

in the chief temple of Persia<sup>1</sup>—a course strongly suggestive of religious symbolism. Such a proceeding in fact would have been impossible in a temple without religious precedent; and in the sacrificial practices of the pre-Christian Mexicans, which we find so many reasons for tracing back to an ancient Asiatic centre,<sup>2</sup> we find clear duplicates of both details of the quasi-sacrifice of Valerian, together with the messenger-sacrifices of the Khonds and Getæ. On the one hand it is recorded that the Mexican “knights of the sun” on a certain day sacrificed to the Sun a human victim whom they “smeared all over with some red substance.....They sent him to the Sun with the message.....that his Knights remained at his service, and gave him infinite thanks for the great.....favours bestowed on them in the wars.”<sup>3</sup> So, again, in the sacrifice to Xiuhtecuhtli the Fire-God in the tenth month the victims were painted red.<sup>4</sup> On the other hand, in a great annual festival held on the last day of the first month, in which a hundred slaves were sacrificed, some were flayed, and their skins were worn in a religious dance by leading devotees, among them being the king. Finally the bodies were sacramentally eaten, and the skins, “filled with cotton-wool, or straw,” were “hung in the temple and king’s palace for a memorial.”<sup>5</sup> The stuffed skin of the victim, then, was sacrosanct,<sup>6</sup> and that which had been worn by the king was doubtless specially so, representing as it did at once the deified victim and the monarch.

<sup>1</sup> Gibbon, ch. 10. Bohn ed. i, 340-1; Pseudo-Lactantius, *De mortibus persecutorum*, c. 5.

<sup>2</sup> See below, Part IV, § 1.

<sup>3</sup> Duran, *Historia de las Indias de Nueva España*, cited in Spencer’s *Descriptive Sociology*, ii, 21, col. 1.

<sup>4</sup> Clavigero, *Hist. of Mexico*, Eng. tr. 2nd ed. B. vi, c. 34 (i, 306-7).

<sup>5</sup> Gomara, *La Historia General de las Indias*, ed. in *Historiadores primitivos de Indias*, i (1852), 444, col. 2; Eng. tr. ed. 1596, pp. 393-4. Cp. Bancroft, *Native Races of the Pacific States*, iii, 359 (following Sahagun, *Hist. Gen.* t. i, l. 2) for another rite of hanging up a victim’s skin in the form of a cross, where stuffing seems to be implied.

<sup>6</sup> In Mexico all the skins taken from victims seem to have been so in some degree. The second month was specially named from the “skinning of men,” and in the third the skins which had been taken were carried to a smaller temple within the enclosure of the greater, and there solemnly deposited in a cave. Clavigero, as cited, p. 298.



When the king took a captive in war with his own hands, the latter was specially regarded as the representative of the sun, and was clothed with the Sun-God's royal insignia.<sup>1</sup> As for the red-painting of the messenger sent to the Sun, that in turn was presumably a special symbolical identification of the victim with the God;<sup>2</sup> and the final inference is that the dead or slain body of the captive emperor Valerian was made to figure as a sacrificial special Messenger sent by the Persian king to the (messenger) Sun-God, and dedicated to that deity.

That the legendary "crucifixion" of "Manichæus" was a myth derived from such a sacrifice is the more probable in view of the evolution of the Christian mystery-drama from an analogous rite.<sup>3</sup> Clemens Alexandrinus, following another authority than Herodotus, tells how "a barbarous nation, not cumbered with philosophy, select, it is said, *annually* an ambassador to the hero Zamolxis,"<sup>4</sup> choosing one held to be *of special virtue*. The usage would thus seem to have made headway after the time of Herodotus. Clemens,<sup>5</sup> too, identifies with Zoroaster that Er son of Armenius who in Plato figures as "the messenger from the other world,"<sup>6</sup> having gone thither in a death-swoon; a suggestion that at least the Persians now connected the doctrine of immortality with some conception or usage resembling that of the Getæ; and Zoroaster, in turn, was mythically associated with a cave containing flowers and fountains, the whole symbolical of the world, and further associated with resurrection in the mysteries.<sup>7</sup> Finally, the Manichæans' annual celebration of the *Bema*, their name for the rite commemorative of the death of Manichæus, carries with it no explanation; and must be taken as the title of some Græco-Oriental mystery-ritual. The word signifies "platform," referring not to the ordinary *Bema* of the Christian churches, wherein stood the altar, but to

<sup>1</sup> J. G. Müller, *Amerik. Urrelig.* p. 635.

<sup>2</sup> See above, pp. 109, 112, as to the practice of the Khonds.

<sup>3</sup> Above, Part II, ch. i.

<sup>4</sup> *Stromata*, iv, 8.

<sup>5</sup> *Stromata*, v, 14.

<sup>6</sup> *Republic*, x, p. 619.

<sup>7</sup> Porphyry, *De antro nypharum*, c. 6. See below, Part III, § 7.



the covered platform of five steps prepared by the Manichæan devotees on the anniversary of the Founder's death;<sup>1</sup> but it is not accounted for by any item in the legendary biography, where no such platform is mentioned.

Upon the platform described by Augustine something must have been represented or enacted; and as he appears never to have been one of the *electi*, but only an *auditor* or catechumen, he would be, as the Manichæans declared, unacquainted with the special mysteries of the system.<sup>2</sup> The "five steps" point to a symbol of the proto-Chaldean high-place or temple-pyramid and altar of sacrifice, often of five stages;<sup>3</sup> and the mystery was in all likelihood akin to the early mystery-drama of the Christian crucifixion. The apparent identification of the birthday of Manichæus, in the late Mohammedan account, with the death-day in the known cultus;<sup>4</sup> and further the symbolism of his public appearance "with two others," suggest a mystic scene analogous to the triple crucifixion.

The critical presumption, then, is that the flayed and stuffed Manichæus is one more figure Evemerised out of a rite of annual sacrifice; and that the Manichæan cult is no more the creation of a man named Manes than is the Buddhist the creation of one Buddha, or the Christian of one Jesus called the Christ. It is a syncretism on the lines of those other cults, borrowing ideas from at least three theosophic sources; combining a nominal Christism with a modified Mithraism;<sup>5</sup> and assimilating both, in the doctrine that "Jesus hangs on every tree," to the esoteric side of the cult of Dionysos.<sup>6</sup> The works ascribed to Mani, so far as known, have every mark of being late concoctions, on Gnostic lines, framed for purposes of proselytism in the

<sup>1</sup> Augustine, as before cited.

<sup>2</sup> Beausobre, i, 227-8; Neander, ii, 193; Augustine, *Contra Fortunatum*, lib. i, app.

<sup>3</sup> Compare the modified "high-place and altar" at Petra, reproduced by Dr. Curtiss, *Primitive Semitic Religion To-day*, 1902, p. 236; and see below, Part IV, § 1, as to the Mexican analogue.

<sup>4</sup> The same coincidence occurs in the legendary life of Moses, his birthday and death-day falling alike on 7th Adar. Hamburger, *Real-Encyc. für Bibel und Talmud*, Suppl. Bd. ii to Abth. i and ii, s.v. *Adar*.

<sup>5</sup> Below, Part III, § 12.

<sup>6</sup> Augustine, *Contra Faustum*, xx, 1, 11.



Christian sphere, each purporting to be written by "Manichæus, an apostle of Jesus Christ"<sup>1</sup> in the manner of the Christian epistles. The "Epistle to the Virgin Menoch," of which fragments are preserved by Augustine in the *Opus Imperfectum*, suggests anew the special signification of the title Manichæus. As for the *Erteng* or *Erzeng*, specially associated in Persia with the name of Mani, the title, it appears, simply means an illustrated book,<sup>2</sup> and such a book is no more to be supposed primordial in the cult than the epistles.

The success of the cult, in fine, was attained very much as was that of Christism. Its promoters, early recognising the vital importance of organisation, created a system of twelve chief apostles or *magistri*, with a leader, representing the Founder, and seventy-two bishops,<sup>3</sup> here copying actual Judaism rather than Christian tradition;<sup>4</sup> and despite its discouragement of marriage and procreation, it survived centuries of murderous persecution in the eastern empire; finally passing on to the west, through the later sects affected by its tradition, the germs of a new heresy in the Middle Ages. Like the crucified Christ, as we have seen reason to think, its Founder never was; and so it outlasted the tough sects of Marcion and Montanus, of which the latter was "all but victorious" against orthodoxy. Montanus claimed to be inspired by the Paraclete; and his movement, being organised on ecclesiastical lines, went far, beginning in Phrygia, where, as in Persia, the doctrine of a Paraclete was probably pre-Christian.<sup>5</sup> But Montanism did not found on an actually established cultus, as did Manichæism; and the movement founded by a real man was finally less tenacious than that which founded on a myth, and on a syncretic rather than a sectarian doctrine. Such is, in fact, the historic rule.

<sup>1</sup> *Id.* xiii, 4.

<sup>2</sup> Beausobre, i, 190, and *note*.

<sup>3</sup> Augustine, *De Haeres.* c. 32.

<sup>4</sup> Cp. *Christianity and Mythology*, pp. 370-7.

<sup>5</sup> "The Paraclete was at this time (Mani's) expected by the Persians as well as by the Christians" (Spiegel, *Avesta*, Einleit. p. 30).



§ 16.—*The Case of Apollonius of Tyana.*

As regards the historical argument it may be well, finally, to anticipate an objection which may be grounded on the admission that Apollonius of Tyana, who has been plausibly described as a Pagan Christ,<sup>1</sup> was really a historic personage, though his life is clothed upon with myth from birth to death. Here, it may be argued, was a real man, who had lived in the first century of the Christian era, represented in the third as born under supernatural circumstances, working miracles, making disciples and converts by his teaching in Europe and Asia, and finally ascending to heaven. If these prodigies could be told of an actual man, it may be asked, why may not Jesus be actual, of whom similar prodigies are told?

The answer is, as aforesaid, that the ascription of prodigies to any ancient personage is not in itself a disproof of his historicity; but that the historical evidence in each case is to be taken on its total merits. It is at bottom the same mythopœic bias that rings with myth the mere name of a phantom God or Demi-God and the slightly known life of a remarkable man; and the task of criticism is to distinguish cases by impartial tests. We hold Charlemagne and Theodoric and Virgil for historical, despite the myths connected with them in the Middle Ages. The case of Apollonius belongs broadly to the same class, as perhaps does that of Solomon.

It is needless here to remark that the abundant attribution of miracles to Apollonius soon after his own day proves the valuelessness of miracle stories as certificates of divinity: these pages are written for students who have put aside the belief in miracles; and when Christian Fathers are found, in the case of Apollonius, attributing to demons the pagan prodigies which they do not deny to have occurred, we have merely to note how absolute was

<sup>1</sup> A. Réville, *Apollonius of Tyana, the Pagan Christ of the Third Century*, Eng. tr. 1866.



the credulity of the time in regard to any story of happenings. They, it is clear, never thought of testing as to whether Apollonius was a real person: they took it for granted that the name of a person said to have existed stood for a real person. Are we, then, entitled to follow their example? The answer is that in the case of Apollonius we have no reason for suspecting invention,<sup>1</sup> save as regards the details of the biography recast for us by Philostratus in the third century. There even the "credible" data are uncertain. But it is likely enough that he was, as there represented, a devout Pythagorean, a vegetarian, an ascetic, a student of medicine and astrology, a universalist in his creed, and a believer in immortality. And he may conceivably have travelled to India, though the details offered us are naught.

As usual, indeed, there lacks contemporary testimony, apart from that preserved in Philostratus. The Life makes Apollonius die about the reign of Nerva (96-98, C.E.); and our first incidental traces of his fame are in Dion Cassius,<sup>2</sup> where he is mentioned as a miraculous seer, and in Origen's reply to Celsus, where one Moiragenes (mentioned by Philostratus) is cited as referring to the accounts of magical feats in the memoirs of Apollonius, and observing that some philosophers of note had been convinced by them. These references belong to the very period of the production of the Life by Philostratus, so that there is no trace of any impression previously made by the memoirs of Damis and Maximus of Ægæ, declared to be used by him. Still, we have no reason for doubting that there was an Apollonius of Tyana, who made an impression in his own day as a wandering teacher, and perhaps as a sorcerer, and whose memory was preserved by statues in several towns, as well as by one or two memoirs, one of them written by his credulous or mendacious disciple, Damis.

The reasons for not doubting are (1) that there was no cause to be served by a sheer fabrication; and (2) that it

<sup>1</sup> Cp. Jean Réville, *La Religion à Rome sous les Sévères*, pp. 212-213.

<sup>2</sup> *Hist. Rom.* lvii, *ad fin.*

<sup>3</sup> *Contra Celsum*, vi, 41.



was a much easier matter to take a known name as a nucleus for a mass of marvels and theosophic teachings than to build it up, as the phrase goes about the cannon, "round a hole." The difference between such a case and those of Jesuism and Buddhism is obvious. In those cases, there was a cultus and an organisation to be accounted for, and a biography of the Founder had to be forthcoming. In the case of Apollonius, despite the string of marvels attached to his name, there was no cultus. Posterity was interested in him as it was in Pythagoras or Plato; and Philostratus undertook the recasting of the Life in literary form at the command of the empress Julia Domna, a great eclectic. Even if, as has been so often argued, from Huet and Cudworth to Baur and A. Réville,<sup>1</sup> there was an original intention to set-off Apollonius against Jesus, we should not have ground to doubt that a teaching Apollonius had flourished in the first century: rather the presumption would be that the pagans would seek for some famous wonderworker whose life they could manipulate.

