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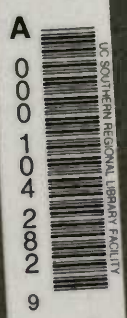
AUGURAL LECTURE OF HE WILDE LECTURER IN NATURAL & COMPARATIVE RELIGION



BY

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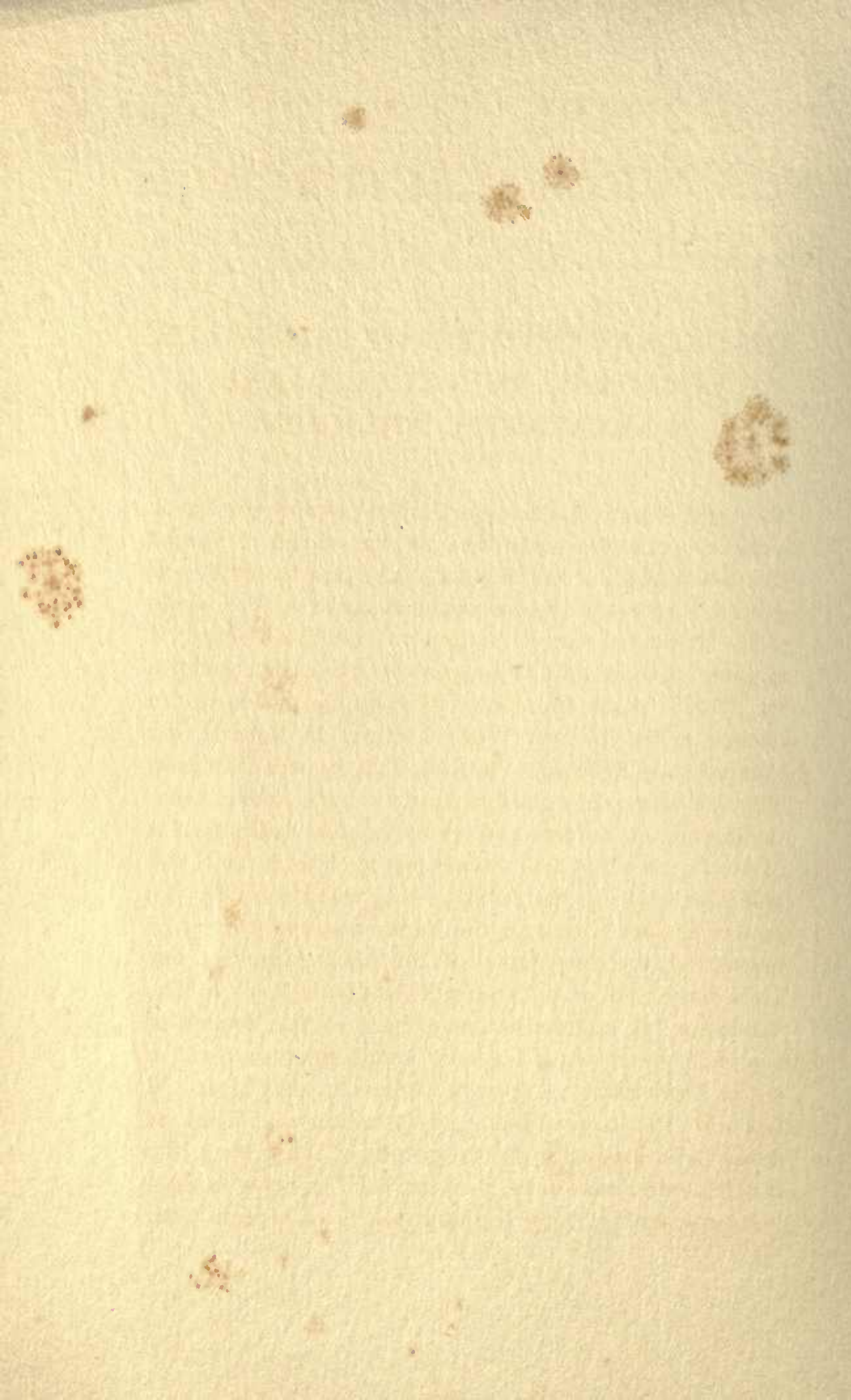

INAUGURAL LECTURE OF THE WILDE LECTURER IN NATURAL AND COMPARATIVE RELIGION

THE newly-elected holder of a University professorship or lectureship, before embarking on the course of special discussion that he has selected, may be allowed or expected to present some outlined account of the whole subject that he represents, and to state beforehand, if possible, the line that he proposes to pursue in regard to it. This is all the more incumbent on me, as I have the honour to be the first Wilde Lecturer in Natural and Comparative Religion—the first, that is, who has been officially charged by the University to give public teaching in the most modern and one of the most difficult fields of study, one that has already borne copious fruit, and will bear more in the future. I appreciate highly the honour of such a charge, and I take this opportunity of expressing my deep sense of the indebtedness of our University and of all students of this subject to Dr. Wilde for his munificent endowment of this branch of research, which as yet has only found encouragement in a few Universities of Europe, America, and Japan. I feel also the responsibility of my charge. Years of study have shown me the magnitude of the subject, the pitfalls that here—more, perhaps, than in other fields—beset the unwary, and the multiplicity of aspects from

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which it may be studied. Having no predecessor, I cannot follow, but may be called upon rather to set, a precedent.

