In the later writings we find merely the name of Ushas. The people lost much of their poetic fire; hence the more human and practical deities caused the more poetical ones to pass into oblivion. Some of the figures in the preceding extracts are most beautifully drawn. The changing colours of the dawn are compared to the many-coloured robes of the dancing girl; the golden tipped clouds that appear ere the sun shines in his strength, are like the jewels of a bride decked for her husband; whilst the quiet modesty of the dawn herself is like a shy maiden, conscious indeed of her beauty, entering society under the protection of her mother. And from the last four lines of the metrical sketch it will be noticed that she was believed to be able to bestow upon her worshippers cattle, horses, sons, health, joy, and length of days.

CHAPTER VII.
THE STORM DEITIES.

1. INDRA.

As was noticed previously, Indra, together with Agni and Surya, by means of sacrifice obtained supremacy over the other gods; and if we may judge from the number of hymns addressed to him in the Vedas, he was the most popular deity.
He is the god of the firmament, in whose hands are the thunder and the lightning; at whose command the refreshing showers fall to render the earth fruitful. When it is borne in mind that in India for months together the earth, exposed to the scorching rays of the sun, becomes so hard that it is impossible for the fields to be ploughed or the seed to be sown, it will not be regarded as wonderful that the god who is supposed to bestow rain should frequently be appealed to, and that the most laudatory songs should be addressed to him. To the poetic minds of the Vedic age, the clouds that the winds brought from the ocean were enemies who held their treasures in their fast embrace until, conquered by Indra, they were forced to pour them upon the parched soil. And very naturally when, in answer to the cry of his worshippers, the genial rains descended, and the earth was thereby changed from a desert to a garden, songs of thanksgiving and praise, couched in the strongest terms, were addressed to him. The attributes ascribed to him refer principally to his physical superiority; and the blessings sought from him are chiefly of a physical rather than a spiritual character.

Indra is not regarded as an uncreated deity. In some hymns he is spoken of as the twin-brother of Agni, and therefore the son of Heaven and Earth; whilst, in other hymns, heaven and earth are said to have been formed by him. Although his parents are often referred to, it is but seldom that they are named; and when they are named, they are not always the same. He is the king of the gods; and in post-Vedic ages his reign is said to extend for a hundred divine years only; at the end of which time he may be superseded as king by some other of the gods, or even by man, if any be able to perform the severe penance necessary to obtain this exalted position.

In pictures, Indra is often represented as a man with four arms and hands; with two he holds a lance, in the third is a thunderbolt, whilst the fourth is empty. He is also sometimes painted with two arms only, and, having eyes all over his body, is then called Sahasráksha (the thousand-eye). He is generally depicted as riding upon the wonderful elephant Airavata, who was produced at the churning of the ocean, carrying a thunderbolt in his right hand and a bow in his left. In the Vedic Age his worship was far more popular than it is at present.

The position and attributes of Indra as taught by the Vedas will be seen from the following description, abbreviated from that given by Dr. Muir:—

"Come, Indra, come, thou much invoked, Our potent hymn thy steeds has yoked. Friend Indra, from the sky descend, Thy course propitious hither bend. But, Indra, though of us thou thinkest, And our labitations gladly drinkest, We, mortal men, can only share A humble portion of thy care. We know how many potent ties Enchain thee in thy paradise. Thou hast at home a lovely wife, The charm and solace of thy life. Thou hast a ceaseless round of joys Which all thy circling hours employs; Joys such as gods immortal know, Ungazed by mortals here below."

Being invoked by mortals, Indra is born. The Sky and the Earth trembled at his appearance, and the Sky exclaimed—

* See part ii. chap. iv.  
† Muir, O. S. T., v. 126.
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"Thy father was a stalwart wight;
Of most consummate skill was he,
The god whose genius fashioned thee."

Immediately after his birth the god gave unmistakable evidence of his divinity. Grasping his weapons, he cried—

"Where, mother, dwell those warriors fierce,
Whose haughty hearts these bolts must pierce?"

Borne in his chariot, hastened by the prayers of his people, the god appears.

"Yet not one form alone he bears,
But various shapes of glory wears,
His aspect changing at his will,
Transmuted, yet resplendent still.
In warlike semblance see him stand,
Red lightnings wielding in his hand."

Ready prepared for him is a feast, the principal attraction of which is the Soma juice.* Indra was particularly fond of this intoxicating drink. It is a most strange circumstance that, whilst the Hindus of the present day are prohibited from the use of intoxicants, Indra is described as being addicted to the Soma; whilst the drink itself is deified and worshipped as a god. Indra on his arrival is invited to quaff the invigorating cup:—

"Thou, Indra, oft of old hast quaffed
With keen delight our Soma draught.
All gods the lascious Soma love,
But thou all other gods above.
Thy mother knew how well this juice
Was fitted for her infant's use.
Into a cup she crushed the sap,
Which thou didst sip upon her lap.

* See chap. viii.