But there is really no reason to suppose that Philostratus, much less Damis, had the gospels before him, though he may well have heard of their story. A close comparison of the story of the raising of Jairus' daughter with the story in Philostratus, to which it is so closely parallel, gives rather reason to believe that the gospels copied the pagan narrative, the gospel story being left unmentioned by Arnobius and Lactantius in lists in which they ought to have given it had they known and accepted it.<sup>2</sup> The story, however, was probably told of other thaumaturgs before Apollonius; and in regard to the series of often strained parallels drawn by Baur, as by Huet, it may confidently be said that, instead of their exhibiting any calculated attempt to outdo or cap the gospel narratives, they stand for the general taste of the time in thaumaturgy. Apollonius, like

<sup>1</sup> Cudworth, *Intellectual System*, Harrison's ed. i, 437; Huet, *Demonstratio Evangelica*, Prop. ix. c. 147, § 3; Baur, *Apollonius von Tyana und Christus*, 1832, rep. in *Drei Abhandlungen zur Geschichte der alten Philosophie und ihres Verhältnisses zum Christenthum*, 1876; A. Réville, *Apollonius of Tyana*, Eng. tr. pp. 57-69.

<sup>2</sup> Cp. *Christianity and Mythology*, pp. 361-2.



Jesus, casts out devils and heals the sick ; and if the Life were a parody of the Gospel we should expect him to give sight to the blind. This, however, is not the case ; and on the other hand the gospel story of the healing of two blind men is certainly a duplicate of a pagan record.<sup>1</sup>

To say, as does Baur, that the casting-out of devils in the Apollonian legend is necessarily an echo of the gospels, on the score that the Greek and Roman literatures at that time show no traces of the idea,<sup>2</sup> is to make the arbitrary assumption that the superstitions of Syria could enter the West only by Judaic or Christian channels. The "Metamorphoses" of Apuleius, to say nothing of those of Ovid, might serve to remind us that the empire imbibed the *diablerie* of the East at every pore ; and the wizardry of Apollonius includes many eastern items of which the gospels show no trace. As for the annunciation of the birth of Apollonius by Proteus, and the manner of its happening, they conform alike to Egyptian myths and to that told concerning the birth of Plato.<sup>3</sup> It is, in fact, the Christian myth that draws upon the common store of Greek and Syrian myth, not the Apollonian legend that borrows from the Christian. The descent of Apollonius to Hades, again, seems to have been alleged, after common Græco-Asiatic precedent, before the same myth became part of the Christian dogmatic code ; and to say that his final disappearance without dying and his apparition afterwards must have been motived by the story of Christ's appearing to Saul<sup>4</sup> is once more to ignore the whole lesson of comparative hierology. Baur goes so far as to argue<sup>5</sup> that when Philostratus says the disciples of Apollonius in Greece were called Apollonians, he must be merely framing a parallel to the title of the Christians, because there is now no knowledge of a sect of Apollonians. It was very hard, two generations ago, for even a great scholar to

<sup>1</sup> *Id.* p. 359.

<sup>2</sup> *Drei Abhandlungen*, p. 139. A. Réville (work cited, pp. 61-2) implicitly follows Baur. J. Réville (*La religion à Rome*, pp. 230-4) discusses and dismisses the parody theory.

<sup>3</sup> *Christianity and Mythology*, pp. 318, 328-9.

<sup>4</sup> Baur, as cited, p. 148.

<sup>5</sup> *Id.* p. 148, note.



realise the broadest laws of religious evolution. Yet Lardner had shown with reasonable force, in his primitive fashion, nearly a century before, that the model before Philostratus, if there be any, is not Jesus but Pythagoras;<sup>1</sup> and his friend De la Roche had rightly and tersely summed up the whole case in the words: "Philostratus said nothing more in the Life of Apollonius than he would have said if there had been no Christians in the world."<sup>2</sup> For once, Baur had not fully grappled with the literature of his subject.<sup>3</sup> His superiority to his Christian predecessors as a critic of Apollonius comes out chiefly in his gravely candid recognition<sup>4</sup> of the high moral purpose set forth in all the discourses ascribed to him in the Life.

The habit of pitting Apollonius against Jesus really arose about a century after Philostratus, when the pagan intelligence first began to feel itself menaced by the new creed. Hierocles set the fashion in his *Philalethes Logos*, to which Eusebius and Lactantius<sup>5</sup> replied in the normal patristic manner. A hundred years later still, in the time of Augustine, the setting of the miracles of Apollonius and Apuleius against those of Jesus was a common line of pagan argument,<sup>6</sup> met as usual, neither side convincing the other. If there was any gain, it was on the pagan side; for while Chrysostom<sup>7</sup> triumphs over the failure of the Apollonian movement, such a classically cultured Christian bishop as Sidonius Apollinaris<sup>8</sup> acclaims the personal virtues and philosophic teaching of the pagan sage. The pagans on their part had taken him up all round. In the

<sup>1</sup> *Works*, ed. 1835, vi. 489 sq.

<sup>2</sup> Cited by Lardner. Cp. also his citation from De la Roche's *New Memoirs of Literature* (1725), i, 99. In an Appendix to his 39th chapter (*Works*, vii, 508), Lardner cites a passage from Bishop Parker, published in 1681, rejecting Huet's thesis that Philostratus had copied the gospels.

<sup>3</sup> Zeller notes in his ed. of the *Drei Abhandlungen* (p. 201, note) that Baur is wrong in his statement that Porphyry and Jamblichus never mention Apollonius. Lardner had cited their references. Dr. A. Réville follows Baur (p. 80).

<sup>4</sup> *Drei Abhandlungen*, p. 45, sq.

<sup>5</sup> Eusebius, *Contra Hieroclem*; Lactantius, *Div. Inst.* v, 2, 3.

<sup>6</sup> Marcellinus, in *Ep. Augustin.* 136 (Migne, *Patrol. Cursus Compl.* T. 33).

<sup>7</sup> *Adv. Judæos*, Orat. v, 3.

<sup>8</sup> *Epist.* l. viii, c. 3. The bishop writes of him to a correspondent as *noster Tyaneus*.



day of Philostratus, Alexander Severus had eclectically placed a bust of Apollonius, with others of Abraham, Jesus, and Orpheus, in his private chapel or oratory;<sup>1</sup> and later we find Eunapius,<sup>2</sup> Ammianus Marcellinus,<sup>3</sup> Vopiscus,<sup>4</sup> and Apuleius,<sup>5</sup> from their different standpoints treating the Tyanean as a demigod, or divinely inspired, or a supreme Mage.

It was not, of course, the high ethic and philosophy of the Apollonian discourses that they stressed as against the Christians. Such a saying as "I have found my reward in the amendment of men"<sup>6</sup> was not a word to conjure with in popular debate. It was the miracles, the prodigies, the fables, that were for them the warrant of the sage's greatness. To-day we cannot tell any more than they to what extent the remarkable discourses which Philostratus professes to copy from Damis stand for any genuine utterances or writings of Apollonius:<sup>7</sup> we can be satisfied of the historicity of the man without knowing how far to trust the accounts of his travels and teaching. But we know that if Apollonius had uttered every wise or eloquent teaching put in his mouth by his biographers he could not thereby have founded such a cult as the Christians conducted on the basis of an entirely fictitious biography.

Lactantius, in the patristic style, asks Hierocles: "Why therefore, O mad head, doth none worship Apollonius for a God, unless perchance thou alone, worthy indeed of that God, with whom the true God will punish thee to all eternity?"<sup>8</sup> We to-day can give the answer of hierology. No man was ever perdurably deified for his wisdom, or even for his supposed miracles: religions grow up around rites offered immemorially to unknown powers, or round ways of life set up by generations of nameless teachers, all

<sup>1</sup> Lampridius, *Vit. Alex. Sev.* xxix.

<sup>2</sup> Proœmium in *Vit. Sophistarum.*

<sup>4</sup> *Vit. Aureliani*, xxiv.

<sup>6</sup> Philostratus, *Vit. Apollon.* viii, 7, 7.

<sup>7</sup> Philostratus (viii, 6), in introducing the Apology before Domitian, remarks that it has been criticised for lack of elegance and sublimity of style; but this is no security for its genuineness.

<sup>8</sup> *Div. Inst.*, v, 3.

<sup>3</sup> L. xxi, c. 14, *ad init.*

<sup>5</sup> *Apologia*, *ad fin.*



of which abstractions alike take form as named Gods or Sons of Gods, who in one age are the givers of civilisation, agriculture, knowledge, crafts, arts, rites, and laws, and in another of oracles, of revelations, of doctrines and discourses, of their own lives as redeemers. But the really slain man, the true human sacrifice, though he be counted by millions, is not deified: not he, but an abstraction shaped out of the mystic drama and sacrament which have followed on ages of sacrifices and sacraments of human flesh; and neither is the true teacher or thinker deified: not he, but a superposed abstraction distilled from many teachings, wise or unwise, put by many generations in the mouth of the first. For it is by such modes alone that men have been able to create the economic bases without which no religion can live. Apollonius, credited with many miracles and wondrous wisdom, like Pythagoras long before him, could become a God only by way of a passing figure of speech, precisely because he had really lived and taught.

Given the culture-stage in which many crave the Teaching God, while the multitude still crave the Sacrificed God, a cult which shall combine these in one Deity, still retaining the cosmic Creator God and adding the attractive appeal of the Mother Goddess, has obviously a maximum chance of survival. And such a religion, we have seen reason to conclude, cannot be founded on concrete personages: it must be developed from personalised abstractions. Such a combination is presented in the Christian cultus. But all such success is finally in terms of political and economic adaptations; and the final explanation of non-survivals, accordingly, is to be found in the lack or frustration of such adaptations. It remains to note, then, how systems historically developed from abstractions like the Christian have disappeared in the struggle for existence.



## PART III.

### MITHRAISM

#### § 1.—*Introductory.*

IN the current edition of the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, supervised by so eminent a scholar and hierologist as the late Professor Robertson Smith, who wrote in it some hundreds of pages on certain books of the Hebrew Bible, there is devoted to the subject of the ancient Persian deity Mithra or Mithras, and his cultus, one column. If we are to master the sociological side of the problem of Christian origins we must bring to it a better-developed sense of proportion, and a much more awakened historical sense, than are concerned in this allotment of study and space.

A little inquiry serves to discover that this ancient cult, of which so little is known in our own time, was during some centuries of the Roman empire the most widespread of the religious systems which that empire embraced; that is to say, Mithraism was in point of range the most nearly universal religion of the western world in the early centuries of the Christian era. As to this, students are agreed.<sup>1</sup> To the early Fathers, we shall see, Mithraism

<sup>1</sup> Cp. Tiele, *Outlines of the History of the Ancient Religions*, Eng. tr. p. 170; Gaston Boissier, *La Religion Romaine d'Auguste aux Antonins*, i, 395, ii, 417; H. Seel, *Die Mithrageheimnisse*, Aarau, 1823, p. 214; Sainte-Croix, *Recherches sur les Mystères du Paganisme*, 2e. édit. ii, 123; Smith and Cheetham's *Dict. of Christ. Antiq.*, art. PAGANISM; Beugnot, *Hist. de la Destruction du Paganisme*, 1835, i, 156-8, 336, ii, 225; Windischmann, *Mithra, ein Beitrag zur Mythengeschichte des Orients*, in *Abhandlungen für die Kunde des Morgenlands*, Bd. i, p. 62; E. Meyer, *Geschichte des Alterthums*, 1884, i, 541; Ozanam, *History of Civilisation in the Fifth Century*, Eng. tr. i, 77; Creuzer, *Das Mithræum von Neuenheim bei Heidelberg*, 1838, pp. 10, 19; Lajard, *Recherches sur le culte public et les Mystères de Mithra*, 1867, p. 672; Roscher, *Ausführliches Lexikon der Griechischen und römischen Mythologie*, col. 3067, ll. 20-30; Prof. Cumont, *Textes et monuments figurés relatifs aux mystères de Mithra*, 1894-6, passim (partly translated in *Open*



was a most serious thorn in the flesh; and the monumental remains of the Roman period, in almost all parts of the empire, show its extraordinary extension. In our own country, held by the Romans for three hundred years at a time when Christianity is supposed to have penetrated the whole imperial world, there have been found no signs whatever of any Roman profession of the Christian faith; while there are a number of monuments in honour of Mithra.<sup>1</sup> There has been found, for instance, a Mithraic cave at Housesteads, in Northumberland, containing sculptures of Mithra-worship, and an inscription: "To the God, best and greatest, invincible Mithra, Lord of Ages";<sup>2</sup> and another at Kichester, with an inscription: "To the God the Sun, the invincible Mithra, the Lord of Ages." Other monuments have been found at Chester, on the line of the Roman wall, at Cambeck-fort in Cumberland, at Oxford, and at York.<sup>3</sup> And "Mithraic bas-reliefs, cut upon the smoothed faces of rocks, or upon tablets of stone, still abound throughout the former western provinces of the Roman Empire; many exist in Germany; still more in France."<sup>4</sup> According to Mr. King, again, "the famous 'Arthur's Oon' (destroyed in the eighteenth century) upon the Carron, a hemispherical vaulted building of immense blocks of stone, was unmistakeably a *Specus Mithræum*, the same in design as Chosroes' magnificent fire-temple at Gazaca." But in

*Court*, May, June, and July, 1902, where see pp. 303, 305, 306, 310, 340, 347, etc.); Quinet, *Génie des Religions*, l. iv, sec. 1; Renan, *Marc Aurèle*, éd. 1882, pp. 576-581; Jean Réville, *La religion à Rome sous les Sévères*, 1886, pp. 78, 84-5, 102; Hertzberg, *Geschichte Griechenlands unter der Herrschaft der Römer*, 1866, 3te Th. pp. 120-1; Gardner, *Exploratio Evangelica*, 1899, p. 333; Hausrath, *Hist. of the N. T. Times: Time of the Apostles*, Eng. tr. 1895, i, 96-7.