One guidance, at least, I have—namely, the expressed wishes of the founder of this post, which I mean loyally to respect. He has formulated them in such a way that I feel precluded from what may be called the primitive anthropology of religion. I shall not, therefore, deal directly with the embryology of the subject, with merely savage religious psychology, ritual, or institutions. It is not that I do not myself feel the fascination of these subjects of inquiry, and their inevitableness for one who wishes wholly to understand the whole of any one of the higher world-religions.

But we have already in the University two accomplished exponents of these themes—Professor Tylor and Mr. Marett—and Dr. Wilde has made his wishes clear that his lecturer should mainly devote himself to the analysis, elucidation, and comparison of the higher forms and ideas in the more advanced religions. And I can cheerfully accept this limitation, as for years I have been occupied with the minute study of the religion of Greece, in which one finds much, indeed, that is primitive, even savage, but much also of religious thought and religious ethic, unsuspected by former generations of scholars, that has become a rich inheritance of our higher culture. He who wishes to succeed in this new field of arduous inquiry that I am discussing to-night should have studied at least one of the higher religions of the old civilization *au fond*, and he must have studied it by the comparative method. He may then make this religion the point of departure for wide excursions into outlying tracts of the

more or less adjacent religious systems, and he will be the less likely to lose himself in the maze and tangle of facts if he can focus the varying light or doubtful glimmer they afford upon the complex set of phenomena with which he is already familiar.

And the Greek religion serves better than any other than I know for such a point of departure, the influences being so numerous that radiated upon it. It had its own special inheritance which it fruitfully developed from the North, from its proto-Aryan past, and which we shall be able to define with greater clearness when comparative religion has done its work upon the religious records of the early Aryan peoples. Also, the Hellene had many intimate points of contact with earlier and alien peoples of the ancient Mediterranean culture whom he conquered and partly absorbed, or with whom he entered into intellectual or commercial relations. Therefore, the religions of the Minoan Age, of the Anatolian peoples, of Egypt, and finally of Babylon and Persia, come inevitably to attract the student of the Hellenic.

As far, then, as I can see at present, I may have to limit my attention in the lecture-courses of these three years during which I fill this post to the phenomena of the Mediterranean area, and these are more than one man can thoroughly elucidate in a lifetime, as the manifold activity in various departments of this field attested by the Transactions of our recent Congress of the History of Religions will prove to those who read them. And I shall endeavour in the future to follow out one main problem through a short series of lectures, as this is the best method for a reasoned statement of consecutive thought. But I propose in this lecture to sketch merely in outlines the salient

features of some of the religions of the Mediterranean area, and hope thereby to indicate the main problems which the student of comparative religion must try to solve, or the leading questions he must ask, and thus, perhaps, to be able to suggest to others as well as to myself special lines of future research and discussion.

What, then, are the questions which naturally arise when we approach the study of any religion that has advanced beyond the primitive stage? We wish to discover with definiteness what is the idea of divinity that it has evolved, in what forms and with what concepts this idea is expressed—whether, for instance, the godhead is conceived as a vague 'numen,' or as a definite personality with complex character and functions, and whether it is imagined or presented to sense in anthropomorphic forms.

The question whether the religion is monotheistic or polytheistic is usually answered at a glance, unless the record is unusually defective; but in the case of polytheism careful inquiry is often needed to answer the other morphological questions that press themselves upon us, whether the polytheism is an organized system of coordinated and subordinated powers or a mere medley of uncorrelated deities. If the former, whether the unifying tendency has developed in the direction of monotheism or pantheism.

Again, the study of the attributes and functions ascribed and the titles attached to the deity will enable us to answer the questions concerning his relation to the world of Nature, to the social sphere of law, politics, and morality; and in this quest we may hope to gain fruitful

suggestions concerning the interaction of religion, social institution, and ethics. We shall also wish to know whether the religion is dogmatic or not—that is to say, whether it lays stress on precise theological definitions; whether it claims to possess sacred books or a revelation; whether it contains the idea of faith as a cardinal virtue. Further, it is always interesting to consider whether it has engendered a cosmogony, a theory of the cosmos, its origin, maintenance, and possible dissolution; and whether it is instinctively favourable or antagonistic to the growth of the scientific spirit, to the free activity of the intellect; and, finally, whether it gives prominence to the belief in the immortality of the soul and to the doctrine of posthumous rewards and punishments.

There are also certain special questions concerning the nature and powers of the divinity that are found to be of importance. The distinction of sex in the anthropomorphic religions, the paramountcy of the god or the goddess, is observed to produce a singular effect in religious psychology, and may be associated with fundamental differences in social institutions, with the distinction, for instance, between a patrilinear and a matrilinear society. As regards the powers attributed to the divinity, we may endeavour to discern certain laws of progress or evolution in progressive societies—an evolution, perhaps, from a more material to a more spiritual conception, or, again, from a belief in divinities finite and mortal to a dogma that infinity, omniscience, and immortality are their necessary attributes. On this line of inquiry we are often confronted with the phenomenon of the death of the god or goddess, and no single fact in the history of religions is of more interest and of more weight. Also, we occasionally find

an antagonism between malevolent and benevolent powers, whence may arise a philosophic conception of dualism in Nature and the moral world.

There are, further, the questions concerning ritual, often very minute, but of none the less significance. What are the forms of worship, sacrifice, prayer, adoration? As regards sacrifice, is it deprecatory merely, a bribe to avert wrath, or is it a gift to secure favour, or is it a token of friendly trust and affection, or a mystic act of communion which effects between the deity and the worshipper a temporary union of body and soul? In the study of ritual we may consider the position of the priesthood, its power over the religion, and through the religion over the State, and the sources of that power.

