

## NEWEST LIGHT ON OUR OLDEST MOTHER COUNTRY.

BY WILLIAM FAIRFIELD WARREN.

**W**HENCE came we Aryans? In what remotest mother country did the first men of our blood and of our speech reside? What was their culture, what their religion in the prehistoric years prior to their differentiation into the great Indo-European peoples? From what center did they march forth, horde after horde, until the left wing of their ever-broadening array rested by the mouth of the Ganges and the right wing covered the Hebrides?—These are questions of perennial interest not only to us of Aryan stock, but also to all enlightened minds in other races.

During the second half of the nineteenth century a flood of light was thrown upon the thought and life of the primeval, as yet undispersed Aryas by studying, in the comparative method, the languages of the peoples known to have descended from them. Proceeding upon the sound principle that when one and the same word is used to express a particular idea in each member of this family of languages, it is safe to regard that word as having come down from the time when the ancestors of all the Indo-European peoples were as yet living together and of one speech, such scholars as Pott, and Burnouf, and Pictet, ascertained that those far-off ancestors were far from being in the conditions of savage life. They could count beyond a hundred. They built houses that had roofs, and windows, and doors. They navigated rivers and lakes in boats with oars. They used yokes and wheels, they spun and wove. They were acquainted with metals and could work them. They made swords and spears, and to the sound of the trumpet rode into battle in chariots. Family life was of a high type, with no sign of polygamy. There were family altars and social worship. Pictet even claimed that their philosophic insight had already reached a point

so high that for "conscience," "will," and "memory" they had words that are not traceable to material objects.<sup>1</sup>

As to the land in which the Aryans dwelt the learned were for quite a period of one opinion, all agreeing that it was in Central Asia. More precisely it was on the great Plateau of Pamir, where modern Bokara and Tibet are found. Great interest was felt in its early exploration. Here are the words of Renan:

"When the Aryan race shall have become master of the planet, its first duty will be to explore the mysterious depths of Bokara and Little Tibet, where so much that is of immense value to science probably lies concealed. How much light must be thrown upon the origin of language when we shall find ourselves in the presence of the localities where those sounds were first uttered which we still employ, and where those intellectual categories were first formed which guide the movement of our faculties!"<sup>2</sup>

If instead of speaking of "sounds" and "categories," Renan had suggested the possibility of unearthing a few Proto-Aryan coins or crania in that first home-land of our race, his appeal would have seemed more promising.

This mid-Asian solution of the question as to the starting-point of the Indo-European migrations was not destined to be final. In the last quarter of the last century many philologists and ethnologists openly abandoned it.<sup>3</sup> The majority of these located the starting-point in Scandinavia, or in other northerly portions of Europe. Some thought the data pointed rather to Siberia. At the close of the century not one leading authority remained to champion Tibet as the cradle-land in question. The weight of expert opinion inclined perhaps to Scandinavia, but in any case to some location much farther to the north than the Plateau of Pamir.

Just now a new and remarkable work, produced in India, is attracting the attention of European and American scholars. Its author is a native of the Orient, a man possessed of scholarly familiarity with the Sanskrit texts, yet well acquainted with Occidental science and learning. He writes English with a correctness and force which many an Englishman might covet. His training as a

<sup>1</sup> *Les Aryas primitifs*, II, 539-546.—Our best compendium for this information in the English language is Dr. Schrader's *Prehistoric Antiquities of the Aryan Peoples*. Translated from the German by Jevons.

<sup>2</sup> *De l'origine du langage*, p. 232.

<sup>3</sup> So Latham, Spiegel, Schrader, Benfey, Poesche, Penka, Rendell, Isaac Taylor, Van den Gheyn, etc. Taylor declared, "There is no more curious chapter in the whole history of scientific delusion."

lawyer has given him lucidity of style and a proper appreciation of the principles of evidence. If, like other scholars, he needed experience in practical affairs to check speculative tendencies, he has had it in his habitual work as an editor, and as an official councilor in connection with the government of Bombay. In a former work, entitled *Orion, or Resarches into the Antiquity of the Vedas*, he surprised his countrymen by showing that certain till then unnoticed astronomical allusions in the Vedic hymns gave evidence that these compositions must have been written at a period far more remote than commonly supposed; in fact, at a date about 4500 years before Christ. Naturally this claim was at first received by scholars in a very skeptical spirit, but soon after, without knowing of the researches of his Indian predecessor, Professor Jacobi of Bonn, one of the best Sanskritists in Europe, independently arrived at a conclusion substantially the same; since which time Professor Bloomfield,<sup>4</sup> M. Barth, Professor Bühler, and others, have more or less freely conceded the force of the new arguments. A writer of these qualifications and antecedents is certain to have a respectful hearing. His name is Bâl Gangâdhar Tilak.