<sup>1</sup> Wright, *The Celt, The Roman, and the Saxon*, 4th ed. pp. 327, 353.

<sup>2</sup> There are a shrine and two altars. The second altar has on its frieze the simple word DEO, the whole inscription running: "To the Sun-God, Mithra, unconquered, eternal." The first was erected in the year 252. See the Newcastle Society of Antiquarians' Guide to the Black Gate, etc., pp. 11-12.

<sup>3</sup> Wright, as cited, p. 327; Wellbeloved, *Eburacum*, 1842, pp. 75, 84; Stukeley, *Palæographica Britannica*, No. 3, London, 1752. See also the inscriptions to Sol and Mithra in Hübner, *Inscr. Brit. Lat.*

<sup>4</sup> C. W. King, *The Gnostics and their Remains*, 2nd ed. p. 136. Cp. Prof. Cumont, *Textes et Monuments*, passim. Prof. Cumont ascribes the largest share of Mithraic monuments to Germany, noting that they are rare in central and western France.



other lands the remains of Mithraic shrines are far more numerous: they abound in the Alps, in Southern France, in Eastern Italy, in Dalmatia, in Dacia, in many Mediterranean ports; and though their distribution is unequal they signify that the cult went wherever went the legions and the Syrian traders who followed them.

And yet, with all this testimony to the vogue of Mithraism in the early Christian centuries, there ensues for a whole era an absolute blank in the knowledge of the matter in Christendom—a thousand years in which the ancient cultus seems a forgotten name in Europe. One modern investigator, M. Lajard,<sup>1</sup> thinks that since the time of the Fathers the first in European literature to mention Mithra was Pietro Riccio (Petrus Crinitus),<sup>2</sup> born about 1465, a disciple of Politian; and no other mention occurs till about the middle of the sixteenth century.<sup>3</sup> And such was the ignorance of most scholars, that of three now well-known Mithraic monuments discovered about that period, not one is attributed to Mithra either by the great antiquarian of the time, Rossi, or by his pupil, Flaminus Vacca. Every one knows the sculptured group of Mithra slaying the bull, so often engraved, of which we have a good example in the British Museum. Rossi declared one of these monuments to represent Jupiter, as the bull, carrying off Europa; and Vacca tells how a lion-headed image, now known to represent Kronos-Zervan or the Time-Spirit in the mysteries of Mithra, but then held to represent the devil, was (probably) burned in a limekiln.<sup>4</sup> A century later, Leibnitz demonstrated that Ormazd and Ahriman, the Good and Evil Powers of the Persian system to which Mithra belonged, were simply deified heroes; and later still the historian Mosheim, a man not devoid of judgment, elaborately proved that Mithra had simply been at one time, like Nimrod, a famous hunter,<sup>5</sup> before the Lord or otherwise. Other

<sup>1</sup> *Introduction à l'étude du culte de Mithra*, 1846, pp. 2-3.

<sup>2</sup> *De Honesta Disciplina*, v. 14, cited by Lajard.

<sup>3</sup> By Smet and Pighi.

<sup>4</sup> Cp. Cumont, *Textes et Monuments*, ii., 196; King, pp. 129-130.

<sup>5</sup> Mosheim's notes on Cudworth, *Intellectual System*, Harrison's ed. i. 475-



eighteenth-century scholars discussed the problem more intelligently;<sup>1</sup> but even in our own day, when all the extant notices and monuments of Mithra have been carefully collected and studied, vigilant scholars<sup>2</sup> confess that we know very little as to the Mithraic religion. It is somewhat remarkable that this should be so; and though in the terms of the case we cannot look to find much direct knowledge, we may hope at least to find out *why* the once popular cultus has fallen into such obscurity. To that end we must see what really is known about it.

### § 2.—*Beginnings of Cult.*

To trace completely the history of the cultus, however, we should have to make an examination not merely of Mithraism proper, but of at least three older systems. No historical principle is better established than this, that all historic religions run into and derive from some other religions, the creeds of all mankind being simply phases of a continuous evolution. So, when we say that Mithraism derives from Persia, we are already implying that it affiliates more distantly to the religions of India and Assyria. Here it must suffice, therefore, to give only the briefest sketch of origins.

We trace the cult specifically in the earliest Aryan documents—in the Vedas, in which the deity Mitra or Mithra is one of the prominent figures.<sup>3</sup> Seeing that there already he duplicates with other deities, it may be that, to begin with, the name was only a special epithet of the sun, the central force in myth as in our planetary system; and that it lay with the priests and their royal patrons to

<sup>1</sup> See a list in Fabricius, *Bibliographia Antiquaria*, ed. 3a, 1760, p. 332; and cp. M. J. C. Wolf, *Manichæismus ante Manichæos*, 1707, pp. 62–7.

<sup>2</sup> Havet, *Le Christianisme et ses Origines*, iii. 402; Cumont, *Textes et Monuments*, as cited, i. 5–7; J. Réville, *La Religion à Rome sous les Sévères*, p. 88.

<sup>3</sup> "Mitra is greater than the earth and the sky: he supports even all the Gods" (*Rig Veda*, iii. 59, 7–8; cited by Max Müller, *Hibbert Lectures on Religion in India*, 2nd ed. p. 275). Two of his doubles, Pushan and Savitri, are all-seeing, and leaders of souls to the abode of the blest (*Id.*). Mitra is further the eldest of the eight sons of Aditi (Muir, *Sanskrit Texts*, iv. 14.).



determine which Name should be the most popular God, since the whole evolution was one of words. In any case, it is in Aryan Persia that the name of Mithra makes its fortune: in India it passes into the background of the verbal host.

In the Rig-Veda it is frequently associated with Varuna<sup>1</sup> and Agni; and in the Atharva-Veda Mitra is so defined as to make his solar character certain. Of a deity who stands in general for the principle of light, it is there said that "In the evening he becomes Varuna Agni; in the morning he becomes Mitra going forth,"<sup>2</sup> an expression which plainly points to the Sun-God. That Mithra was not developed into a pre-eminent Vedic deity is to be proximately explained by the fact that Agni, who as fire-God and light-God had similar attributes, was better suited to the purposes of the highly-specialised priesthood which built up the Vedas. The God of the sacrificial fire was eminently adapted to sacerdotal ends; and it is in that aspect that Agni is oftenest presented. It may have been, indeed, that the Aryan invaders of India had thus early assimilated in the case of Agni a popular pre-Aryan (though not Hindu) worship,<sup>3</sup> as they did later with the Hindu cult of Krishna; while in Persia the Aryan Gods may have had a simpler course of development. However that may be, though we find the sacramental Vedic beverage the Soma preserved in the Persian cult as the Haoma, that principle does not predominate; and Mithra, in the character of Sun-God and War-God, grew in popular importance. Of Agni, as a special personification of the sacred fire, there is in the Persian system no other trace.

The Iranian documents which present to us what remains of the ancient lore of Mithraism are for the most part contained in the collection called the Zendavesta, a somewhat unfortunate title, since Zend signifies, not, as was

<sup>1</sup> *Id.* p. 219.

<sup>2</sup> Oldenberg, *Die Religion des Veda*, 1894, pp. 190-1, citing Atharva-Veda, xiii, 3, 13; Max Müller, *Hibbert Lectures*, 2nd ed. p. 297.

<sup>3</sup> Cp. Tiele, *Outlines*, pp. 109-110; Fischer, *Heidenthum und Offenbarung*, 1878, p. 59.



formerly supposed, a language, but "a commentary or explanation"; and Avesta (from old Persian *âbastâ*, "the law") is the proper name of the original texts, of which the language somewhat resembles the modern Afghan. The collection is divided into two parts, of which the first is the Avesta properly so-called, containing (1) the Vendidâd, a compilation of religious laws and mythical tales; (2) the Vispêrad, a set of litanies for the sacrifice; and (3) the Yasna, consisting of other litanies and five hymns or Gâthas written in what appears to be an older dialect than the rest. The second part is called the Khorda (Small) Avesta, and contains short prayers for general use, namely, five *Gâh*, thirty formularies of the *Sirôzah*, three *Âfrigân*, and six *Nyâyis*. It is usual to include in the Khorda, though they do not strictly belong to it, the *Yashts*, hymns of praise to the several Izads or lesser deities (who, however, here include Mithra) and some fragments.

As to the age of the different portions there is considerable dispute. In the opinion of the late M. James Darmesteter, one of the highest authorities, certain quasi-scientific sections (*Nasks*) of the Avesta were written as late as the middle of the third century of our era, in imitation of Greek and Sanskrit scientific treatises;<sup>1</sup> and the same scholar places the important Hôm Yasht late in the second century. Much of the Vendidâd, however, is reckoned pre-Alexandrian, and while M. Darmesteter held the Gâthas to be post-Alexandrian, and very late in spirit albeit the oldest texts in the Avesta, other students count them among the earliest items of all.<sup>2</sup> Broadly speaking, the religion of the

<sup>1</sup> Introduction to the *Zendavesta*, 2nd ed. p. xlvi.

<sup>2</sup> This is the view of Mr. L. H. Mills, as it was that of Haug. The latter, however (*Essays on the Parsis*, 3rd ed. pp. 257-260, 287), leaves his position somewhat obscure, arguing as he does on the one hand that the Gâthas are the oldest parts of the *Zendavesta*, and on the other that they ignore Mithra and other *Zendavestan* Gods, the sacrifice of the Homa, etc., because Zoroaster did not believe in them. M. Darmesteter (Introd. to the *Zendavesta*, vol. iv. of "Sacred Books of the East" series, 2nd ed. p. lxxv) supposes the Gâthas to have been written (in a dead language) between 100 B.C. and 100 C.E., and the Vendidâd still later, pronouncing the latter a return to an older form of doctrine, however. Neither view seems satisfactory. M. Darmesteter argues (pp. xlviii-ix), for instance, (a) that one passage in the Hôm Yasht can best be understood as referring to Alexander the Great, (b) that the Yasht is a "coherent whole," and (c) that it is therefore as a whole post-Alexandrian. He thus makes no allowance at this point for redactions or interpolations.



Avesta, commonly called the Mazdean, from the God-name Ahura Mazda, is a highly composite one; but "there are few instances of foreign elements and concepts so freely borrowed by a religion and so harmoniously blended in the original mould."<sup>1</sup>

### § 3.—Zoroastrianism.

It is thus difficult to formulate precisely the evolution of Mithraism. If the Gâthas are really the oldest parts of the Avesta, the cult of Mithra, though older than the Gâthas, was for a time or in one region of Irân rejected or eclipsed, since in those rituals it does not appear. Zoroastrianism and Mithraism were certainly not originally one, neither did one grow out of the other.<sup>2</sup> And here arises the question whether Zarathustra (Zoroaster), so closely associated with the Mithra-cult in the later portions of the Avesta, was a mythical figure or a real reformer who put a more spiritual or philosophic teaching in place of the simpler naturalism of the Vedic period. Mr. L. H. Mills, the learned translator and commentator of the Gâthas, affirms in his introduction the historic reality<sup>3</sup> and religious originality of Zarathustra, mainly on the ground that whereas in the later Avesta he is lost in myth, in the Gâthas he figures quite simply as a real person.<sup>4</sup>

From the conclusion thus drawn, some of us must respectfully but firmly dissent. The Gâthas, critically considered, do not warrant it; on the contrary, the ostensibly earliest so clearly present Zarathustra as either an ideal or an official figure that Mr. Mills is driven to try to explain them by the question, "Can there have been a school, or family, of Zarathustrians, religious poets, similar to the Vedic seers?"<sup>5</sup> Equally vital is his suggestion that "the

<sup>1</sup> *Id.* p. lxix.

<sup>2</sup> Cp. Justi, *Geschichte des alten Persiens*, 1878 (Oncken's series), pp. 68-70; Cumont, *Textes et Monuments*, i, 4, 11.

<sup>3</sup> So also Justi, as cited, p. 67, and Haug, as above cited.

<sup>4</sup> Vol. iii. of the *Zendavesta trans.*, "Sacred Books of the East," vol. xxxi, introd. pp. xxii-xxv.

