intense pathos, and high poetic grace and beauty; and while, as works of art, they are far inferior to the Greek epics, in some respects they appeal far more strongly to the romantic mind of Europe, namely, by their loving appreciation of natural beauty, their exquisite delineation of womanly love and devotion, and their tender sentiment of mercy and forgiveness.

2. *Purāṇas and Tantras.—*The *Purāṇas@@l* are partly legendary partly speculative histories of the universe, compiled for the purpose of promoting some special, locally prevalent form of Brãhmanical belief. They are sometimes styled a fifth Veda, and may indeed in a certain sense be looked upon as the scriptures of Brãhmanical India. The term *purāṇa,* signifying “ old,” applied originally to prehistoric, especially cosmogonic, legends, and then to collections of ancient traditions generally. The existing works of this class, though recognizing the Brāhmanical doctrine of the Trimürti, or triple manifestation of the deity (in its creative, preservative and destructive activity), are all of a sectarian tendency, being intended to establish, on quasi-historic grounds, the claims of some special god, or holy place, on the devotion of the people. For this purpose the compilers have pressed into their service a mass of extraneous didactic matter on all manner of subjects, whereby these works had become a kind of popular encyclopaedias of useful knowledge. It is evident, however, from a comparatively early definition given of the typical Purāṇa, as well as from numerous coincidences of the existing works, that they are based on, or enlarged from, older works of this kind, more limited in their scope and probably of a more decidedly tritheistic tendency of belief. Thus none of the Purāṇas, as now extant, is probably much above a thousand years old, though a considerable propor­tion of their materials is doubtless much older, and may perhaps

in part go back to several centuries before the Christian era.

In legendary matter the Purāṇas have a good deal in common with the epics, especially the *Mahabharata—*the compilers or revisers of both classes of works having evidently drawn their materials from the same fluctuating mass of popular traditions. They are almost entirely composed in the epic couplet, and indeed in much the same easy flowing style as the epic poems, to which they are, however, as a rule greatly inferior in poetic value.

According to the traditional classification of these works, there are said to be eighteen (*Mahā*-, or great) *Purāṇas,* and as many *Upa-purāṇas,* or subordinate Purāṇas. The former are by some authorities divided into three groups of six, according as one or other of the three primary qualities of external existence—goodness, darkness (ignorance), and passion—is supposed to prevail in them, viz. the *Vishṇu, Nāradīya, Bhāgavata, Garuḍa, Padma, Varāha— Matsya, Kūrma, Linga, Siva, Skanda, Agni—Brahmāṇḍa, Brahmavaivarta, Mārkaṇḍeya, Bhavishya, Vāmana* and *Brahma-Purāṇas.* In accordance with the nature of the several forms of the Trimürti, the first two groups chiefly devote themselves to the commenda­tion of Vishṇu Siva respectively, whilst the third group, which would properly belong to Brahman, has been largely appropriated for the promotion of the claims of other deities, viz. Vishṇu in his sensuous form of Krishṇa, Devī, Gaṇeśa, and Sūrya. As Professor Banerjea has shown in his preface to the *Mārkaṇḍeya,* this seems to have been chiefly effected by later additions and interpolations. The insufficiency of the above classification, however, appears even from the fact that it omits the *Vāyu-purāṇa,* probably one of the oldest of all, though some MSS. substitute it for one or other name of the second group. The eighteen principal Purāṇas are said to consist of together 400,000 couplets. In northern India the Vaishnava Purāṇas, especially the *Bhãgavata* and *Vishnu,@@*2 are by far the most popular. The Bhâgavata was formerly supposed to have been composed by Vopadeva, the grammarian, who lived in the 13th century. It has, however, been shown @@3 that what he wrote was a synopsis of the Purāṇa, and that the latter is already quoted in a work by Ballãla Sena of Bengal, in the 11th century. It is certainly held in the highest estimation, and, especially through the vernacular

versions of its tenth book, treating of the story of Krishṇa, has powerfully influenced the religious belief of India.