This enumeration of the problems is long, but I fear by no means exhaustive. I have not yet mentioned the question that may legitimately arise, and is the most perplexing of all—that which is asked concerning the vital power and influence of a certain religion, its strength of appeal, its real control of the people's thoughts and acts. The question, as we know, is difficult enough when we apply it to modern societies; it may be quite hopeless when applied to an ancient State. It is only worth raising when the record is unusually ample and varied, and of long continuity; when we can believe that it enshrines the thoughts of the people, not merely of the priest or of the philosopher. We are more likely to believe this when the record is rich not only in literature, but in monuments.

It may also be demanded that the history of religions should include a history of their decay, and in his brilliant

address at the recent Congress, Professor Petrie has formulated this demand as one that Egyptology might fulfil. Certainly it belongs to the scientific treatment of our subject to note the circumstances and operative causes that induced a certain people to abandon their ancestral beliefs and cults ; but whether from the careful study of each special case certain general laws will emerge by process of induction may be doubted. It will depend partly on the completeness of our records and our skill in their interpretation.

I will conclude this sketch of an ideal programme, which I, at least, can never hope to make actual, with one last query—It is the main object of this comparative study to answer the inquiry as to the reciprocal influences of adjacent religions, to distinguish between the alien and the native elements in any particular system—to estimate, for instance, what Greece owed to Babylon, to Egypt, to India ? Certainly the problem is proper to our province, is attractive, and even hopeful, and I may even dare at a later stage to approach it myself. But I should hesitate to allow that it is the main one, and that the value of our study is to be measured by our success in solving it ; for, whatever answer we finally give to such questions, or if we abandon in despair the attempt to answer them precisely, it is none the less fruitful to compare the Babylonian, Indo-Iranian, Egyptian, and Hellenic systems of belief—for instance, to consider the Orphic eschatology in relation to the Buddhistic, even if we reject the theory that Buddhistic influences could have penetrated into early Orphism.

I will now sketch what I have perceived to be the higher elements or more developed features in Hellenic

religion, and will consider in regard to each of these how it contrasts with or resembles the cults of the other leading peoples of this area. The Hellenic high divinity is, in the first place, no mere shadowy 'numen,' no vague spirit-power or semi-personal divine force, such as the old Roman belief often seems to present us with, nor is he usually conceived as a divine element perceived as immanent in certain things ; but he appears as a concrete personal individual of definite physical traits and complex moral nature. Vaguer and cruder ideas no doubt survived right through the historic period, and the primitive Hellene may once have lived in the religious phase of thought in which the personal god has not yet emerged or not yet been detached from the phenomenon or the world of living matter. But I believe that the Greek of the historic, and even of the Homeric, period had left this phase far more remotely behind him than certain modern theorists have lightly supposed, and I am inclined to affirm that the proto-Hellenic tribes had already before the conquest of Greece developed the cult of certain personal deities, and that some, at least, of these were the common heritage of several tribes. It is quite possible that before they crossed the northern frontier of Greece they found such divinities among their Aryan kinsfolk of Thrace, and it is certain that this was the type of religion that they would mainly find among the peoples of the Minoan-Mycenæan culture.

We discern it also, where the record allows us to discern anything, among the nearer and remoter stocks of the Asiatic side of the Mediterranean area. In the Zend-Avesta, the sacred books of the Persian religion, Ahura-Mazda is presented as a noble ethical figure, a concrete personal god, like Jahwé of Israel, whatever his original

physical significance may have been. Marduk of Babylon, whom Hammurabi, the consolidator of the Babylonian power, raised to the rank of the high god, may once have been a sun-god, but he transcended his elemental nature, and appears in the records of the third millennium as a political deity, the war-god, and leader of the people, as real a personality as Hammurabi himself. The same is true of Asshur, once the local deity of the aboriginal land of the Assyrians, but later raised by the imperial expansion of this people almost to the position of a universal god, the guardian of the land, the teacher and the father of the kings ; nor can we discern that he was ever an elemental god.

Speaking generally, in spite of many important differences, we may regard the religious structure to which the cults of Anatolia and Egypt belonged as morphologically the same as that which I am defining as Hellenic. Also, among all these peoples, by the side of the few higher deities who have developed moral personalities, we find special elemental divinities, as, in Hellas, we find Helios and the deities of the wind, Hephaistos the fire-god.

The distinction between the religions of the Hellenes and ' the barbarians,' which Aristophanes defines as the difference between the worship of ideal divine personages, such as Zeus, Apollo, and Demeter, and the direct worship of elementary powers, such as sun and moon, is not borne out by modern research. Where we find sun-worship or moon-worship in the East, it does not appear to have been directed immediately to the thing itself regarded as a living or animate body, but to a personal god of the sun or the moon—Bel, Schamash, or Sin. We can only distinguish the Greek from the Oriental in respect of

Nature-religion by the lesser degree of devotion that the Hellene showed to it. Only those of his divinities whose names connoted nothing in the material or natural world could develop into free moral personalities, and dominate the religious imagination of the people. Nowhere, for instance, had Helios any high position in the Greek world except at Rhodes, where we must reckon with pre-Hellenic, Minoan, and later with Semitic influences. Therefore, when, shortly before and after the beginning of the Græco-Roman period, a wave of sun-worship welled from the East over the West, it may have brought with it religious ideas of high spirituality and ethical purity, yet by the race-consciousness of the Hellenes it must have been judged to be a regress towards a barbaric past.

