sun causes the division of “ day and night, which are of two sorts, those “ of men and those of the Gods; the day, for “ the labour of *all* creatures in their several “ employments; the night, for their slumber. “ A month is a day and night of the Patriarchs;

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“ and it is divided into two parts ; the bright half
 “ is *their* day for laborious exertions; the dark
 “ half, *their* night for sleep. A year is a day
 “ and night of the Gods; and that is also di-
 “ vided into two halves; the day is, when the
 “ sun moves towards the north; the night,
 “ when it moves towards the south. Learn
 “ now the duration of a night and day of
 “ BRAHMA', with that of the ages respectively
 “ and in order. Four thousand years of *the*
 “ Gods they call the *Crīta* (or *Satya*), age; and
 “ its limits at the beginning and at the end
 “ are, in like manner, as many hundreds.
 “ In the three successive ages, together with
 “ their limits at the beginning and end of
 “ them, are thousands and hundreds dimi-
 “ nished by one. This aggregate of four ages,
 “ amounting to twelve thousand divine years, is
 “ called an age of the Gods; and a thousand
 “ such divine ages added together must be con-
 “ sidered as a day of BRAHMA': his night has
 “ also the same duration. The before men-
 “ tioned age of the Gods, or twelve thousand
 “ of their years, multiplied by seventy-one,
 “ form what is named here below a *Manwan-*
 “ *tara*. There are *alternate* creations and de-
 “ structions of *worlds* through innumerable
 “ *Manwantara's*: the Being Supremely Desira-
 “ ble performs all this again and again.”

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Such is the arrangement of infinite time, which the *Hindus* believe to have been revealed from heaven, and which they generally understand in a literal sense: it seems to have intrinsic marks of being purely astronomical; but I will not appropriate the observations of others, nor anticipate those in particular, which have been made by two or three of our members, and which they will, I hope, communicate to the society. A conjecture, however, of Mr. PATERSON has so much ingenuity in it, that I cannot forbear mentioning it here, especially as it seems to be confirmed by one of the couplets just cited: he supposes, that, as a *month* of mortals is a day and night of the Patriarchs from the analogy of its bright and dark halves, so, by the same analogy, a day and night of mortals might have been considered by the ancient *Hindus* as a month of the lower world; and then a year of such months will consist only of twelve days and nights, and thirty such years will compose a lunar year of mortals; whence he surmises, that the *four million three hundred and twenty thousand* years, of which the four *Indian* ages are supposed to consist, mean only years of twelve days; and, in fact, that sum, divided by *thirty*, is reduced to *an hundred and forty-four thousand*: now a *thousand four hundred and forty* years are one *pada*, a period in the

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Hindu astronomy, and that sum, multiplied by *eighteen*, amounts precisely to *twenty-five thousand nine hundred and twenty*, the number of years in which the fixed stars appear to perform their long revolution eastward. The last mentioned sum is the product also of *an hundred and forty-four*, which, according to M. BAILLY, was an old *Indian* cycle, into *an hundred and eighty*, or the *Tartarian* period, called *Van*, and of *two thousand eight hundred and eighty* into *nine*, which is not only one of the lunar cycles, but considered by the *Hindus* as a mysterious number and an emblem of Divinity, because, if it be multiplied by any other whole number, the sum of the figures in the different products remains, always nine, as the Deity, who appears in many forms, continues One immutable essence. The important period of *twenty-five thousand nine hundred and twenty* years is well known to arise from the multiplication of *three hundred and sixty* into *seventy-two*, the number of years in which a fixed star seems to move through a degree of a great circle; and, although M. LE GENTIL assures us, that the modern *Hindus* believe a complete revolution of the stars to be made in *twenty-four thousand* years, or *fifty four* seconds of a degree to be passed in one year, yet we may have reason to think, that the old *Indian* astronomers

had made a more accurate calculation, but concealed their knowledge from the people under the veil of *fourteen MENWANTARA'S, seventy-one* divine ages, compound cycles, and years of different sorts, from those of BRAHMA' to those of *Pátála*, or the *infernal regions*. If we follow the analogy suggested by MENU, and suppose only a day and night to be called a *year*, we may divide the number of years in a divine age by *three hundred and sixty*, and the quotient will be *twelve thousand*, or the number of his *divine years* in one age; but, conjecture apart, we need only compare the two periods 4320000 and 25920, and we shall find, that among their common divisors, are 6, 9, 12, &c. 18, 36, 72, 144, &c. which numbers with their several multiples, especially in a decuple progression, constitute some of the most celebrated periods of the *Chaldeans, Greeks, Tartars*, and even of the *Indians*. We cannot fail to observe, that the number 432, which appears to be the basis of the *Indian* system, is a sixth part of 25920, and, by continuing the comparison, we might probably solve the whole enigma. In the preface to a *Várânes Almanack* I find the following wild stanza: “ A *thousand* Great Ages are a day of
 “ BRAHMA'; a *thousand* such days are an *In-*
 “ *dian* hour of VISHNU; *six hundred thousand*
 “ such hours make a period of RUDRA; and a