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Yes, Indra, on thy natal morn,
The very hour that thou wast born,
Thou didst those jovial tastes display,
Which still survive in strength to-day."

Indra, after singing the praises of the Soma juice, drinks the proffered cup, and as a result is most graciously disposed towards the worshippers, ready to give whatever they ask. When thus strengthened by the draught, he goes forth to meet the great enemy he came to conquer. This enemy is Vritra (Drought). And in the conflict and victory are seen the peculiar blessings to the earth and man that Indra is able to grant. Vritra is thus described:—

"He whose magic powers
From earth withhold the genial showers;
Of mortal men the foe malign,
And rival of the race divine;
Whose demon hosts from age to age
With Indra war unceasing wage;
Who, times unnumbered crushed and slain,
Is ever newly born again,
And evermore renews the strife
In which again he forfeits life."

The battle is described at length; in which we have a graphic description of the commencement of the rainy season, with the severe thunderstorms which usually accompany this change of the seasons. At last the conflict is over:

"And soon the knell of Vritra's doom
Was sounded by the clang and boom
Of Indra's iron shower.
Pierced, cloven, crushed, with horrible yell,
The dying demon headlong fell
Down from his cloud-built tower."

As a result of the victory of the god, the rains descend and the earth is made fruitful:
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"Now bound by Suhàna’s spell no more,
The clouds discharge their liquid store;
And long by torrid sunbeams baked
The plains by copious showers are slaked;
The rivers swell, and seawards sweep
Their turbid torrents broad and deep.
The peasant views with deep delight,
And thankful heart, the auspicious sight.
His leafless fields, so bare and sad,
Will soon with waving crops be glad;
And mother Earth, now brown and bare,
A robe of brilliant green will wear."

After this blessing has been received, the sun shines,
and earth again is bright; the gods come with their
congratulations to their king, and men present their
thanksgivings.

Such was Indra in ancient times; and though
worshipped still, he occupies a very inferior position
in the present age. As mentioned previously, according
to the teaching of the later books, his rule over the gods
continues for a hundred divine years; at the expiration
of which time he may be superseded by another god, or
even by a man. The Puranas teach that, in each age of
the world, a different being has enjoyed this position.
In the "Vishnu Purana" the following story of a
man raising himself to the throne of Indra.

There was a war between the gods and demons; both
parties inquired of Brahma which would be victorious.
Brahma replied, "The side for which Raji (an earthly
king) shall take up arms." The demons called first
upon Raji to invoke his aid. He promised to assist
them provided they would make him their Indra or
king. They could not promise this, as Prabhala their
Indra's term of office was not yet expired. The same

* See part ii. chap. x.
† Book iv. chap. ix.

condition being proposed to the gods, they consented,
and Raji became their Indra. He fought for them, and
conquered. Upon this, Indra bowed down before him,
and, placing Raji's foot upon his head, said, "Thou hast
preserved me from a great danger. I acknowledge thee
as my father: thou art king over all; I am thy son."
Raji, however, was contented to remain as king on earth,
and appointed Indra to continue as his representative on
the throne of heaven. On the death of Raji, his sons
wished to assume the position their father had declined.
This Indra opposed, but was at length compelled to
yield. After a time, being sad because deprived of his
share in the sacrifices of mortals, Indra met with his
spiritual preceptor Vrihaspati, and asked him for a
morsel of the sacrificial butter. The teacher replied
that, had Indra applied to him earlier, he would not
have been reduced to such straits; but "as it is," he
said, "I will regain your sovereignty in a few days."
Upon this he commenced a sacrifice, with the special
purpose of obtaining power for Indra. The result was,
that Raji's sons were led into sin, they became enemies
of the Brahmins, despised the Vedas, and neglected their
religious duties. When thus weakened, Indra fell upon
and slew them.

The most effectual way by which a mortal could
obtain the position of Indra was by the sacrifice of a
hundred horses; and, as will be seen in the account of
Ganga, the Indra of that time did not object to play
the part of a thief, so as to prevent the completion of
the rites by which he was to be deprived of his
sovereignty. The most common and generally success-
ful method by which these ambitious mortals were
frustrated in their design was by his sending down

* Part iii. chap. viii.
some celestial nymphs, called Apsaras, who, by their beauty, distracted the thoughts of the devotees, and rendered them unfit to offer this great sacrifice.

In the "Vishnu Purana," there is a legend of a conflict between Indra and Krishna, in which Indra is overcome. Krishna, accompanied by his wife Satyabhāmā, visits Indra in his heaven. On her arrival, this lady was most anxious to obtain possession of the wonderful Parijata tree, which was produced at the churning of the ocean, and planted in Indra's heavenly garden. This tree was beautiful in form, was adorned with lovely and sweet-scented flowers, and bore most luscious fruit. The flowers had this virtue, that, worn in the hair by a wife, they enabled her to retain the love of her husband; whilst those who ate the fruit of this tree could remember what had occurred in their previous states of existence. At the request of his wife, Krishna took the tree, and placed it upon Garuda, his wonderful bird-vehicle. Immediately there was an uproar in heaven; but though Indra and his attendant deities tried to prevent the removal of his property, they could not do so. Krishna caught a thunderbolt of Indra in his hand, and, returning home unhurt, planted the tree in his garden.