The instinct of the Greek in his creation of divine forms shows always a bias towards the personal and the individual, an aversion to the amorphous and vague, and herein we may contrast him with the Persian and Egyptian. A certain minor phenomenon in these religions will illustrate and attest this. All of them admitted by the side of the high personal deities certain subordinate personages less sharply conceived, divine emanations, as we may sometimes call them, or personifications of moral or abstract ideas. Plutarch specially mentions the Persian worship of Truth, Good-will, Law-abidingness, Wisdom, emanations of Ahura Mazda, which in the light of the sacred books we may, perhaps, interpret as the Fravashis or Soul-powers of the High God ; and in certain Egyptian myths and religious records we hear of a personification of Truth, whose statue is described by the same writer. But at least in the Persian system we may suspect that such divine beings had little concrete per-

sonality, but, rather, were conceived vaguely as daimoniac forces, special activities of divine force in the invisible world. Now the Greek of the period when we really know him seems to have been mentally unable to allow his consciousness of these things or these forces to remain just at that point. Once, no doubt, it was after this fashion that his ancestors dimly imagined Eros, or the half-personal Curse-power Ἀρά; but he himself could only cherish Eros under the finished and concrete form of a beautiful personal god, and the curse was only vitalized for him when it took on the form of the personal Erinys. This topic is a fruitful one, and I hope to develop it on a later occasion.

It suggests what is now the next matter I wish to touch on—the comparison of the Mediterranean religions in respect of their anthropomorphism. Philosophically, the term might be censured as failing to distinguish any special type of religion; for we should all admit that man can only envisage the unseen world in forms intelligible to his own mind and reflecting his own mental structure. But, apart from this truism, we find that religions differ essentially and vitally according as this anthropomorphism is vague and indefinite or sharply defined and dominating; according as they picture the divinity as the exact though idealized counterpart of man, and construct the divine society purely on the lines of the human, or refrain from doing this either through weakness and obscurity of imagination or in deference to a different and perhaps more elevated law of the religious intellect. Now, of the Hellenic religion no feature is so salient as its anthropomorphism, and throughout its whole development and career the anthropomorphic principle has been more dominating and imperious than

it has ever been found to be in other religions.* At what remote period in the evolution of the Hellenic mind this principle began in force, what were the influences that fostered and strengthened it, in what various ways it shaped the religious history of the Hellenic people, are questions that I may be able to treat more in detail in a future course. But there are two important phenomena that I will indicate now, which we must associate with it, and which afford us an illuminating point of view from which we may contrast the Greek world and the Oriental. In the first place, the anthropomorphic principle, combining with an artistic faculty the highest that the world has known, produced in Greece a unique form of idolatry ; and, in the second place, in consequence chiefly of this idolatry, the purely Hellenic religion remained almost incapable of that which we call mysticism.

Now, much remains still to be thought out, especially for those interested in Mediterranean culture, concerning the influence of idolatry on religion ; and not only the history, but the psychology of religion, must note and estimate the influence of religious art. It may well be that the primitive Greeks, like the primitive Roman, the early Teuton, and Indo-Iranian stocks, were non-idolatrous, and this appears to have been true to some extent of the Minoan culture. Nevertheless, the Mediterranean area has from time immemorial been the centre of the fabric and the worship of the eikon and the idol. The impulse may have come from the East or from Egypt to the Hellene ; he in his turn imparted it to the Indian Aryans, as we now know, and in great measure at least to the Roman, just as the Assyrian-Babylonian temple-

* I am aware that there are exceptions to this principle, which I propose to consider in a future course ; no single formula can ever sum up all the phenomena of a complex religion.

worship imparted it to the Persian. Nowhere, we may well believe, has the influence of idolatry been so strong upon the religious temperament as it was upon that of the Hellenes ; for to it they owed works of the type that may be called the human-divine which surpass any other art-achievement of man's.

I can here only indicate briefly its main effects. It intensified the perception of the real personal god as a material fact. It increased polytheism by multiplying the separate figures of worship, often, perhaps, without intention. It assisted the imagination to discard what was uncouth and terrifying in the Hellenic religion, and was at once the effect and the cause of the attachment of the Hellenic mind towards mild and gracious types of godhead. The aniconic emblem and uncouth fetich-formed figures were here and there retained, because of vague ideas about luck or for superstitious fetichistic reasons ; but the beautiful idol was cherished because it could arouse the enthusiastic affection of a sensitive people, and could bring them to the very presence of a friendly divine person. The saying that the Olympian deities died of their own loveliness means a wrong interpretation of the facts and the people. But for a beautiful idolatry, Hellenic polytheism would have passed away some centuries before it did, the deities fading into alien types or becoming fused one with the other. Nor was its force and influence exhausted by the introduction of Christianity, for it shaped the destinies of the Greek Church, and threw down a victorious challenge to the iconoclastic Emperors.

If now we were to look across the Mediterranean, and could survey the religious monuments of Persia, Assyria

and Babylonia, Phœnicia, and the Hittite people, we should find a general acceptance of the anthropomorphic idea. The high personal deities are represented mainly in human form, but the art is not able to interpret the polytheistic beliefs with skilfully differentiated types. In Chaldaic and Assyrian art one type of countenance is used for various divinities, and this such as might inspire terror rather than affection. And the anthropomorphism is unstable. Often animal traits appear in parts of the divine figure. The ineffable Ahura-Mazda is half-bird, half-man ; Nergal has a lion's head ; even the warrior Marduk is invoked in the mystic incantations as ' Black Bull of the Deep, Lion of the dark house.'* In fact, over a large part of anterior Asia, anthropomorphism and theriomorphism exist side by side in religious concept and religious art. We may say the same of Egypt, but here theriomorphism is the dominating factor.