The title of his new and striking work is *The Arctic Home in the Vedas: A New Key to the Interpretation of many Vedic Texts and Legends*.<sup>5</sup> He finds the cradle-land of the Aryans "at or near the North Pole." In his Preface he speaks of his ten years of search for evidence that would reveal the long vista of primitive Aryan antiquity, and adds: "How I first worked on the lines followed up in the *Orion*, how in the light of latest researches in geology and archæology bearing on the primitive history of man, I was gradually led to a different line of search, and finally how the conclusion that the ancestors of the Vedic Rishis lived in an Arctic home, in inter-glacial times, was forced on me by the slowly accumulating evidence, is fully narrated in the book."

The volume is an octavo of five hundred and twenty-four pages. Its first chapter treats of "Prehistoric Times" in general; the second of "The Glacial Age"; the remaining eleven of the following topics in due succession: "The Arctic Regions"; "The Night of the Gods" (a very ancient designation of the polar night of six months); "The Vedic Dawns"; "The Long Day and Long Night" in the Vedic hymns; "Months and Seasons"; "The Cow's Walk" (a ceremony in the ancient sacrificial system); "Vedic Myths—the Captive Waters";

<sup>4</sup> See Professor Bloomfield's address at eighteenth anniversary of Johns Hopkins University.

<sup>5</sup> Published by Messrs. Ramchandra Govind & Son, Bombay.

“Vedic Myths—the Matutinal Deities”; “The Avestic Evidence”; “Comparative Mythology”; “The Bearing of our results on the History of Aryan Culture and Religion.” Two excellent indexes, one “General,” and one “Index of Vedic and Avestic Passages,” greatly increase the value of the work to all scholars.

Within the limits of this article no summary of the author’s argument can be given. Suffice it here to say that in the judgment of the present writer the array of evidences set forth is far more conclusive than any ever attempted by an Indo-Iranian scholar in the interest of any earlier hypothesis. Absolute candor and respect for the strictest methods of historic and scientific investigation characterize the discussion throughout. This results in part no doubt from the fact that the author’s own attitude of mind was at the outset highly skeptical. He says: “I did not start with any preconceived notion in favor of the Arctic theory; nay, I regarded it as highly improbable at first; but the accumulating evidence in its support eventually forced me to accept it.” It is hard to see how any other candid mind can master the proof produced without being mastered by it in turn.

One criticism must not be suppressed. Both titles given by Mr. Tilak to his book are altogether too narrow. They prepare one to expect nothing beyond a discussion of evidences found in the Vedic hymns. In reality he deals with a far wider range of data. He draws almost as often upon Avestic texts as upon the Vedic, and in more than one instance finds the former more convincing than the latter. Probably the fact that he was writing in India and primarily for the heirs of Vedic literature, accounts for this undue restriction of the title.

Twenty years ago, in preparing my work on the broader problem of the cradle-land of the whole human race, I went through all the Vedic and Avestic texts so far as existing translations would then permit, reaching at the end the same conclusion that Mr. Tilak has now reached.<sup>6</sup> Incidentally, in my argument a new light was thrown upon various points in the mythical geography and cosmography of the ancient Iranians,—light which the foremost Iranist of his time, Professor Spiegel, generously acknowledged. Incidentally, I also arrived at a new interpretation of the Vedic myth of the captive waters, and of other Vedic myths. Especially gratifying, therefore, is it to me to find in Mr. Tilak a man in no degree dependent

<sup>6</sup> *Paradise Found: the Cradle of the Human Race at the North Pole.* Boston. 11th edition. 1904.

on translations, yet arriving not only at my main conclusion, but also at a number of minor ones of which I had never made public mention. I desire publicly to thank this far-off fellow-worker for the generosity of his frequent references to my pioneer work in the common field, and for the solidity and charm of his own, in certain respects, more authoritative contribution. Whoever will master this new work, and that of the late Mr. John O'Neill on *The Night of the Gods*, will not be likely ever again to ask, Where was the earliest home of the Aryans?