<sup>5</sup> *Id.* p. 21, note on Yasna, xxviii.



special eminence of the Governor of Ragha as needing no 'Zarathustra' over him, that is, no imperial chief (Yasna xix. 19) may be attributed to the successors of Zarathustra."<sup>1</sup> The fact is that the Gâthas imply rather an established sacerdotal or quasi-regal functionary than a single notable man when they speak of Zarathustra Spitama.<sup>2</sup>

Still more unconvincing is the claim made for Zoroastrian doctrine as something primarily abnormal. Mr. Mills first claims that "nowhere at their period had there been a human voice, so far as we have any evidence, which uttered thoughts like these"; but immediately afterwards, doubtless realising the impossibility of founding a cult all of a sudden with entirely new ideas, he admits that Zarathustra "was probably only the last visible link in a far extended chain. His system, like those of his predecessors and successors, was a growth. His main conceptions had been surmised, although not spoken before."<sup>3</sup> The last clause returns to the arbitrary. There is positively no ground for seeing in the Gâthas new ideas by a new man: they have all the air of a gradually evolved ritual.

The abnormal depth which Mr. Mills ascribes to them, finally, appears to be illusory. He affirms<sup>4</sup> that "the mental heaven and hell with which we are now familiar as the only future states recognised by intelligent people, and thoughts which, in spite of their familiarity, can never lose their importance, are not only used and expressed in the Gâthas, but expressed there, so far as we are aware, *for the first time.*" But this claim proceeds on such expressions as, "for the wicked the worst life; for the holy the best mental state";<sup>5</sup> and to read in such expressions a negation of *places* of happiness and of torment is to misread alike the psychology and the language of primitive life. The modern who negates a physical heaven and hell, but still affirms a future-state-of-mind, either evades entirely

<sup>1</sup> Introd. p. xxviii. Compare the laboured arguments on p. 168, with regard to Yasna xlix, and on p. 141, under xlvi, 13.

<sup>2</sup> Cp. the *Bunahish*, xxiv, 1; xxix, 2 (S.B.E. v); and the *Mihir Yasht* (Zendavesta, ii, S.B.E. xxiii), xxix, 115.

<sup>3</sup> Introd. cit. pp. xviii-xxiv.      <sup>4</sup> *Id.* p. xx.      <sup>5</sup> Yasna, xxx, 4, p. 30.



the fatal problem as to the details of that state or verbally affirms its non-locality. There is no reason whatever to suppose that in ancient Asia men either demurred to the doctrine of places of happiness<sup>1</sup> and torment, or sought thus intelligibly to modify them. "Worst life" and "best state of mind" could perfectly well connote for early thinkers bodily states and local habitations.

We must refuse, then, to let the sympathetic illusions even of scholars force upon us an otherwise unsupported belief in the occurrence of a remarkable personality which of its own sheer moral power wrought a sudden and signal innovation in that most conservative of processes, ancient sacerdotal religion. The religious dualism ascribed to Zarathustra is in all likelihood a natural adaptation by priests of a polytheistic process of thought;<sup>2</sup> and it seems far more likely that Zarathustra is an ancient title for a kind of priest-king<sup>3</sup>—since both functions appear to go with the name in the early Gâthas—than that there was a man so named who invented monotheistic dualism,<sup>4</sup> even as Abraham is fabled to have discovered monotheism, and somehow succeeded in imposing his doctrine as a system of ritual and worship on his contemporaries. As Mr. Mills and Haug admit, there is not a single biographical detail on Zarathustra to be found.

#### § 4.—*Evolution of Mithra.*

Putting aside as otherwise insoluble the problem of "Zoroastrianism," and recognising that that system and

<sup>1</sup> The heavenly Mount, whither all redeemed souls go, is spoken of in the Yasna, xxviii, 5—one of the early Gâthas.

<sup>2</sup> In Yasna xlvi, 12, Mr. Mills (p. 141) finds proof that the Zarathustrians had early been joined by a Turanian clan. This would introduce Turanian influences.

<sup>3</sup> As to the normal approximations of the offices of priest and king in antiquity, compare Jewish history and Greek and Roman sacrificial usages with the historic developments in Egypt (Maspero, *Hist. ancienne des peuples de l'orient*, 4e édit. p. 288), and Phœnicia (Tiele, *Hist. comp. des anciennes religions*, Fr. tr. 1882, p. 324). See also Frazer, *Golden Bough*, 2nd ed. i, 7 sq.

<sup>4</sup> Haug (*Essays on the Parsis*, 3rd ed. pp. 300–5) credits him with holding at once by Monotheism and Dualism—one God containing two "principles." This conception might as well be credited to the Vedas. See next section; and cp. Cox, *Mythology of the Aryan Nations*, p. 562, and Bréal and Maury as there cited.



the special cult of Mithra were originally separate but probably fused by some conquest,<sup>1</sup> we proceed to note that the Mithra-cult, both in this connection and later, underwent an evolution in which the God's status slowly fluctuated, or was readjusted, like that of so many other ancient deities. For a time (and this suggests the Zoroastrian influence) he was graded as the subordinate of Ahura-Mazda (Ormazd).

"In the Indo-Iranian religion" [M. Darmesteter writes<sup>2</sup>] "the Asura of Heaven was often invoked in company with Mithra, the God of the heavenly light; and he let him share with himself the universal sovereignty. In the Veda they are invoked as a pair (Mitrâ-Varunâ) which enjoys the same powers and rights as Varunâ alone, as there is nothing more in Mitrâ-Varunâ than in Varunâ alone, Mitra being the light of heaven, that is, the light of Varunâ. But Ahura-Mazda [Ormazd] could no longer bear an equal, and Mithra [in the Avesta] became one of his creatures: 'This Mithra, the lord of wide pastures, I have created as worthy of sacrifice, as worthy of glorification, as I, Ahura-Mazda, am myself.'<sup>3</sup> But old formulæ, no longer understood, in which Mithra and Ahura, or rather Mithra-Ahura, are invoked in an indivisible unity, dimly remind one that the Creator was formerly a brother to his creature."

"He preserved, however, a high situation, both in the concrete and in the abstract mythology. As the God of the heavenly light, the lord of vast luminous space, of the wide pastures above, he became later the God of the Sun, *Deo invictò Soli Mithræ* (in Persian *Mihr* is the Sun). As light and truth were one and the same thing, viewed with the eyes of the body and of the mind, he becomes the God of truth and faith. He punishes the Mithra-Drug, 'him who lies to Mithra' (or 'who lies to the contract,' since Mithra as a neuter noun means friendship, agreement, contract<sup>4</sup>); he is a

<sup>1</sup> Cp. Prof. Cumont, *Textes et Monuments*, i, 11; Haug, as cited, pp. 290-2.

<sup>2</sup> *The Zendavesta*, i, Introd, pp. lx-lxi.

<sup>3</sup> *Mihir Yasht*, i, in vol. ii. of M. Darmesteter's translation of the *Zendavesta* (vol. 23 of "Sacred Books" series). Cp. the *Khôrshed Nyâyis* in same vol, p. 351.

<sup>4</sup> Cp. West, note to trans. of the *Dinkard*, S.B.E., vol. 37, B. viii, c. 44, 8.



judge in hell, in company with Rashnu, 'the true one,' the God of truth, a mere offshoot of Mithra in his moral character."<sup>1</sup>

The ritual of the Avesta is clear on the subject. "We sacrifice unto Mithra and Ahura, the two great, imperishable, holy Gods; and unto the stars, and the moon, and the sun, with the trees that yield up baresma" [burned on the altar]. "We sacrifice unto Mithra, the lord of all countries, whom Ahura-Mazda made the most glorious of all the Gods in the world unseen." "So may Mithra and Ahura, the two great Gods, come to us for help. We sacrifice unto the bright, undying, shining, swift-horsed sun."<sup>2</sup> And in the teaching associated with Zoroaster we find Mithra extolled by Ahura-Mazda as a beneficent and comforting Spirit. "Happy that man, I think,"—said Ahura-Mazda—"O Spitama Zarathustra! for whom a holy priest .....who is the Word Incarnate, offers up a sacrifice unto Mithra.....Straight to that man, I think, will Mithra come, to visit his dwelling. When Mithra's boons will come to him, as he follows God's teaching, and thinks according to God's teaching."<sup>3</sup> This, though still ancient, was doubtless a relatively late and high form of the cultus in Persia, since in the Avesta we find Mithra repeatedly invoked as a warlike and formidable deity, a God of battles, swift to assail and slay the enemies of truth and justice—which would normally mean, the enemies of his worshippers. But the evolution of a moral cult on such a basis was in the due course of religious adaptation, since in the Mahâbhârata Agni combines the same set of characteristics, being at once friendly to warriors and typified by a dove, while as the Mouth of the Gods he fulfils the highest moral functions.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> On the bearing of early Mithraism on conduct see in particular the *Mihir Yasht*, xxix, pronounced by M. Darmesteter "one of the most important in the Avesta, as a short account of the social constitution and morals of Zoroastrian Iran" (ii, 149, n).

<sup>2</sup> *Id.* ii, 158, 351.

<sup>3</sup> Darmesteter's *Zendavesta*, ii, 155: *Mihir Yasht*, xxxii, 137-8.

<sup>4</sup> A. Holtzmann, *Agni nach den Vorstellungen des Mahâbhârata*, 1878, pp. 7, 28, 30, 35. See also above, p. 216. As to the slow rise of Brahmanic ethic from the primary idea of *quid pro quo* in the relations of Gods and



Thus, then, we have the cultus of Mithra as the Sun-God, the deity of light and truth, created by, and yet co-equal with, the Supreme Deity, and fighting on the side of the good against the evil power Angra-Mainyu (Ahriman) —this at a period long before the Christian era. So much is certain, whatever we may decide as to the actual period of the writing of the Avesta, as it has come down to us. Of the literature of Mazdeism, of course, a great deal has perished; this appearing, says M. Darmesteter, not only from internal evidence, but from history.

“The Arab conquest proved fatal to the religious literature of the Sassanian ages, a great part of which was either destroyed by the fanaticism of the conquerors and the new converts, or lost during the long exodus of the Parsis.....The cause that preserved the Avesta is obvious: taken as a whole, it does not profess to be a religious encyclopædia, but only a liturgical collection; and it bears more likeness to a prayer-book than to the Bible.”<sup>1</sup>

We can therefore only infer the nature of the rest of the system. But we do know that, as time went on, the cultus of Mithra became more and more considerable. It is hardly accurate to say, as does Canon Rawlinson, that “Mithra was originally not held in very high esteem”; but it is the historic fact that

“he ultimately came to occupy a place only a little inferior to that assigned, from the first, to the Ahura-Mazda. Darius, the son of Hystaspes, placed the emblems of Ahura-Mazda and of Mithra in equally conspicuous positions on the sculptured tablet above his tomb [B.C. 485]; and his example was followed by all the later monarchs of his race whose sepulchres are still in existence. Artaxerxes Mnemon [d. B.C. 358] placed an image of Mithra in the temple attached to the royal palace of Suza. He also in his inscriptions

men, cp. M. Baudry's essay *De l'interprétation mythologique* in the *Revue Germanique*, Fév. i, 1868, p. 36; and Tiele, *Outlines of the Hist. of Religion*, Eng. tr. p. 113. Of course the dove may have been, as in other ancient cults, a symbol of sex instinct. On that view, Agni combined the characters of Mars and Venus.

*Ibid.* i, Introd, pp. xxxi, xxxii (xxxiii in second ed.).



unites Mithra with Ahura-Mazda, and prays for their conjoint protection. Artaxerxes Ochus [*d. B.C. 337*] does the same a little later; and the practice is also observed in portions of the Zendavesta composed about this period."<sup>1</sup>

Artaxerxes Mnemon, too, swore by "the light of Mithras," as our William the Conqueror swore by "the splendour of God";<sup>2</sup> and in general the importance and range of the Mithraic worship at an early period may be clearly inferred from the mere vogue of the name Mithridates, "the justice of Mithra," which we find in use at least six hundred years before the Christian era.<sup>3</sup>

It is after the Persian conquest of Babylon (538 B.C.) that Mithraism begins to take the shape it wears in the period of the Roman empire. Though historical details are lacking, we are broadly entitled to say that "the Mazdeism of the Persians, in uniting with the astrolatry of the Chaldeans, produced Mithraism."<sup>4</sup> It was presumably before this development that Mazdeism entered Armenia under the earlier Achamenidæ,<sup>5</sup> who conquered that region about 625 B.C.; for whereas Ahuramazda, the Supreme God, was in some measure superseded by Mithra in the later Mithraic cult,<sup>6</sup> in virtue of the same psychological tendency that later gave to the Christian Jesus a nominal equality with and a

<sup>1</sup> *The Religions of the Ancient World*, p. 105, citing the same author's *Ancient Monarchies*, iv, 334; Flandin, *Voyage en Perse*, pls. 164 bis, 166, 173-6; Loftus, *Chaldea and Susiana*, p. 572; and Sir H. Rawlinson's *Cuneiform Inscriptions*, i, 342. See also Plutarch, *Alexander*, 30; Quintus Curtius, *De gestis Alex.* iv, 48, 12; Xenophon, *Æconom.* iv, 24; Ed. Meyer, *Geschichte des Alterthums*, i, 506, 542; and Windischmann, *Mithra, ein Beitrag zur Mythengeschichte des Orients*, in *Abhandlungen für die Kunde des Morgenlands*, Bd. i, p. 55.

<sup>2</sup> King, *The Gnostics and their Remains*, p. 116; Ælian, *Var. Hist.* i, 33; Xenophon, *Cryop.* vii, 5, § 53; Plutarch, *Artaxerxes*, 4.