As regards the explanation of this phenomenon, many questions are involved which are outside my present province. I would only express my growing conviction that these two distinct modes of representing the divine personage to the worshipper are not necessarily prior and posterior, the one to the other, in the evolution of religion. They can easily, and frequently do, coexist. The vaguely conceived deity shifts his shape, and the same people may imagine him mainly as a glorified man of human volition and action, and yet think of him as temporarily incarnate in an animal, and embody his type for purposes of worship or religious art in animal forms.

I would further indicate here what I cannot prove in detail—that theriomorphism lends itself to mysticism,

* *Vide* Langdon, in Transactions of Congress of the History of Religions, 1908, vol. i., p. 251.

while the anthropomorphic idolatry of Greece was strongly in opposition to it. The mystic theosophy that pervaded later paganism, and from which early Christianity could not escape, originated, as Reitzenstein has well shown, mainly in Egypt, and it arose partly, I think, in connection with the hieratic and allegorical interpretation of the theriomorphic idol. There was nothing mystic about the Zeus of Pheidias, so far as the form of the god was concerned. The forms were entirely adequate to the expression of the physical, moral, and spiritual nature of the god. The god was just that, and there was nothing behind, and, as the ancient enthusiast avers, 'having once seen him thus, you could not imagine him otherwise.' But when a divinity to whom high religious conceptions have already come to attach is presented, as it might be in Egyptian religious art, with the head of a jackal or an ape, the feeling is certain to arise sooner or later in the mind of the worshipper that the sense-form is inadequate to the idea. Then his troubled questioning will receive a mystic answer, and the animal type of godhead will be given an esoteric interpretation.

Plutarch, in the 'De Iside et Osiride,'* is one of our witnesses. He finds a profounder significance for theosophy in the beetle, the asp, and the weasel than in the most beautiful anthropomorphic work of bronze or marble. He here turns his back on his ancestors, and goes over to the sect of the Egyptian mystic.

But the most curious testimony to my thesis is borne by an inscription on an Egyptian lamp—an invocation of the God Thoth: 'O Father of Light, O Logos, that orderest day and night, come show thyself to me. O God of Gods, in thy ape-form enter.' Here the association

* P. 382, C.

of so mystic a concept as the 'Logos,' the divine Reason, an emanation of God with the form of an ape, is striking enough, and suggests to us many reflections on the contrast between the Egyptian theriomorphism and the human idolatry of the Greek. The Hermes of Praxiteles was too stubborn a fact before the people's eyes to fade into the high vagueness of the 'Logos,' too stable in his beautiful humanity to sink into the ape.

But before leaving this subject I would point out a phenomenon in the Hellenic world that shows the working of the same principle. The Orphic god Dionysos-Sabazios-Zagreus was *πολύμορφος*, a shape-shifter, conceived now as bull, now as serpent, now as man, and the Orphic sects were penetrated with a mystic theosophy; and, again, they were a foreign element embedded in Greek society and religion.

While we are dealing with the subject of anthropomorphism, we should consider also the question of sex, for a religion that gives predominance to the god is certain to differ in some essential respects from one in which a goddess is supreme. Now, although the conception of an All-Father was a recognized belief in every Greek community, and theoretically Zeus was admitted to be the highest god, yet we may believe Athena counted more than he for the Athenians, and Hera more for the Argives. And we have evidence of the passionate devotion of many urban and village communities to the mother Demeter and her daughter Kore, to whom the greatest mysteries of Greece, full of the promise of posthumous salvation, were consecrated. Also, in the adjacent lands of earlier culture we mark the same phenomenon. In Egyptian religion we have the commanding figure of Isis, who, though by no means supreme in the earlier period, seems

to dominate the latter age of this polytheism. In the Assyrian-Babylonian Pantheon, though the male deity is at the head, Ishtar appears as his compeer, or as inferior only to Asshur. Coming westward towards Asia Minor, we seem to see the goddess overshadowing the god. On the great Hittite monument at Boghaz-Keui, in Cappadocia, skilfully interpreted by Dr. Frazer, we observe a great goddess with her son coequal with the Father-God. In the lands adjacent to the coast a Mother-Goddess, sometimes also imagined as virgin, Kybele of Phrygia, Ma of Cappadocia, Hipta of Lydia, Astarte of Askalon, Artemis of Ephesos who was probably a blend of Hellenic and Oriental cult-ideas, appears to have been dominant from an immemorial antiquity, for Dr. Evans has discovered the same mysterious feminine power pre-eminent in the Minoan religion. We may even affirm that she has ruled a great part of the Mediterranean down to the present day.

The various questions suggested by this predominance of goddess-worship are fascinating and subtle. The sociological one—how far it is to be connected with a system of counting descent through the female, with a matrilinear society—I have partly discussed in a former paper.* I may later be able to enter on the question that is of more interest for the psychology of religion—the effect of such worships on the religious sentiment. Here I can merely point to the phenomenon as a natural and logical product of the principle of anthropomorphism, but would call attention to the fact that in the East it sometimes developed into a form that, from the anthropomorphic point of view, must be called morbid and subversive of this principle ; for the rivalry of divine sex was here and there

* 'Archiv für Religionswissenschaft,' 1904.

solved by the fusion of the two natures in the divinity, and we find a bisexual type—a male Astarte, a bearded Ishtar.* The healthy-minded anthropomorphism of the Hellene rejects this Oriental extravagance.