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“ million of *Rudra's* (or *two quadrillions five hundred and ninety-two thousand trillions of lunar years*), are but a *second* to the Supreme Being.” The *Hindu* theologians deny the conclusion of the stanza to be orthodox: “ *Time, they say, exists not-at all with GOD;*” and they advise the Astronomers to mind their own business without meddling with theology. The astronomical verse, however, will answer our present purpose; for it shows, in the first place, that cyphers are added at pleasure to swell the periods; and if we take ten cyphers from a *Rudra*, or divide by ten thousand millions, we shall have a period of 259200000 years, which, divided by 60 (the usual divisor of *time* among the *Hindus*) will give 4320000, or a Great Age, which we find subdivided in the proportion of 4, 3, 2, 1, from the notion of *virtue* decreasing arithmetically in the *golden, silver, copper, and earthen*, ages. But, should it be thought improbable, that the *Indian* astronomers in very early times had made more accurate observations than those of *Alexandria, Bagdad, or Marághab*, and still more improbable that they should have relapsed without apparent cause into error, we may suppose, that they formed their divine age by an arbitrary multiplication of 24,000 by 180 according to M. LE GENTIL, or of 21600 by 200 according to the comment

on the *Súrya Siddhánta*. Now, as it is *hardly* possible, that such coincidences should be accidental, we may hold it *nearly* demonstrated, that the period of a *divine age* was at first merely astronomical, and may consequently reject it from our present inquiry into the historical or civil chronology of *India*. Let us, however, proceed to the avowed opinions of the *Hindus*, and see, when we have ascertained their system, whether we can reconcile it to the course of nature and the common sense of mankind.

The aggregate of their four ages they call a divine age, and believe that, in every thousand such ages, or in every *day* of BRAHMA, *fourteen* MENU'S are successively invested by him with the sovereignty of the earth: each MENU, they suppose, transmits his empire to his sons and grand sons during a period of seventy-one divine ages; and such a period they name a *Manwantara*; but, since *fourteen* multiplied by *seventy-one* are not quite a *thousand*, we must conclude, that *six* *divine ages* are allowed for intervals between the *Manwantara's*, or for the twilight of BRAHMA'S day. Thirty such days, or *Calpas*, constitute, in their opinion, a *month* of BRAHMA'; twelve such months, one of his years; and an hundred such years, his *age*; of which age they assert, that fifty years have elapsed. We are now then, according to the

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Hindus, in the first day or *Calpa* of the first month of the fifty-first year of BRAHMA'S age, and in the twenty-eighth divine age of the seventh *Manwantara*, of which divine age the *three first* human ages have passed, and *four thousand eight hundred and eighty-eight* of the fourth.

In the present day of BRAHMA', the first MENU was surnamed SWA'YAMBHUYA, or *Son of the Self-existent*: and it is He, by whom the *Institutes of Religious and Civil Duties* are supposed to have been delivered: in his time the Deity descended at a *Sacrifice*, and, by his wife SATARU'PA', he had two distinguished sons, and three daughters. This pair was created, for the multiplication of the human species, after that new creation of the world, which the *Bráhmans* call *Pádmacalpiya*, or the *Lotos-creation*.

If it were worth while to calculate the age of MENU'S *Institutes*, according to the *Bráhmans*, we must multiply four million three hundred and twenty thousand by six times seventy-one, and add to the product the number of years already past in the seventh *Manwantara*. Of the five MENU'S, who succeeded him, I have seen little more than the names; but the *Hindu* writings are very diffuse on the life and posterity of the *seventh* MENU, surnamed VAIVASWATA, or *Child of the Sun*: he is supposed to have had ten sons, of whom the eldest was ICSHWA'CU;

and to have been accompanied by seven *Rīṣi's*, or holy persons, whose names were, CASYAPA, ATRI, VASISHTHA, VISWA'MITRA, GAUTAMA, JAMADAGNI, and BHARADWA'JA; an account, which explains the opening of the fourth chapter of the *Gītā*: “ This immutable
 “ system of devotion, says CRISHNA, I re-
 “ vealed to VIVASWAT, or the Sun; VIVAS-
 “ WAT declared it to his son MENU; MENU
 “ explained it to ICSHWA'CU: thus the Chief
 “ *Rīṣi's* know this sublime doctrine delivered
 “ from one to another.”

In the reign of this *Sun-born* Monarch the *Hindus* believe the whole earth to have been drowned, and the whole human race destroyed by a flood, except the pious Prince himself, the seven *Rīṣi's*, and their several wives; for they suppose his children to have been born after the deluge. This general *pralaya*, or destruction, is the subject of the first *Purāna*, or *Sacred Poem*, which consists of fourteen thousand Stanzas; and the story is concisely, but clearly and elegantly, told in the eighth book of the *Bhāgawata*, from which I have extracted the whole, and translated it with great care, but will only present you here with an abridgement of it.
 “ The demon HAYAGRIVA having purloined
 “ the *Vēdas* from the custody of BRAHMA',
 “ while he was reposing at the close of the