<sup>3</sup> See Cumont, *Textes et Monuments*, ii, 76-82, for a list of all the names combining that of Mithra, from the earliest times down to the Christian era. They include Mitraphernes, Mitrobates, Mithropaustes, Homamithres, Ithamitres, Siromitres, Mitrogathes, Aspamitres, Mitraios, Mitrostes, Rheomithres, Mithrobouzanes, Mithrines, Sisymithres, Mithracenes, etc., and the name Mithrōs is very common.

<sup>4</sup> *Id.* i, 8, 231. Justi (*Geschichte des alten Persiens*, 1879, p. 93) sees Egyptian as well as Chaldean elements in the cult.

<sup>5</sup> Cumont, pp. 10-11, 17, 231. Justi says no: "not under Darius or the Achamenidæ, but first under the Parthians, who here set up an Arsacide dynasty" (p. 95).

<sup>6</sup> Meyer, *Gesch. des Alterthums*, i, 542.



practical precedence over Yahweh, we find the older Mazdean deity adored as the thundering God in Eastern Iberia as late as the fourth century.<sup>1</sup> But Mithraism in turn was prepared in Armenia for its cosmopolitan career in the western world; since it was from Armenian Mazdeism that it borrowed its enigmatic "supreme God," Kronos-Zervan, the Time Spirit, a Babylonian conception, represented in the mysteries by the lion-headed or demon-headed and serpent-encircled figure which bears the two keys.<sup>2</sup> And this deity in turn tells of Babylonian influence, since the conception of the two locked doors of exit and entrance in the firmament is of Babylonian origin.<sup>3</sup>

Of the deity thus shaped through many centuries, by many forces, it seems warrantable to say that his cult was normally in an ethically advanced stage, relatively to contemporary worships. In remote times doubtless, he was worshipped with human sacrifices, like most other Gods: the Persian practice of sacrificing on a "high place"<sup>4</sup> tells of early connection with the Asiatic cult of pyramid-altar-temples, which spread to Polynesia, North America, Syria, and Greece, always in connection with sacrifices of men and children. Of such sacrifice there is no trace in the historic period, however, and at no time do we find any trace in his legend of sexual complications. Unlike Agni, unlike Krishna and Apollo and Adonis and Herakles and Dionysos and Attis, he has no amours; and his conjunction with Anaitis, as we shall see, seems to have been rather a mystical blending of sexes than a conjugal union. At times he may have been licentiously worshipped,<sup>5</sup> as

<sup>1</sup> Moses of Chorene, l. ii, c. 83 (cited by Ioselian, *Hist. of Georgian Ch.*). Ahuramazda seems to have been widely worshipped in the Georgian district, and often in connection with another deity whose name is preserved by the old historians as Zaden, probably = Satan = Ahriman. Ioselian, *Hist. of the Georgian Church*, Eng tr. pp. 20, 39, 67. Cp. Cumont, i, 16-20.

<sup>2</sup> Haug, *Essays on the Parsis*, 3rd ed. pp. 12-13; Cumont, i, 19, 74 sq.; ii, 196, 212, 215, 216, 238.

<sup>3</sup> Cumont i, 83, citing Jensen, *Die Kosmogonie der Babylonier*, 1890, p. 9. Cp. Maspero, *Hist. anc. des peuples de l'orient*, 4e édit. p. 136.

<sup>4</sup> Strabo, xv, 3, § 13.

<sup>5</sup> Athenæus (x, 45), citing Ctesias and Duris, tells that among the Persians the king was permitted to get drunk and dance on one day in the year only, the festival of Mithras (either Christmas-day or one of the days of the New



Anaitis was;<sup>1</sup> but in the Avesta and in the developed cultus so far as we know it he is always shown as making for righteousness.<sup>2</sup>

Theologically, he exists both in abstract and in symbol. Originally, he is simply the animised sun: later, according to the universal law of religious evolution, he becomes a spirit apart from the sun but symbolised by it, the sun being worshipped in his name, and he being the God who sustains it: nay, an actual subordinate Sun-God takes his place, even in the Rig Veda.<sup>3</sup> But since in Persian, as we have seen, his name (*Mihir*) actually means the sun,<sup>4</sup> he can never be dissociated from it; and as the same word also means "the friend," the light being the friend of man,<sup>5</sup> and seems to connote love or amity,<sup>6</sup> a moral distinction inevitably attaches to him in a stage of thought in which words have an incalculable significance. He is not a mere benefactor to be flattered. As the sun in Nature can both succour and slay; as Apollo, called by Pindar<sup>7</sup> the most friendly to men of all the Gods, is also the Destroyer, so the Persians sang: "Thou, O Mithra, art both bad and good to nations"—and to men.<sup>8</sup> And at length, the dualist theory holding its ground as a theological system, as it always will while men personify the energies of the universe, Mithra comes to occupy a singular position as between the two great powers of good and evil, Ormazd and Ahriman

(Year festival in spring); no one else being allowed to get drunk or dance on that day.

<sup>1</sup> Her worship being assimilated to that of Ishtar. Cumont, i, 231, n. Cp. Strabo, B. xi, *end*.

<sup>2</sup> In a Roman inscription he is *sanctus dominus*, the holy Lord. Cumont, ii, 235.

<sup>3</sup> "Sometimes a poet says that Savatri is Mitra, or that he at least performs the same work as Mitra. This Mitra is most frequently invoked in conjunction with Varuna. Both stand together on the same chariot." Max Müller, Hibbert Lectures, 2nd ed. p. 269.

<sup>4</sup> Cp. Darmesteter, *Introd. to Zendavesta*, pp. liv, lxi; Von Bohlen, *Das alte Indien*, i, 258; Sainte-Croix, *Recherches*, ii, 122, n.

<sup>5</sup> Mitra literally means "a friend"; it is the light as friendly to man. Cp. Darmesteter, *Ormazd et Ahriman*, §§ 59-61; Max Müller, Hibbert Lectures, 2nd ed. p. 268, *note*.

<sup>6</sup> Wait, *Jewish, Oriental, and Classical Antiquities*, 1823, p. 194, citing the *Berhan-ī Kattēā*. The name seems to have been the Persian equivalent of Eros. Hyde, *De Vet. Persar. Relig.* 1700, c. iv. p. 107.

<sup>7</sup> Cp. Donaldson, *Theatre of the Greeks*, 7th ed. p. 23.

<sup>8</sup> *Mihir Yasht*, viii, 29.



(the Ahura-Mazda and Angra-Mainyu of Mazdeism), being actually named the MEDIATOR,<sup>1</sup> and figuring to the devout eye as a humane and beneficent God, nearer to man<sup>2</sup> than the Great Spirit of Good, a Saviour, a Redeemer, eternally young, son of the Most High,<sup>3</sup> and preserver of mankind from the Evil One. In brief, he is a pagan Christ.

Much has been written as to whether Mithra was worshipped as the sun, or as the creator and sustainer of the sun. There can be no reasonable doubt that the two ideas existed, and were often blended.<sup>4</sup> We may depend upon it, that for the weak and ignorant minds, which could conceive a personal God only under the form of a man or animal, or both combined, the perpetual pageant of the sun was a help and not a hindrance to elevation of thought. We can understand, too, how even to the thinkers, who sought to distinguish between matter and essence, and reckoned the sun only a part of the material universe, the great orb should yet be the very symbol of life and splendour and immortality, as well as the chosen seat of the deity who ruled mankind; and that it should be the viewless spirit of the sun who, in their thought, proclaimed to man the oracle of the Soul of the Universe: "I am the Alpha

<sup>1</sup> Plutarch, *Isis and Osiris*, c. 46; Julian, *In regem solem*, cc. 9, 10, 21. Lesser spirits, of course, were also held to exercise mediatorial functions, like the Christian Saints. "The Furuhers of the ancient Persians were intermediate agents between God and man, who presented earthly petitions to the throne of Ormuzd, being connected with the human soul and attendants on it." Wait, *Jewish, Oriental, and Classical Antiquities*, 1823, p. 88, citing the *Berhan-ī Katteā*. Cp. Spiegel, *Avesta*, Einleitung, p. 31. For the metaphysical development of the idea of the Sun-God as Mediator see Julian, *In regem solem*.

<sup>2</sup> In the Persian mythology the first man and woman, Mashya and Mashyana, arise on Mithra's day in Mithra's (the seventh) month. (Spiegel, *Erânische Alterthumskunde*, i, 503, 511.) In the Persian myth the pair are at first not only sinless but alike sexless (*Bundahish*, xv).

<sup>3</sup> "Like all the Aryan religions, that of the ancient Persians admitted that Ahura Mazda was a husband and father." Cumont, *Textes et monuments*, i, 137. M. Cumont need not have limited this characteristic to the Aryan systems: it is equally Semitic. But it is in the later stages of Mithraism that the Sonship of the God is stressed. *Id.* ii, 4-5.

<sup>4</sup> Cp. Tiele, *Egyptian Religion*, p. 44, as to Osiris. One of the many proposed corrections of Gibbon by his commentators which are themselves errors is Guizot's note on ch. viii (Bohn ed. i, 255) to the effect that "Mithra was not the sun." Guizot founded on Anquetil, who, though a great pioneer, had not fully mastered the records.



and the Omega, the first and the last, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty."<sup>1</sup>

§ 5.—*The Process of Syncretism.*

In the great polytheistic era, however, the habit of personifying all the forces of nature led first to a universal recognition of the actual existence of the deities of foreign peoples, and later on to the idea that all the deities of the nations are but names of phases of one central and omnipotent power. Even among the philosophers and theologians, of course, this conception never really destroyed the habit of thinking of the alleged phases or manifestations of *the* deity as being really minor deities;<sup>2</sup> and much more a matter of course was it that among the multitude the deity or deities should always be conceived in a quite concrete form. But the synthesizing tendency early resulted in this, that different cults were combined; different God-names identified as pointing to the same God; and different Gods combined into unities of two, three, four, or more members. Egypt is the great theological factory for such combinations; but the law necessarily operated elsewhere. The conception of a Divine Trinity is of unknown antiquity: it flourished in Mesopotamia, in Hindostan, in the Platonic philosophy, in Egypt, long before Christianity.<sup>3</sup> But the combining process, among other variations, had to take account of the worship of Goddesses as well as of Gods; and in regions where Goddess-worship was deeply rooted it was inevitable that there should occur combinations of sex. This actually

<sup>1</sup> Revelation, i, 8; xxi, 6; xxii, 13. A very ancient Pagan formula. See Pausanias, x, 12, as to the chant "Zeus was, Zeus is, Zeus shall be"; and the phrase "God the beginning and the end," in Plato, *Laws*, iv, 7. Cp., in the Egyptian "Book of the Dead" (ch. lxiv; Budge's trans. pp. 112, 116), the formula, "I am Yesterday, To-day, and To-morrow."

<sup>2</sup> Compare the Gâthas, *passim*. Mr. Mills (introd. p. xxiv) makes too much of "the wonderful idea that God's attributes are his messengers." The messengers, as he admits, are conceived as Gods or angels. They simply bear the names of attributes, on the analogy of the titles of a king's functionaries. Thus arose the idea of the *Logos* or Divine Word (Yasna, xxix, 7).

<sup>3</sup> See, in the Gâthas, Yasna xxx, 7, and Mr. Mills' comments, pp. 14-15, etc., for traces of an early Zoroastrian trinity.



took place in the worship of Mithra. From Herodotus,<sup>1</sup> writing in the fifth century B.C., we learn that in some way the God Mithra was identified with a Goddess. The whole passage, though familiar to students, is worth quoting here:—

“The Persians, according to my own knowledge, observe the following customs. It is not their practice to erect statues, or temples, or altars, but they charge those with folly who do so; because, as I conjecture, they do not think the Gods have human forms, as the Greeks do. They are accustomed to ascend the highest parts of the mountains, and offer sacrifice to Zeus, and they call the whole circle of the heavens by the name of Zeus. They sacrifice to the sun and moon, to the earth, fire, water, and the winds. To these alone they have sacrificed from the earliest times; but they have since learnt from the Arabians and Assyrians to sacrifice to (Aphroditê) Urania, whom the Assyrians call Mylitta, the Arabians Alitta, and the Persians Mitra.”

This is one of the seemingly improbable statements in Herodotus which research has partly confirmed.<sup>2</sup> He is accused, indeed, of blundering<sup>3</sup> in combining Mithra with Mylitta, it being shown from monuments that the Goddess identified with Mithra was Anaitis or Tanat.<sup>4</sup> But that the Armenian Anaitis and Mylitta were regarded as the same deity seems clear,<sup>5</sup> and there are other clues.

It has not been commonly observed that Strabo twice explicitly brackets Anaitis with a Persian God Omanus as being worshipped at a common altar. He saw the statue

<sup>1</sup> B. i, c. 131.

<sup>2</sup> Lenormant admits as to the alleged blunder: “Perhaps it was not after all an error, and the divine couple . . . may have been sometimes designated as a double Mithra” (*Chaldean Magic*, p. 236).

<sup>3</sup> Rawlinson's *Herodotus*, i, 257, 416. Cp. Lenormant, *Manual of Anc. Hist.*, Eng. trans. ii, 46; and *Chaldean Magic*, as quoted.

<sup>4</sup> Cumont, *Textes et Monuments*, i, 5; ii, 87–88. On the names of this Goddess, see G. Diercks, *Entwicklungsgeschichte des Geistes der Menschheit*, Berlin, 1881, i, 242. She is held to have been the Goddess of the Oxus. Meyer, *Geschichte des Alterthums*, i, 542. Cp. Tiele, *Outlines*, pp. 170–1, where she is derived from the Semites, who in turn took her from the Akkadians. See also Tiele's *Egyptian Religion*, Eng. tr. p. 135.; and Justi, *Gesch. des alten Persiens*, pp. 93–5.