If we now could consider in detail the various moral conceptions attached to the high State divinities of Greece and the East, we should be struck with a general similarity in the point of view of the various culture-stocks. The higher deities, on the whole, are ethical beings who favour the righteous and punish transgressors ; and the worship of Greece falls here into line with the Hebraic conceptions of a god of righteousness. But in one important particular Hellenic thought markedly differs from Oriental, especially the Persian. In the people's religion throughout Hellas the deities are, on the whole, worshipped as beneficent, as doing good to their worshippers, so long as these do not offend or sin against them. The apparent exceptions are no real exceptions. Ares may have been regarded as an evil god by the poet or the philosopher, but we cannot discover that this was ever the view of the people who cared to establish his cult. The Erinyes are vindictive ; nevertheless, they are moral, and the struggle between them and Apollo in the Æschylean drama is only the contest between a more barbaric and a more civilized morality. In the list of Greek divine titles and appellatives, only one or two at most can be given a significance of evil.

Doubtless, beneath the bright anthropomorphic religion lurked the fear of ghosts and evil spirits, and the later days of Hellenic paganism were somewhat clouded with demonology. But the average Greek protected himself sufficiently by purification and easy conventional magic.

* *Vide* Jastrow, 'Religion Babyloniens u. Assyriens,' vol. i., p. 545.

He did not brood on the principle of evil or personify it as a great cosmic power, and therefore he would not naturally evolve a system of religious dualism, though the germs from which this might grow may be found in Orphic tradition and doctrine. Contrast this with the evidence from Egypt, Assyria, and Persia. The Egyptian and Assyrian records bear strong impress of the prominence and power of the belief in evil spirits. The high gods of Assyria were continually being invoked and implored by the worshipper to save him from the demons, and one of these, Ira, a demon of pestilence, seems to have been actually worshipped ; and much of Egyptian private ritual was protective magic against them.

But nowhere did the power of evil assume such grand proportions as in the old Mazdean creed of Persia, and the dualism between the good and evil principle became here the foundation of a great religion that spread its influence wide through the West. The religion had its prophet, Zarathustra, in whose historic reality we ought not to doubt. In his system the faithful Mazdean is called upon to play his part in the struggle between Ahura-Mazda and Angra-Mainyu, and this struggle continues through the ages till in the final cataclysm the Daevas, or evil demons, will be overthrown. We note here that this faith includes the idea of a final Judgment, so familiar to Judaic and Christian thought, but scarcely to be found in the native Hellenic religion. Further, it should be observed that the Mazdean dualism between good and evil has nothing in common with the Platonic antithesis between mind and sense, or St. Paul's between spirit and flesh, or with the hatred of the body that is expressed in Buddhism. The good Mazdean might regard his body as good and pure, and therefore he escaped, as by a

different way did the Greek, from the tyranny of a morbid ascetism. Only he developed the doctrine of purity into a code more burdensome than can be found, I think, elsewhere. The ideas of ritual-purity on which he framed this code are found broadcast through the East and in Egypt, and appear in the Hellenic religion also. The Greek, however, did not allow himself to be oppressed by his own cathartic system, but turned it to excellent service in the domain of law, as I have tried to show elsewhere.*

Generally, as regards the association of religion and morality, we find this to be always intimate in the more developed races, but our statistics are insufficient for us to determine with certainty the comparative strength of the religious sanction of morals in the ancient societies of the Mediterranean. The ethical-religious force of the Zarathustrian faith seems to approach that of the Hebraic. We should judge it to be stronger, at least, than any that was exercised in Hellas, for Hellas, outside the Orphic sects, had neither sacred books of universal recognition nor a prophet. Yet all Hellenic morality was protected by religion, and the Delphic oracle, which occasionally was able to play the part of the father-confessor, encouraged a high standard of conduct—as high as the average found elsewhere in the ancient world. We may note, however, one lacuna in the Hellenic code: neither Greek ethics, on the whole, nor Greek religion, emphasized or exalted or deified the virtue of truth; but we hear of a goddess of Truth in Egypt, and it becomes a cardinal tenet and a divine force in the Zarathustrian ideal.

Again, in all ancient societies religion is closely interwoven with political, legal, and social institutions, and its

* *Vide* my 'Hibbert Lectures,' pp. 139-152.

influence on these concerns the history of the evolution of society and law. It is only in modern society, or in a few most ideal creeds at periods of great exaltation, that a severance is made between Cæsar and God. Save Buddhism, the religions of the ancient societies of the East and of Egypt were all in a sense political. Darius regards himself as specially protected by Ahura-Mazda, and we are told by Herodotus* that in the private Persian's prayers no separate personal benefits were besought, but only the welfare of the King and the Persian community. The gods of Assyria inspire counsel and order the campaign; Schamash, the sun-god, is 'Just Ruler' and the 'Lord of Law'; and Ninib is styled the god 'who lays for ever the foundation-stone of the State,' and who, like Zeus ὅριος, and the Latin Terminus, 'protects the boundaries of the cornfield.' The Syrian goddess of Bambyke, Kybele of Phrygia, Astarte of Askalon, all wear the mural crown, the badge of the city goddess. But I doubt if our materials are as yet rich enough to inform us in what precise way religion played a constructive part in the oldest civilizations—namely, those of Assyria and Egypt. We may observe that the code of Hammurabi, our oldest legal document, is curiously secular and in many respects modern.