From the little we know regarding the Upa-purāṇas, their char- acter does not seem to differ very much from that of the principal sectarian Purãnas. Besides these two classes of works there is a large number of so-called *Sthala-purāṇas,* or chronicles recounting the history and merits of some holy “ place ” or shrine, where their recitation usually forms an important part of the daily service. Of much the same nature are the numerous *Mähãtmyas* (literally “ relating to the great spirit ”), which usually profess to be sections of one or other Purāṇa. Thus the *Devī-māhātmya,* which celebrates the victories of the great “goddess ” over the Asuras, and is daily read at the temples of that deity, forms a section, though doubtless an interpolated one, of the Mārkaṇḍeya-purāṇa. Similarly the *Adhyatrna-Rãmäyana,* a kind of spiritualized version of Vãlmïkï's poem, forms part of the *Brahmāṇḍa-purāṇa* which (like the Skanda) seems hardly to exist in an independent form, but to be made up of a large number of Mähãtmyas.

The *Tantras@@*4 have to be considered as partly a collateral and partly a later development of the sectarian Purãnas; though, unlike these, they can hardly lay claim to any intrinsic poetic value. These works are looked upon as their sacred writings by the numerous Śā*ktas,* or worshippers of the female energy (ś*αkti)* of some god, especially the wife of Siva, in one of her many forms (Pārvatī, Devī, Kālī, Bhavānī, Durgā, &c.). This worship of a female representation of the divine power appears already in some of the Purāṇas; but in the Tantras it assumes quite a peculiar character, being largely intermixed with magic performances and mystic rites, partly, indeed, of a grossly immoral nature (see Hinduism). Of this class of writings no specimen would appear to have as yet been in existence at the time of Amarasimha (6th century), though they are mentioned in some of the Purāṇas. They are usually in the form of a dialogue between Siva and his wife. The number of original Tantras is fixed at sixty-four, but they still await a critical examination at the hands of scholars. Among the best known may be mentioned the *Rudrayāmala, Kulārṇaυa, Śyāmā-rahasya* and *Kālikā-tantra.*

3. *Artificial Epics and Romances.—*In the early centuries of the Christian era a new class of epic poems begins to make its appearance, differing widely in character from those that had preceded it. The great national epics, composed though they were in a language different from the ordinary vernaculars, had at least been drawn from the living stream of popular tradition, and were doubtless readily understood and enjoyed by at least the educated classes of the people. The later productions, on the other hand, are of a decidedly artificial character, and must necessarily have been beyond the reach of any but the highly cultivated. They are, on the whole, singularly deficient in incident and invention, their subject matter being almost entirely derived from the old epics. Nevertheless, these works are by no means devoid of merit and interest; and a number of them display considerable descriptive power and a wealth of genuine poetic sentiment, though unfortunately often clothed in language that deprives it of half its value. The simple heroic couplet has mostly been discarded for various more or less elaborate metres; and in accordance with this change of form the diction becomes gradu­ally more complicated—a growing taste for unwieldy compounds, a jingling kind of alliteration, or rather agnomination, and an abuse of similes marking the increasing artificiality of these productions.

The generic appellation of such works is *kāvya,* which, meaning “poem, or the work of an individual poet (*kαvi*), is, as we have seen, already applied to the *Rāmāyana.* Six poems of this kind are singled out by native rhetoricians as standard works, under the title of *Mahãkävya,* or great poems. Two of these are ascribed to the famous dramatist Kâlidãsa, the most prominent figure of this period of Indian literature and truly a master of the poetic art. In a comparatively modern couplet he is represented as having been one of nine literary “ gems ” at the court of a king Vikramäditya, who was supposed to have originated the so-called Vikrama era, dating from 56-57 B.C. Recent research has, however, shown that this name was only applied to the era from about **A.D.** 800, and that the latter was already used in inscriptions of the 5th century under the name of the Mälava era. Hence also Fergusson's theory that it was founded by King Vikramäditya Harsha of Ujjayinī (Ujjain or

*@@@*1 *Cf.* H. H. Wilson, *Essays on the Religion of the Hindus,* ii. ρρ. 67 sqq.

@@@2 There are several Indian editions of these two works. The Bhâgavata has been partly printed, in an *édition de luxe,* with a French translation at Paris, in 3 vols., by E. Burnouf, and a fourth by M. Hauvette-Besnault. Of the Vishṇu, there is a translation by H. H. Wilson, 2nd ed., enriched with valuable notes by F. Hall. This and most other Purāṇas have been printed in India, especially in the *Bibl. Ind.* and the “ Anand. series.”

@@@3 Rājendralāla Mitra, *Notices of Sansk. MSS.* ii. 47.

@@@4 Cf. H. H. Wilson, *Essays on the Religion of the Hindus,* ii. pp. 77 sqq.