<sup>5</sup> Creuzer-Guigniaut, *Religions de l'Antiquité*, t. ii. ptie. i, pp. 76–82 (1829); Bähr, *Symbolik des Mosaischen Cultus*, ii, 243.



of Omanus carried in procession.<sup>1</sup> There is reason to suppose that Omanus (or the Persian form of the word) was a name of Mithra, and that it is an adaptation of Vohumano (Bahman) = Good Mind, a divine name with a very fluctuating connotation. In one passage of the Zendavesta,<sup>2</sup> Vohumano figures as the doorkeeper of heaven; but he was also first of the Ameshaspentas or Amshaspands, of whom Mithra too (making seven) was chief; and he ranks further in the Avesta with Ahura Mazda as judge of the dead; and again as the first born son of Ahura Mazda, as was Mithra later. Yet again, he is identified with the creative power;<sup>3</sup> and it seems impossible that the conception of the "Good Mind" should have been prevented from coalescing either with that of Ahura Mazda, who was not usually represented by a statue, or with that of Mithra, who was "the Word." In any case, the fact of the combination of Mithra in a double personality with that of a Goddess is made clear, not only by the statement of the Christian controversialist Julius Firmicus, in the fourth century, and later writers, that the Persians make Mithras both two-sexed and threefold or three-formed,<sup>4</sup> but by innumerable Mithraic monuments on which appear the symbols of two deities, male and female, the sun and

<sup>1</sup> B. xi, c. 8, § 4; B. xv, c. 3, § 15.

<sup>2</sup> *Vendidad*, Farg. 31 (102).

<sup>3</sup> See Max Müller, *Psychological Religion*, 1893, pp. 184, 186, 203; and the Avesta, *Yasna*, xxx; and compare Darmesteter's *Introd.* 2nd. ed. p. lvi, as to Vohumano being the *Logos*. M. Darmesteter thinks the idea came through the Greeks, but does not face the problem as to whence *they* derived it. In the Bundahish, Vohumano is the first thing created by God—exactly as is the *Logos* for Philo—and from him then proceeds "the light of the world" (i, 23, 25). Cp. the Pahlavi *Yasna*, xxxi, 8 (a). There is considerable obscurity as to the original character of Vohumano. Cp. Müller, as cited, pp. 54, 56, 57; Haug, *Essays on the Parsis*, 3rd. ed. p. 350; and Spiegel, *Avesta* (1852), i, 247-8 (Fargard xix of *Vendidad*). Tiele identifies Vohumano with Sraosha, who in turn, however, was joined with Mithra. *Outlines*, pp. 171, 172, 176; Haug, pp. 307-8. Below, § 10. Winckler (*Altorient. Forschungen*, xvi (1901) p. 4) identifies the Omanus of Strabo with Haman; but the existence of a deity so named is far from certain.

<sup>4</sup> *De Errore Profanarum Religionum*, v. Compare Dionysius the pseudo-Areopagite, *Epist. vii. ad Polycarp.*, cited in Selden, *De Diis Syris*, Proleg. c. 3; and in Cudworth, *Intellectual System*, Harrison's ed. i, 482. In a passage in the *Yasna* there is mention of "the two divine Mithras" (Lenormant, as quoted, citing Burnouf). But cp. Mills' rendering of *Yasna*, i, II, which appears to be the passage in view.



the moon, or, it may be, male and female principles of the sun or of the earth. And this epicene or double-sexed character is singularly preserved to us in that Mithraic monument of the Græco-Roman period which we possess in our own British Museum, in which the divine slayer of the bull presents a face of perfect and sexless beauty, feminine in its delicate loveliness of feature, masculine in its association with the male form.

In such a combination there is reason to see a direct influence of the old Akkado-Babylonian system on the later Mazdean. From the old Akkadians the Semites received the conception of a trinity, the "divine father and mother by the side of their son the Sun-God."<sup>1</sup> But their own ruling tendency was to give every God, up to the highest, a "colourless double or wife";<sup>2</sup> and in the final blending of these in a double-sexed deity we have the consummation of the idea. It was not special to Asia; for the Egyptians gave a double sex alike to moon, earth, air, fire, and water, making the earth male as rock, female as arable soil; fire masculine as heat, female as light, and so on;<sup>3</sup> and the Greeks and Romans accepted the notion;<sup>4</sup> but it was probably from Chaldæa that it reached the Mithraists. Bel had been represented as both father and mother of Enlil, and Belti as both father and mother of Ninlil; and there are yet other instances of the Babylonian vogue of the idea of a God combining the two sexes.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Sayce, Hibbert Lectures, p. 193.

<sup>2</sup> *Id.* p. 215. Cp. Genesis, i, 27; Donaldson, *Theatre of the Greeks*, 7th ed. p. 21; and Lenormant, *Chaldean Magic*, pp. 129-130. In all likelihood, the Hebrew "Holy Spirit" was originally held to be feminine. Cp. Justin Martyr, 1 *Apol.* c. 64.

<sup>3</sup> Plutarch, *Isis and Osiris*, c. 43; Seneca, *Quæst. Nat.* iii, 14.

<sup>4</sup> See Servius on the *Aeneid*, ii, 632. Cp. Donaldson, as last cited. It was in this way that Apollo and Dionysos came to be at times represented in feminine robes; while Aphrodite was sometimes (as in Sparta) bearded. Cp. Macrobius, *Saturnalia*, iii, 8, as to the double sex of Venus, which is abundantly illustrated by Preller, *Römische Mythologie*, 2nd ed. p. 389, and *Griechische Mythologie*, 2nd ed. i, 268. On other developments of the principle cp. Selden, *De Diis Syris*, Syntag. ii, c. 2; and Spencer, *De legibus Hebræorum*, lib. ii, c. xvii, § 12. It has recently been discussed with much suggestiveness, if with some fantasy of speculation, by Mr. Gerald Massey in his *Natural Genesis*, 1883, i, 510-518.

<sup>5</sup> Anz, *Zur Frage nach dem Ursprung des Gnosticismus*, 1897, p. 105, following Jensen, *Kosmologie der Babylonier*, pp. 142 sq., 272 sq.



There is a further presumption that it was either from Babylonia or through Mithraism as modified after the Persian conquest of Babylon that the idea of a double-sexed deity reached the Greeks. In the Orphic hymns, which probably represent the theosophy of several centuries before our era, it is predicated of four deities, of whom two, the Moon and Nature (Selené and Physeos), are normally female, and two (Adonis and Dionysos) normally male.<sup>1</sup> Selené is further identified with Mên, the Moon-God, who, as being double-sexed like Mithra, was finally identified with him in worship and on coins.<sup>2</sup> As Dionysos and Adonis, originally Vegetation Gods, have at this stage become identified with the Sun, there arises a presumption that a solar cult has been imitated; though at the same time the solar cult may have adopted features from the others. The presumption is that the notion of a double-sexed deity was the outcome on the one hand of the concrete practice of bracketing a male and a female deity together, and on the other hand of speculation on the essence of "divinity." But the concrete process probably came first, and the conjunction of the symbols or heads of a male and female deity in one monument or sculpture would give the lead to a mystical theory of a twy-sexed being.

#### § 6.—*Symbols of Mithra.*

To point to these Mithraic monuments, of which there are so many examples, is to point out, further, that the old Persian aversion to images of deity had disappeared with the extension of the Mithraic cultus.<sup>3</sup> There is no doubt as to the original forbiddal of images, despite the common delusion that the Jews were the first to lay down such a veto. But it was inevitable that, in the artistic countries,<sup>4</sup> the adoption of Mithraism should involve the

<sup>1</sup> *Orphica*, ix, 2, 3; x, 18; xliii, 4; lvi, 4.

<sup>2</sup> Cumont, ii, 189-190; i, 235, and notes. Mithra was also identified with Shamas, the Babylonian Sun-God. *Id.* i, 231.

<sup>3</sup> Cumont, i, 10, note; i, 236, note.

<sup>4</sup> I do not quite follow Canon Rawlinson's meaning in the statement (*Seventh Oriental Monarchy*, p. 632), that "the Persian system was further



representing Mithra by images, like other deities. Nor was this all. One reason for regarding the Zend-Avesta as substantially ancient is the comparative simplicity of the Mithra cultus it sets forth. Just as happened with Christianity later, the spreading faith assimilated all sorts of ancient symbolisms, and new complications of ritual; and Mithra is associated with the strange symbolic figures of the lion-headed serpentine God, bearing two keys, but above all figures in that of the slayer of the bull. Whence came that conception? There are many explanations. It has been variously decided that the bull slain by Mithra is the symbol of the earth, the symbol of the moon, the symbol of the sun, the symbol of lust, the symbol of the cloud, the bull of the Zodiac, and the cosmogonic bull of the Magian system.<sup>1</sup> All of these conceptions lead back to the primitive symbolism of the Veda, where Agni is the bull; and it is in a similarly early sense, as the Sun-God among the cows, that Mithra is in the Avesta the bull and the cow-stealer<sup>2</sup>—which last name he retains in the late Roman period,<sup>3</sup> when he has the epithet in common with Hermes. On the basis of the primitive nature-myth arose a host of symbolisms, all interfluent and inseparable, because all fanciful. Any one who has followed the maze of symbolism in Plutarch's *Isis and Osiris* will be prepared

tainted with idolatry in respect of the worship of Mithra." For that matter, however, the "idolatry" of antiquity in general is on all fours with the reverence of images under Christianity.

<sup>1</sup> Cp. Hammer-Purgstall, *Mithriaca*, Caen and Paris, 1833, p. 31; Roscher, *Ausführliches Lexikon*, col. 3051-3; Creuzer, *Das Mithræum von Neuenheim*, p. 31; Darmesteter, *Ormazd et Ahriman*, pp. 144-153; Baur, *Das manichäische Religionssystem*, 1831, p. 91; Rawlinson, *Five Great Monarchies*, iii, 361; and Hyde, as there cited. Darmesteter holds that the bull, like the Vedic cow, = the cloud; that its seed is the rain (p. 149); and that its true slayer is the serpent (p. 153). In the zodiac, the bull was *domus Veneris*. But the idea that the bull or ram symbolised lust could well be primary; and in the Persian myth the ram helps to lead the first man and woman into sin (Spiegel, *Erân. Alterthumsk.*, i, 511-512; *Bundahish*, xv, 13). For Porphyry, the God (Mithra) who was a stealer of oxen was secretly concerned with generation (*De antro*, xviii). As to the primeval ox, source of all animals, see the *Bundahish*, iii, 4-18; iv, 1, etc. (West's *Pahlavi Texts*, i, 17-20. S.B.E. vol. v).

<sup>2</sup> *Mihir Yasht*, xxii, 86.

<sup>3</sup> Firmicus, *De errore*, v, calls him *abactor boum*. Cp. Commodianus, *Instructiones*, i, 13 (cited by Windischmann, p. 64, and by Cumont, ii, 9), who speaks of the cows as hidden in a cave; and Porphyry, as last cited.



to believe that for the later ancients Mithra as the bull had half-a-dozen significations.<sup>1</sup> In that famous treatise, Isis and Osiris and Typhon successively represent a number of different Nature-forces—sun, moon, moisture, the Nile, the Earth, generative warmth, injurious heat, and so on—shifting and exchanging their places, till it becomes plain that the old theosophy was but a ceaseless flux of more or less congruous fancies. We may depend upon it that Mithraism was as hospitable to mystic meanings as Osirianism. It is intelligible and probable that Mithra slaying the bull should have meant the rays of the sun penetrating the earth, and so creating life for mundane creatures,<sup>2</sup> as the dog feeds on the blood<sup>3</sup> of the slain bull. In the *Vendidâd*, the older (Vedic) God Yima, whose “glory” was secured by Mithra when Yima fell through disobedience,<sup>4</sup> is represented as “sealing the earth with his golden seal,” and thrusting into it with his dagger,<sup>5</sup> which is perhaps the earliest form of the myth under notice. But those who adopt this as the whole explanation<sup>6</sup> overlook a principle perhaps bound up with the origin of Mithraism proper—the significance of the bull as one of those signs of the zodiac through which the sun passed in his annual course. It is nearly certain that the zodiac was the source of very much of the later symbolism and mysticism of those ancient cults which their priesthoods associated with the sun, not to speak of those whose priesthoods professedly repudiated sun-worship. And one of the most important facts established by the collection and comparison of ancient monuments<sup>7</sup> is, that the Mithraic

<sup>1</sup> For Porphyry, Mithra is “the Bull Demiourgos” and “lord of generation” (*De antro*, xxiv).

<sup>2</sup> This interpretation is clearly adopted in one monument which makes ears of corn instead of blood come from the bull’s wound. Cumont, ii, 228.

<sup>3</sup> For another signification of the dog here, see Mr. King’s *Gnostics and their Remains*, 2nd ed. p. 137. Compare the Osirian theory in Plutarch, *Isis and Osiris*, xlv.

<sup>4</sup> *Zamyâd Yasht*, vii, 35.

<sup>5</sup> *Vendidâd*, Fargard ii, 10, 14, 18 (32-3).

<sup>6</sup> King, pp. 135-6.