The question can be most fruitfully pursued in the study of the Greek societies; for no other religion of which we have any record was so political as the Hellenic, not even, as I should judge, the Roman, to which it bears the closest resemblance in this respect. The very origin of the πόλις, the city-state, was often religious; for the name or title of the deity often gave a name to the city, and the temple was in this case probably the centre of

* I. 132.

the earliest residence. In the organized and complex Greek societies every institution of the State—the assembly, the council, the law-courts, the agrarian economy, all the regulations of the family and clan—were consecrated and safeguarded by the supervision of some deity. Often he or she was worshipped as in a literal sense the State ancestor, and in one of the temples might be found burning the perpetual fire which symbolized the permanence of the city's life. And in Greece we find a unique phenomenon, which, though small, is of great significance—the deity might here and there be made to take the office and title of a civic magistrate. For instance, Apollo was *στεφανηφόρος* in Asia Minor cities, and in the later days of Sparta, as the recent excavations have shown, the ghost of Lykourgos was elected as the chief inspector of the education of the young.

To the superficial observer, then, the Greek civic society might appear a theocracy. But such a view would imply ignorance of the average character of the ancient Greek world. There can be no theocracy where there is no theocrat. In Asia Minor the priest might be a great political power, but in Greece this was never so. Here the political, secular, utilitarian interest dominates the religion. The high divinities become politicians, and immersed in secular affairs, and even take sides in the party strife, as some of the religious titles attest. Thus Greek religion escaped morbidity and insanity, becoming genial and human, and compensating by its adaptability to the common needs of life for what it lost in respect to the sense of mystery and aloofness. Therefore, also, in Greek invocations and hymns we do not often hear the echo of that sublimity that resounds in the Iranian, Assyrian, and still more in the Hebrew liturgies.

Another interesting point of comparison is the relation of religion to the arts and sciences. Their association may be said to have been more intimate in Hellenism than it has been found to be in any other creed. We can estimate what music and the drama owed to Apollo and Dionysos, and how the life of the philosopher, artist, and poet was considered consecrated to certain divinities. We hear of the Delphic oracle encouraging philosophic pursuits. The very name of our present building, the Museum, is a landmark in the religious history of education, and we know that the temple of Asklepios in Kos was the cradle of the school of modern medicine. The records of the other religions of this area show glimpses of the same association, and more extended research may throw further light on it. The Assyrian gods Nebo and Ea were divinities of wisdom and the arts, and to the former, who was the inventor of writing, the library of Aschurbanapal was consecrated. Chaldean astronomy was evolved from their astrology, which was itself a religious system. But demonology was stronger in Assyria, Persia, and Egypt than in Hellas, and demonology is the foe of science. In the Zend-Avesta the priestly medicine-man, who heals by spell and exorcism, is ranked higher than the scientific practitioner. A chapter might be written on the negative advantages of Greek religion, and none was of greater moment than this—that it had no sacred books or authoritative religious cosmogony to oppose to the dawn and the development of scientific inquiry. Asclepios had been a practitioner in the method of thaumaturgic cures, but he accepted Hippokrates genially when the time came.

As regards the relation between Greek philosophy and Greek religion, something may remain to be discovered

by any scholar who is equally familiar with both. It would be absurd to attempt to summarize the facts in a few phrases here. I wish merely to indicate the absence in pure Hellenic speculation of any elaborated system of theosophy, such as the late Egyptian 'gnosis,' till we come to Neo-Platonism, when the Greek intellect is no longer pure. We discover also a vacuum in the religious mind and nomenclature of the earlier Greek: he had neither the concept nor any name to express the concept of what we call 'faith,' the intellectual acceptance and confessional affirmation of certain dogmas concerning the divinity; and in this respect he differed essentially not only from the Christian, but also from the Iranian and Buddhistic votary.

A great part of the study of ancient religion is a study of ritual, and it is interesting to survey the Mediterranean area, so as to discern similarities or divergences in the forms of religious service. Everywhere we observe the blood-sacrifice of animals, and very frequently the harmless offering of fruits and cereals, and now one, now the other, in Greece as elsewhere, was regarded as the more pious. The former is of the higher interest, for certain ideas which have been constructive of higher religions—our own, for example—have grown out of it. At first sight the animal oblation seems everywhere much the same in character and significance. The sacrificial ritual of Leviticus does not differ in any essential trait from that which commended itself to the Greeks and the other peoples of these lands. Certain animals are everywhere offered, at times as a free and cheerful gift, at other times as an atonement to expiate sin and to deprecate wrath. Certain other animals are tabooed, for reasons that may repay searching out.

In most regions we have evidence of the practice of human sacrifice, either as an established system or as an occasional expedient. The motives that prompted it present an important and intricate question to the modern inquirer. The two nations that grew to abhor it and to protest against it were the Hebrew and the Greek, though the latter did not wholly escape the taint of it; for he had inherited the practice from his ancestral past, and he found it indigenous in the lands he conquered. Repellent as the rite may be, it much concerns the study of the religions of the cultured races.

