

regarded as a record of a great advance made by humanity by special means at a certain period of its collective progress. In its esoteric, as well as its exoteric significance, it is the Book of Works, of the inner and the outer sacrifice; it is the spirit's hymn of battle and victory as it discovers and climbs to planes of thought and experience inaccessible to the natural or animal man, man's praise of the divine Light, Power and Grace at work in the mortal. It is far, therefore, from being an attempt to set down the results of intellectual or imaginative speculation, nor does it consist of the dogmas of a primitive religion. Only, out of the sameness of experience and out of the impersonality of the knowledge received, there arise a fixed body of conceptions constantly repeated and a fixed symbolic language which, perhaps, in that early human speech, was the inevitable form of these conceptions because alone capable by its combined concreteness and power of mystic suggestion of expressing that which for the ordinary mind of the race was inexpressible. We have, at any rate, the same notions repeated from hymn to hymn with the same constant terms and figures and frequently in the same phrases with an entire indifference to any search for poetical originality or any demand for novelty of thought and freshness of language. No pursuit of aesthetic grace, richness or beauty induces these mystic poets to vary the consecrated form which had become for them a sort of divine algebra transmitting the eternal formulae of the Knowledge to the continuous succession of the initiates.

The hymns possess indeed a finished metrical form, a constant subtlety and skill in their technique, great variations of style and poetical personality; they are not the work of rude, barbarous and primitive craftsmen, but the living breath of a supreme and conscious Art forming its creations in the puissant but well-governed movement of a self-observing inspiration. Still, all these high gifts have deliberately been exercised within one unvarying framework and always with the same materials. For the art of expression was to the Rishis only a means, not an aim; their principal preoccupation was strenuously practical, almost utilitarian, in the highest sense of utility. The hymn was to the Rishi who composed it a means of spiritual progress