<sup>7</sup> See the series in Lajard’s *Atlas*. Professor Cumont, while of course rejecting Lajard’s theory that Mithraism originated in the Assyrian system, recognises that the planetary and zodiacal elements in Mithraism were certainly borrowed by it from the ancient Chaldean system; and that in general Chaldean elements were early superimposed upon the Iranian when the cults met at Babylon (*Textes et Monuments*, i, 73, 109).



cultus connects symbolically with an Assyrian or Akkadian cultus far older—the cult which produced those common Assyrian monuments in which a divine or kingly personage slays a lion or a bull, thrusting a sword through him.<sup>1</sup> There can be little doubt that these successive religious representations of the slaying of the lion and the slaying of the bull rest partly on a zodiacal system of sacred symbolism, in which the slaying of a given animal means either the passing of the sun into or out of a particular sign of the zodiac at a particular season of the year, or the slaying of the animal represented as a special sacrifice, or both.

The zodiac, which is of immense antiquity,<sup>2</sup> has come to be conventionalised—that is to say, it is fixed, so that the signs have long ceased to coincide with the actual constellations whose names they bear. But originally the students of the stars must needs have had regard to the actual constellations. And this carries us very far back indeed. The view that the slaying of the bull originally pointed to the sun's entering the sign of the Bull at the vernal equinox is supported by the circumstance that the bull was at once a symbol of the Sun-God and a symbol of agriculture, the early plough being drawn by bulls or oxen

<sup>1</sup> Sometimes a griffin or dragon (pronounced by Justi, p. 109, to be the Arimanian beast) takes the place of the lion or bull. All three figure in Persian sculpture of the age of Xerxes, evidently following the Assyrian models. Reber, *History of Ancient Art*, Eng. tr. 1883, pp. 123–5. Again, there is a presumption that the design of a lion attacking a bull or an ilcorn, seen on a number of ancient coins in Asia Minor, and even in Macedonia, is a symbol analogous to that of Mithra slaying the bull (see Parker and Ainsworth's *Lares and Penates*, 1853, p. 187, where the explanation given will not stand). Persia is still the "Land of the Lion and the Sun." Cp. the figures on the palace of Xerxes, reproduced by Justi, *Gesch. des alten Persiens*, p. 106.

<sup>2</sup> Cp. Sayce, Hibbert Lectures, pp. 397–8; Narrien, *Histor. Account of the Orig. and Prog. of Astronomy*, 1850, pp. 79–83, 126–137; Tiele, *Hist. comp. des anciennes relig.* Fr. tr. 1882, p. 248; Cumont, *Textes et Monuments*, i. § 6; Jensen, *Kosmologie der Babylonier*, 1890, pp. 57–95; Jastrow, *The Religion of Babylonia and Assyria*, 1898, pp. 434, 456. The careful argument of Letronne (*Mélanges d'érudition et de critique historique: Origine des Zodiaques*) to show that the zodiac originated with the Greeks is exploded by the discoveries of Assyriology. The ideas of Macrobius and of Dupuis, which Letronne undertook to overthrow, are thus in some measure rehabilitated.



(whence possibly the naming of the constellation);<sup>1</sup> and is strongly suggested further by the hostile function assigned in the monuments to the Scorpion, which is the opposing sign, and would represent the autumnal equinox.<sup>2</sup> This symbol then dates back, probably, more than 3,000 years before the Christian era; while the symbol of the slaying of the lion would signify the sun's entrance into Leo at midsummer in the same period, and may connect with the worship of Tammuz, after whom the midsummer month was named in Syria—unless the God took his name from the month. In point of fact, astronomy tells us that, by the precession of the equinoxes, the constellation of the Bull had ceased to be the sun's place at the vernal equinox for about 2,100 years before the reign of Augustus, the constellation of the Ram taking its place. Still, just as the symbol of the slaying of the lion had, on this theory, held its ground in religion after the bull played a similar part, so did the sign of the Bull play its part in symbol and ceremony long after the sun had begun to enter the constellation Aries at the sacred season. Nevertheless—and this seems a crowning vindication of the zodiacal theory—while the bull holds its place on the monuments of the Christian era, we find at this very period, in connection with the worship of Mithra as with those of Dionysos<sup>3</sup> and (more anciently) of Amun,<sup>4</sup> an actual ceremony of slaying a ram in honour of the Sun-God. In Persia, the sign Aries, the Ram, was known as the Lamb; and in some of the Mithraic mysteries at the Christian era, it was a lamb that was slain.<sup>5</sup> That fact, as we shall see, has further bearings;

<sup>1</sup> Sayce, p. 48. "The title given to Merodach, the Sun-God, when he passed through the twelve zodiacal signs, was Gudi-bir, 'the bull of light.'" Cp. pp. 290, 292.

<sup>2</sup> Lenormant (*Chaldean Magic*, p. 56) rejects the idea that there was an astronomical significance in the Assyrian bull-slaying; but his arguments do not amount to a refutation. He rests his denial on one fragment of a conjuration, which makes demons bulls.

<sup>3</sup> The ram "supplied the favourite Dionysiak sacrifice." R. Brown, *The Great Dionysiak Myth*, ii, 65. In one version of the Dionysiak myth, Zeus changes Dionysos into a ram to save him from Heré. *Smith's Dict.*, art. DIONYSUS, citing Hyginus and Theon. Cp. Herodotus, ii, 42.

<sup>4</sup> Herodotus, as cited.

<sup>5</sup> Garucci, *Les Mystères du Syncretisme Phrygien*, p. 34. A ram was the



but thus far it surely counts for much as a proof of the zodiacal element in the symbolism of the ancient sophisticated sun worships. The notion of a Fish God is deeply rooted in several of the older eastern religions,<sup>1</sup> and though it may be explained as arising from the fancy that the sun was a fish, who plunged into the sea in the evening and emerged in the morning—a natural type of immortality for later mystics—it also strongly suggests an ancient connection with zodiacal astrolatry. In any case, I know of no more plausible explanation than the zodiacal one of the early Christian habit of calling Jesus Christ the Fish. The sign of the Fishes comes next the Ram in the zodiac; and that constellation had actually taken the place of the Ram, at the spring equinox, when this symbol came into use.<sup>2</sup>

We may further infer, when we read of Phrixos, the son of Athamas, who was carried to Colchis by a ram with a golden fleece,<sup>3</sup> and who in his statue on the Acropolis was represented as having “just sacrificed the ram to some God,”<sup>4</sup> that in some eastern cult<sup>5</sup> which the Greeks misunderstood, a deity was latterly figured as borne on the zodiacal Ram, in the manner of Mithras “bull-borne,” and as sacrificing the ram in its turn. And that there was a constant astronomical significance in the Mithraic cult in particular, we know from the testimony of Origen, that its mysteries included an elaborate representation of the movements and relations of the stars and the planets, and the movements of the disembodied human soul among these.<sup>6</sup>

Every widespread religion, however, is necessarily a complex of many ideas, and in the cult of Mithra this is abundantly seen. In the course of its western evolution it

first sacrifice offered by the first man and woman in the Persian myth; and they, as we saw (p. 304), are specially associated with Mithra.

<sup>1</sup> Cp. the illustrations collected in W. Simpson's *Jonah*, 1899.

<sup>2</sup> Cp. Gerald Massey, *Natural Genesis*, i, 454, ii, 389, sq., and the plate in Simpson's *Jonah*, p. 263, with the fish on the head of the Horus-bearing Isis. Horus had long been “the Fish.”

<sup>3</sup> Apollodorus, i, 9, § 1.

<sup>4</sup> Pausanias, i, 24.

<sup>5</sup> One of the children of Athamas in the myth is Melicertes—Melkarth. The story being one of child sacrifice by way of averting a drought, it has analogies to the myth of Abraham and Isaac, which is a late sophistication of an earlier legend. See Frazer, *G. B.* ii, 35, as to the Greek development of the myth.

<sup>6</sup> *Against Celsus*, vi, 22.



became closely associated, like that of Attis, with the popular worship of Cybelê, the Magna Mater, Mother of the Gods;<sup>1</sup> and in virtue of Roman military tradition it was bracketed with that of many specifically Roman deities. In the Mithraic cave-temples have been found images and names of Juno, Minerva, Apollo, Mars, Bacchus, Mercury, and Venus, "and especially Silvanus, who had taken on the character of a pantheistic God, doubtless because he was the Latin equivalent of the Greek Pan."<sup>2</sup> This, by the way, is not the sole reason for approximating Mithra to Pan. A collocation of the Sun-God with the Goat-God occurs constantly in Greek mythology, and can be clearly traced back to the Babylonian system, on which Mithraism had independently drawn.<sup>3</sup> The image of the slaying of the bull, in particular, whatever its original bearing, came to be associated specially with the idea of sacrifice and purification; and the great vogue of the Phrygian institutions of the Taurobolium and Criobolium,<sup>4</sup> or purification by the blood of bulls and rams, must have reacted on Mithraism, even if it were not of strictly Mithraic origin. Mithra, like Osiris<sup>5</sup> and Dionysos,<sup>6</sup> we saw,<sup>7</sup> was the bull as well as the God to whom the bull was sacrificed, even as Amun, to whom rams were sacrificed, was "the great ram";<sup>8</sup> and herein lies one of the germs of the dogma of the death and resurrection of the God; another being the ancient astronomical myth, to which we shall come later, of the Descent of the God to Hades. In the procedure of the Taurobolia and Criobolia, which grew very popular in the Roman world,<sup>9</sup> we have the literal and original meaning of the phrase "washed in the blood of the lamb"; the doctrine being that resurrection and eternal life were secured by

<sup>1</sup> Roscher, 3043-4; Cumont, *Textes et Monuments*, i, 161, 333.

<sup>2</sup> Roscher, 3045; Cumont, i, 147-8.

<sup>3</sup> See *Christianity and Mythology*, pp. 343-356.

<sup>4</sup> Referred to by Firmicus, c. 28.

<sup>5</sup> Plutarch, *Isis and Osiris*, cc. 20, 29, 39.

<sup>6</sup> Plutarch, *Quæstiones Græcæ*, 36.

<sup>7</sup> Above, p. 310. So in the Babylonian system "the Sun-God eventually became the monster slain by a solar hero." Sayce, p. 293. Cp. Hubert et Mauss, *Essai sur le sacrifice*, in *L'Année Sociologique*, ii, 129.

<sup>8</sup> Tiele, *Egyptian Religion*, p. 147.

<sup>9</sup> Gibbon, Bohn ed. ii, 145; *note*.



drenching or sprinkling with the actual blood of a sacrificial bull or ram, often doubtless a lamb, that being a common sacrifice from time immemorial, on the ground that for certain purposes the victim must be sexually pure. Thus we have such mortuary inscriptions as *Taurobolio criobolioque in aeternum renatus*, "By the bull-sacrifice and the ram-sacrifice born again for eternity."<sup>1</sup> But inasmuch as there was a constant tendency in the mystical systems to substitute symbolism for concrete usages, the Mithraists may be surmised to have ultimately performed their sacrificial rites in a less crude form than that described by Prudentius.<sup>2</sup>

### § 7.—*The Cultus.*

Resembling other cults at some points, the Mithraic was latterly markedly peculiar in others. The great specialty of this worship, as we learn from several writers, is that it was carried on in caves—so far at least as its special mysteries were concerned—the cave being considered so all-important that where natural caves did not exist, the devotees made artificial ones.<sup>3</sup> Porphyry puts it on record<sup>4</sup> that the "Persians, mystically signifying the descent of the soul into the sublunary regions, and its regression thence, initiate the mystic in a place which they call a cavern. For, as Euboulos says, Zoroaster was the first

<sup>1</sup> Given in note on Firmicus in ed. Hackiana, 1672, p. 56. See it also in Orelli, No. 2352, and in Cumont, *Inscr.* 17 (ii, 96). See further in Cumont, No. 20-24, and in Orelli, No. 1899, 1900, 2130, 2199, 2322, 2326, 2328, 2330, 2331, 2351, 2353, 2361. Compare Boeckh, 6012, *b, c.* Here the taurobolium and criobolium are directly connected with Mithraism; and it would appear from Strabo (xv, 3, § 14) that the Mazdeans practised something very like it, slaying victims over pits into which the blood dripped. Concerning the taurobolium at Athens, see Dittenberger, *Inscr. Atticæ et. Roman.*, 172, 173. Cp. King, *Gnostics*, p. 154.

<sup>2</sup> *De Coronis*, Hymn X, 1009-1050. The initiate was placed in a pit over which there was a grating. On this was placed the animal to be slain—young bull or young ram—and the blood dropped on the votary beneath. See Cumont, i, 187, 334, as to the origins and vogue of the Taurobolium (properly *Tauropolium*).

<sup>3</sup> See Justin Martyr, *Dial. with Trypho*, cc. 70, 78. Caves were, therefore, made in honour of Mithra, as temples in honour of other Gods. See Orelli, 2340, 2341. There were no other Mithraic temples. Cumont, ii, 57-8.

<sup>4</sup> *De antro nympharum*, vi. Cp. Firmicus, v.



who consecrated in the neighbouring mountains of Persia a cave, in which there were flowers and fountains, in honour of Mithra, the maker and father of all things—a cave, according to him, being an image of the world, *which was made by Mithra*. But the things contained in the cavern.....were symbols of the mundane elements and climates.”