Now, an interesting theory concerning sacrifice has been expounded and brought into prominent discussion by Professor Robertson Smith in his 'Religion of the Semites,' and in a paper in the 'Encyclopædia Britannica'—namely, that a certain type of ancient sacrifice was a mystic sacramental communion, the worshipper partaking of some sacred food or drink in which the spirit of the deity was temporarily lodged. This mystic act, of which there is no clear trace in the Old Testament, is reported from Egypt,* somewhat less clearly from Babylonia,† and it appears to have been part of the Attis ritual of Phrygia. We find doubtful traces of it in the Eleusinian and Samothracian mysteries; also a glimpse of it here and there in the public religion of Hellas. But it is best attested as a potent force in the Dionysiac worship, especially in a certain savage ritual that we may call Thracian, but also in the refined and Hellenized service as well.

I cannot dwell here on the various aspects of this problem. The Hellenic statistics and their significance

* Transactions of Congress of History of Religions, 1908, vol. i., p. 193.

† *Ibid.*, p. 254.

I have partly collected and estimated in a paper published some years ago. The application of the sacramental idea to the explanation of the Eleusinian mysteries, ingeniously attempted by Dr. Jevons, I have discussed in the third volume of my "Cults"; and the Dionysiac communion-service is considered at length in my forthcoming volume.

The attractiveness of the mystic appeal of the Sacrament appears to have increased in the later days of paganism, especially in its period of struggle with Christianity. That strangest rite of the expiring polytheism, the *ταυροβόλιον*, or the baptism in bull's blood, in the worship of Kybele, has been successfully traced back by M. Cumont to the worship of the Babylonian Anaitis. The sacramental concept was the stronghold of Mithraism, but can hardly be regarded as part of its heritage from Persia, for it does not seem to have been familiar to the Iranian religion nor to the Vedic Indian. In fact, the religious history of no other Aryan race discloses it with clearness, save that of the Thraco-Phrygian and Hellenic. Was it, then, a special product of ancient 'Mediterranean' religious thought? It would be important to know, and Crete may one day be able to tell us whether King Minos took the Sacrament. Meantime, I would urge upon those who are studying this phenomenon in the various religions the necessity of precise definition, so as to distinguish the different grades of the sacramental concept, for loose statements are somewhat rife about it.

Apart from the ritual of the altar, there is another mode of attaining mystic union with the divinity—namely, by means of a sacred marriage or simulated corporeal union.

This is suggested by the initiation formulæ of the mysteries of Attis-Kybele. The cult of Kybele had descended from the Minoan period of Crete, and the strange legend of Pasiphae and the bull-god lends itself naturally to this interpretation. The Hellenic religion also presents us with a few examples of the holy marriage of the human bride with the god, the most notable being the annual ceremony of the union of the 'Queen,' the wife of the King Archon, at Athens, with Dionysos. And in the mysteries of later paganism, as well as in certain forms and symbolism of early Christianity, Professor Dieterich has traced the surviving influence of this rite.

Among all the phenomena of ritual, none are more interesting or in their effects more momentous than the rites that are associated with the dogma of the death of the divinity. That the high gods are naturally mortal and liable to death is an idea that is certainly rare, though it may be found in Egyptian and old Teutonic mythology; but the dogma of the annual or periodic death and resurrection of the divinity has been, and is, enacted in much peasant ritual, and worked for the purposes of agrarian magic in Europe and elsewhere. More rarely we find the belief attached to the mystic forms and faith of some advanced religion, and it is specially in the Mediterranean area where it appears in a high stage of development. It is a salient feature of the Egyptian worship of Isis; of the Sumerian-Babylonian ritual, in which the dead Thammuz was bewailed, and which penetrated Syria and other parts of Asia Minor; of the worship of Attis and Adonis in Phrygia and the Lebanon; and of certain shrines of the Oriental Aphrodite. It is associated often with orgiastic sorrow and ecstatic joy, and with the belief in human immortality,

of which the resurrection of the deity is the symbol and the efficacious means. This idea and this ritual appears to have been alien to the native Hellenic religion. The Hellenic gods and goddesses do not die and rise again.

Only in one Aryan nation of antiquity, so far as I am aware, was the idea clear and operative—the Thraco-Phrygian, in the religion of Dionysos-Sabazios. This alien cult, when transplanted into Greece, retained still some savagery in the rite that enacted the death of the god ; but in the Orphic sects the ritual idea was developed into a doctrine of posthumous salvation, from which the later pre-Christian world drew spiritual comfort and some fertile moral conceptions. This Thracian-Dionysiac influence in Hellas, though chastened and sobered by the sanity of the national temperament, initiated the Hellene into a certain spiritual mood that was not naturally evoked by the native religion ; for it brought into his polytheism a higher measure of enthusiasm, a more ecstatic spirit of self-abandonment, than it possessed by its own traditional bent. Many civilized religions appear to have passed beyond the phase of orgiastic fervour. It emerges in the old Egyptian ritual, and most powerfully in the religion of Phrygia and of certain districts of Syria ; but it seems to have been alien to the higher Semitic and the Iranian religions, as it was to the native Hellenic.

I have only been able to-day, without argument or detailed exposition, to present a short summary of the more striking phenomena in the religious systems of our spiritual ancestors. Many of the problems I have stated still invite further research, which may considerably modify our theories. I claim that the subject possesses a masterful interest both in its own right and for the

light it sheds on ancient philosophy, ancient art, and ancient institutions. And it ought in the future to attract more and more the devotion of some of our post-graduate students. Much remains to be done even for the Hellenic and Roman religions, still more for those of Egypt and Assyria. Here, in our University of Oxford, under whose auspices the Sacred Books were translated, and where the equipment for the study is at least equal to that of any other centre of learning, this appeal ought not to be made in vain.

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