The Religion of the Sikhs

Field Dorothy
The Wisdom of the East Series

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THE RELIGION OF THE SIKHS
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Any writer on the Religion of the Sikhs must necessarily be greatly indebted to Mr. Max A. Macauliffe’s unique work on the subject, The Sikh Religion: Its Gurus, Saints, and Authors.

My special thanks are due to the Oxford University Press for kind permission to quote extensively from the translation of the hymns. The details of the lives of the Gurus are taken from the same source, together with the English version of the prophecies by Teg Bahādur and Gobind Singh.

D. F.
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EDITORIAL NOTE

The object of the Editors of this series is a very definite one. They desire above all things that, in their humble way, these books shall be the ambassadors of good-will and understanding between East and West—the old world of Thought and the new of Action. In this endeavour, and in their own sphere, they are but followers of the highest example in the land. They are confident that a deeper knowledge of the great ideals and lofty philosophy of Oriental thought may help to a revival of that true spirit of Charity which neither despises nor fears the nations of another creed and colour.

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THE RELIGION OF THE SIKHS

CHAPTER I

THE SIKH GURUS

The Religion of the Sikhs is one of the most interesting at present existing in India, possibly indeed in the whole world. Being of comparatively late origin, it has not, until lately, received the attention of students, but both in its history and its theology it will well repay study. It is a pure, lofty monotheism, which sprang out of an attempt to reform and to simplify Muhammadanism and Hinduism, and which, though failing in this attempt, succeeded in binding together, like Judaism of old, a whole race in a new bond of religious zeal. The Sikhs 1 became a nation by reason of their faith,—and a fine nation of stalwart soldiers.

1 Sikh, literally "disciple."
There is a tendency at the present day to reckon the Sikhs as a reformed sect of the Hindus; and this has become a matter for controversy among the Indians themselves. The word Hinduism is undoubtedly capable of a very wide application, but it is questionable whether it should be held to include the Sikhs in view of the fact that the pure teaching of the Gurus\(^1\) assumed a critical attitude towards the three cardinal pillars of Hinduism, the priesthood, the caste system,\(^2\) and the Vedas.\(^3\) A reading of the Granth strongly suggests that Sikhism should be regarded as a new and separate world-religion, rather than as a reformed sect of the Hindus. The founder of the religion, Nānak, was on the one hand the spiritual descendant of monotheistic reformers within Hinduism, but on the other, Muhammadan influences caused him to break away very much more from the older faith, and to admit much that might be directly traced to the followers of the Prophet. The subsequent enmity of the

\(^1\) Guru (literally great) signifies "teacher."

\(^2\) The Hindus recognise four great castes: Brahmins, or priests; Kshatriyas, or warriors; Vaisyas, or traders; and Sudras, or serfs. These castes were mapped out in rigid demarcation, and were supposed to have been created separately, the Brahmins having sprung from the head of Brahma and the other castes from other parts of his body. It will be seen that this belief in a fundamental distinction between various human beings must have a strong effect on religious and social life.

\(^3\) Veda (lit. knowledge) is a term given to the ancient Indian Scriptures, of which there were four sections.