The Rāmāyana has a story showing that Indra was believed to have been guilty of the grossest immorality—the seduction of the wife of his spiritual teacher. He is said to have visited the house of Gautama, in the form of a sage, hoping to be mistaken by the preceptor's wife for her husband, who was absent from home. But although Ahalyā knew him to be Indra, she yielded to his wishes. As Indra was about to leave, Gautama returned, and, knowing what had happened, cursed the god and his wife. Indra in consequence lost his manhood; and Ahalyā was doomed to live for many years invisible in a forest, until Rāma should come to restore her to her former state. Another account of this curse of Gautama was that Indra was compelled to carry a thousand disgraceful marks upon his body, that all might know the sin of which he had been guilty. At the god's earnest request these were changed from their original form into eyes, which by the ignorant came to be regarded as an indication of his omniscience.

The heaven of Indra must not be passed over without notice, as it is there the good on earth hope to go for a time, as a reward of their holy lives. To go to Swarga, as his heaven is named, is not the highest happiness a man can obtain, because he cannot remain there for ever. When his allotted years of happiness are over, he must return to earth and live other lives, until he becomes perfect and fit to enjoy the highest felicity—absorption into the Divine Being. The "Vishnu Purana" says: "Not in hell alone do the souls of the deceased undergo pain: there is no cessation even in heaven; for its temporary inhabitant is ever tormented with the prospect of descending again to earth. Again must he be born upon earth, and again must he die. Whatever is produced that is most acceptable to man becomes a seed whence springs the tree of sorrow."

The home of Indra is situated on Mount Meru. It

* Book v chap. xxx.

† Book vi, chap. v.

‡ Meru is a fabulous mountain, supposed to be the centre of the
has beautiful houses for its inhabitants; and the splendour of its capital is unequalled in the universe. Its gardens are stocked with trees that afford a grateful shade, yield the most luscious fruits, and are adorned with beautiful and fragrant flowers. Most beautiful nymphs (Apsaras) charm the happy inhabitants, whilst choristers and musicians, unrivalled in the universe, discourse sweet music. The city was built by Visvakarma. It is eight hundred miles in circumference, and forty miles high. Its pillars are diamonds; its palaces, thrones, and furniture, pure gold.*

In Bengal this deity is worshipped one day in each year. His image is made of mud, prettily painted; on the day after it has been worshipped it is cast into the river. At the commencement of a sacrifice, too, he is invoked, in the hope that he will convey the prayers and offerings to the deity specially worshipped at that time, or that he will conduct the deity into the presence of the worshippers. In seasons of drought special offerings are made to him in some parts of the country, that through his power the clouds may pour their streams upon the parched country.

The more common of Indra's other names are the following:—Sakra, the able one; Divapati, the lord of the gods; Bajra, he who wields the thunderbolt; Vritraha, the destroyer of Vritra; Meghavahana, he who rides on the clouds; Mahendra, the great Indra; Swarga-pati, the lord of heaven.

If he is believed to be somewhere to the north of the Himalayas. The heavens of the other gods are situated in its vicinity. From the fact that they regarded heaven to be near their former home, it would seem that the Indo-Aryans retained pleasant recollections of the place whence they migrated; or perhaps the inaccessibility of these mountains was a reason for heaven being placed on their summits.

* "Mahābhārata," quoted by Ward, ii. 88.

2. INDRĀNI.

Of Indrāni, the wife of Indra (called also Sachi), very little is said. In the Rig-Veda* we read, "Among all females Indrāni is the most fortunate; for her husband shall not at any future time die of old age." This may be explained by the fact that Indrāni is wife to all who successively attain to the throne of Indra. There is always some one ruling in heaven; the office is perpetual, and as she is the wife of the reigning king, whoever he may be, her husband cannot ever die of old age. Though kings may come and go, she continues queen. She is said to have a son, Chitragupta by name, who was born of a cow; for, owing to a curse pronounced by Umā, none of the goddesses could become a mother. She practised austerities, in order that she might not be childless; and by means of this expedient her desire was gratified. At the birth of this child, the reputed mother suffered all the pains attendant on childbirth, and was able to nurse him.

3. PARIJANYA.

There are a few hymns addressed to this deity in the Rig-Veda; but from the character and functions ascribed to him it is difficult to see wherein he differs from Indra. Professor Roth† says, "Taking a review of the whole, we find that Parijanya is a god who presides over the lightning, the thunder, the rain, and the procreation of plants and living creatures. But it is by no means clear whether he is originally a god of the rain, or a god of the thunder." In another essay he says Parijanya is "the god of the thunderstorms and rain, the generator

* Muir, O. S. T., v. 82.
† Ibid. v. 142.