This explanation of the cave was not improbably suggested by a well-known passage in Plato;<sup>1</sup> and it is obvious that the custom must have had some simpler origin. At an early culture-stage among the Romans, indeed, we find the name *mundus* given to the sacred cave on the Palatine Hill into which the people threw specimens of all their domestic utensils and a handful of Roman earth.<sup>2</sup> This is remarkably close to the symbolic idea in Porphyry; but there must have been an earlier form still.<sup>3</sup> A cave, in fact, seems to have been the earliest form of temple.<sup>4</sup> It is easy to understand how to half-civilised man caves would have a hundred mysterious significances, as places for dwelling or meeting made by the Deity himself; and fire- or sun-worshippers would have the special motives supplied by finding in caves the remains of the fires of earlier men, and by the not unnatural theory that the sun himself went into some cave when he went below the horizon at night. Indeed, Porphyry admits that caves in the most remote periods of antiquity were consecrated to the Gods, before temples were. Thus the Curetes in Crete dedicated a cavern to Zeus; in Arcadia, a cave was sacred to the moon, and to Lycean Pan; and in Naxos to Dionysos.<sup>5</sup> “But,” he

<sup>1</sup> *Republic*, B. vii.

<sup>2</sup> Macrobius, *Saturnalia*, i, 16; Festus, s. v. *Mundus*.

<sup>3</sup> Here I venture to dissent from the view of M. Cumont (i, 6) that the Persian custom of sacrificing in the open air “gave birth” to that of worshipping Mithra in caverns. I cannot follow the supposed causation. The Roman *mundus* seems to have passed for the entrance to the lower world.

<sup>4</sup> See the article “The Mycenaean Tree and Pillar Cult and its Mediterranean Relations,” by A. J. Evans, in the *Journal of Hellenic Studies*, vol. xxi (1901), p. 99, as to the multitude of caves containing votive and sacrificial deposits found in Crete. Cp. *Christianity and Mythology*, p. 217, note.

<sup>5</sup> The usage was in fact nearly universal. Cp. Wait, *Jewish, Oriental, and Classical Antiquities*, p. 47. Hermes and Zeus were cave-born



adds, "wherever Mithra was known, they propitiated the God in a cavern."<sup>1</sup>

It appears that the greatest sanctity attached to caves in the living rock; and there are many remains of Mithraic altars cut in rocks;<sup>2</sup> nay more, the rock came to be specially associated with Mithra,<sup>3</sup> who was named "rock-born"; and the phrase, "Θεὸς ἐκ πέτρας, God out of the rock," or "Mithras out of the rock," became one of the commonest formulas of the cultus.<sup>4</sup>

In these rock-caves, then, or in artificial caves, the priests of Mithra celebrated the habitual rites and the special mysteries of their religion. The rising sun would be daily hailed with joy,<sup>5</sup> as among the Jewish Essenes, and sun-worshippers everywhere; and during the night, when the sun was hidden, special prayers would be offered up. The first day of the week, Sunday, was apparently from time immemorial consecrated to Mithra by Mithraists; and as the Sun-God was pre-eminently "the Lord,"

(Homerid. *Hymn to Hermes*; Hesiod, *Theogony*, 483); and Typhon in turn was born in the Cilician caves (Æschylus, *Prom.*, 359-60; Pindar *Pythia*, i, 32). The resting places of Apollo and Dionysos were alike caves (Pindar, *Olymp.* vii, 57; Diod. Sic. iii, 59). Finally, Apollo, Dionysos, Herakles, Cybele, Demeter, Poseidon, and Zeus were all worshipped in caves (Pomponius Mela, i, 5; Pausanias, i, 28; ii, 23; iii, 25; vii, 25; viii, 15, 36, 42; Cicero, *De natura deorum*, i, 42; Strabo, xvi, 2, § 38). In Phrygia, Herakles, Hermes, and Apollo were specially called "the cave Gods" (Pausanias, x, 32). But whereas all these deities, starting from the cave, which is the primary temple, acquired loftier fanes, the cult of Mithra in the west reverted and adhered to the cave, natural or artificial.

<sup>1</sup> *De antro*, xx. Cp. Statius, *Theb.* i, 719-20; and Commodianus: "vertebatque boves alienos semper in antris" (*Instructiones*, i, 13).

<sup>2</sup> Cp. the pictures in Jacob Bryant's *Analysis of Ancient Mythology*, ed. 1774, i, 232, 234, 294; and in Cumont's *Textes et Monuments*, *passim*.

<sup>3</sup> As with Apollo, born in rocky Delos, to whom the hymnist sings: "Thou hast had delight in all rocks, in the steep crags of tall mountains, in rivers hurrying seaward, in shingles sloping to the tide, and harbours of the sea" (Homerid. *Hymn to the Delian Apollo*). The idea seems to be that the mountains and rivers and harbours were all visible from the place of the God's birth on Mount Cynthus (*see ll.* 25-44); while the rock, which can strike fire, is his earthly symbol, and as it were his source. Johannes Lydus (*De mensibus*, iii, § 26) gives as the reason for Mithra being held rock-born that rock is "the central point of fire."

<sup>4</sup> Firmicus, *De Errore*, xxi; Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*, c. 70; Jerome, *Adversus Jovinianum*, i, 7 (Migne, xxiii, col. 219); Windischmann, pp. 61-2, citing Commodianus and Johannes Lydus.

<sup>5</sup> Under the Mazdean system, prayer was offered to Mithra thrice daily; at dawn, at noon, and at sunset. (Rawlinson, *Seventh Oriental Monarchy*, p. 628, citing Spiegel, *Tradit. Schrift. d. Pars.* p. 135.)



Sunday was "the Lord's day" long before the Christian era.<sup>1</sup> On that day there must have been special Mithraic worship. But we have some exact information as to the two chief Mithraic ceremonies or festivals, those of Christmas and Easter, the winter solstice and the vernal equinox, the birthday of the Sun-God and the period of his sacrifice and his triumph.<sup>2</sup> That Christmas is a solar festival of unknown antiquity, which the early Christians appropriated to their Christ in total ignorance of the real time of his birth, is no longer denied by competent Christian scholars—when they happen to allude to the subject. That Easter is also a solar festival is perhaps not so freely recognised.<sup>3</sup> But we know not only that Mithras and Osiris (and Horus), like so many other solar and vegetal deities, were especially adored at the vernal equinox,<sup>4</sup> but that in these worships there were special formulas representing, apparently at this date,<sup>5</sup> the symbolical death of the deity, the search for his body, and the finding of it. The Christian Firmicus wrathfully tells how the priests of Osiris, who have a representation of the God in the most secret part of their temples, mourn for a certain number of days (presumptively forty,<sup>6</sup> =Lent), while professedly searching for the scattered members of his mangled body, till at length they feign to have found it, when they finish their mourning and rejoice, saying, "We have found him: rejoice we."<sup>7</sup> And we learn also from Tertullian that Osiris in the mysteries was buried and came to life again.<sup>8</sup> Some such idea would seem to be

<sup>1</sup> Above, p. 170, note.

<sup>2</sup> Julian, *In regem solem*, cc. 19, 20; Preller, *Röm. Myth.* p. 755; von Bohlen, *Das alte Indien*, i, 258; Creuzer, *Das Mithræum von Neuenheim*, p. 29. Cp. *Christianity and Mythology*, p. 332.

<sup>3</sup> Or rather a luni-solar. It is singular that this movable feast should be celebrated as an *anniversary* of an event with apparently no orthodox misgivings.

<sup>4</sup> Macrobius, *Saturnalia*, i, 18. Cp. Preller, *Röm. Myth.*, 1865, p. 760.

<sup>5</sup> But see Plutarch, *On Isis and Osiris*, 39, which creates a difficulty. There was considerable variance in the dates of the solar festivals in different countries. Cp. Julian, *In regem solem*, c. 20, and Max Müller, *Natural Religion*, pp. 529-30.

<sup>6</sup> Compare the forty nights' mourning in the mysteries of Proserpine, *De Errore*, c. xxviii (xxvii, ed. Halm).

<sup>7</sup> *De Errore*, last cit.

<sup>8</sup> *Against Marcion*, i, 13.



implied in the ritual performed by the people of Patræ at the annual festival of Dionysos, when the God, called *Asymnetes* ("the Judge" or "the King"), represented by his image in a chest, was carried outside of the temple in the night, to be hailed by the worshippers. Of the image in the chest it was obscurely told that the sight of it had driven Eurypilus mad—a suggestion that it may have been dismembered.<sup>1</sup>

But as to Mithraism the details (if only we can be sure of one identification) are still more precise. The worshippers, Firmicus tells us,<sup>2</sup> lay a stone image by night on a bier and liturgically mourn for it, this image representing the dead God. This symbolical corpse is then placed in the tomb, and after a time is withdrawn from the tomb, whereupon the worshippers rejoice, exhorting one another to be of good hope; lights are brought in; and the priest anoints the throats of the devotees, murmuring slowly: "Be of good courage; ye have been instructed in the mysteries, and ye shall have salvation from your sorrows." As the stone image would be laid in a rock-tomb—the God being pre-eminently "from the rock"—the parallel to a central episode in the Christian legend is sufficiently striking; and in view of the duplication of the motive on all hands—in the cults of Osiris, Attis, Adonis, Dionysos—it is impossible to doubt that we are dealing with a universal myth.

To assign the origin of the rite to any known religion would be unwarrantable; nor is it even certain whether it was originally a part of a solar or of a vegetal cult, though there are grounds for ascribing it to the latter. In any case, it was adaptable to both. It would seem to be implied in the myth-theory so ably built up by Mr. Frazer that the God who dies and rises again does so not as Sun-God but

<sup>1</sup> Pausanias, vii, 19, 20. Cp. ii, 7, where it is told that the Sicyonians have "statues in a secret place, which one night in every year they bring to the temple of Dionysos."

<sup>2</sup> *De errore*, xxiii (xxii). I have elsewhere (*Christianity and Mythology*, p. 417, note) discussed Mr. Frazer's view that this passage in Firmicus refers to the cult of Attis. The evidence is clearly against it, the stone image belonging distinctly to the cult of Mithra, though similar rites, with wooden images, belonged to the worships of Attis and Osiris. In the Dionysiak cult, however, the image may have been of stone.



as Vegetation-God; and it may be granted that the vegetation principle is either primary or present in the cults of Attis, Adonis, Dionysos, and Osiris. But on the other hand the pre-eminently solar Herakles dies on the funeral pyre, descends to Hades, and reascends to Heaven; the obviously solar Samson of the Semitic myth, who also in its earlier form probably descended to the underworld,<sup>1</sup> dies ostensibly in his solar capacity (with shorn hair,<sup>2</sup> blinded, and placed between the "pillars" = Herakles' pillars), and must, as God, have risen again; and even the strictly solar Apollo, as is shown by K. O. Müller,<sup>3</sup> made his Descent into Hades, as did Orpheus, the presumable Day-God. Now, the Descent into Hades was for mortals simply Death; and since the God as such cannot cease to exist, he may as well be said to die in one way as in another. In all these cases the explanation is more or less clearly astronomical; and it is so in the case of the Descent of Mithra to Hades, noticed later; though, as above remarked, the sacrificial principle, identifying the God with the sacrifice, would so complicate the doctrine as to make the solar cult approximate closely to that of the Vegetation-God.

This, however, was only one of the Mithraic mysteries, presumably celebrated once a year. We have further records of another enacted at the initiation of every new devotee, and probably repeated in some form frequently. Justin Martyr,<sup>4</sup> after describing the institution of the Christian Lord's Supper, as narrated in the Gospels, goes on to say: "Which the wicked devils have imitated in the mysteries of Mithra, commanding the same thing to be done. For, that bread and a cup of water<sup>5</sup> are placed with

<sup>1</sup> Steinthal on *The Legend of Samson*, § 3.

<sup>2</sup> It is true that in some cults this might signify only previous dedication and the preparation for sacrifice. In the practice of the man-sacrificing Khonds, for instance, the victim was kept unshorn till ten or twelve days before the sacrifice, when his hair was cut (Macpherson, *Memorials*, p. 117). But in the story of Samson the shearing of the hair has clearly also the significance of the weakening of the sun's heat.

<sup>3</sup> *Introd. to Mythol.*, note, pp. 244-6. Cp. Preller, *Gr. Myth.* ii. 317.

<sup>4</sup> *1 Apol.* c. 66.

<sup>5</sup> The Ebionite Christians (the earliest), it will be remembered, celebrated the communion rite with bread and water (Epiphanius, *Hær.* 30). And water was mixed with wine in later usage; see Bingham, *Christian Antiquities*, B. xv, c. ii, § 7 (ed. 1855, v. 242).



certain incantations in the mystic rites of one who is being initiated, you either know or can learn." And this is borne out by Tertullian, who intimates<sup>1</sup> that "the devil, by the mysteries of his idols, imitates even the main parts of the divine mysteries. He also baptises his worshippers in water, and makes them believe that this purifies them of their crimes.....There Mithra sets his mark on the forehead of his soldiers; he celebrates the oblation of bread; he offers an image of the resurrection, and presents at once the crown and the sword; he limits his chief priest to a single marriage: he even has his virgins and his ascetics (*continentes*)."<sup>2</sup> Again,<sup>3</sup> the devil "has gone about to apply to the worship of idols those very things in which consists the administration of Christ's sacraments."

Reference is here made to a certain ceremony of initiation. It strongly suggests the mysteries which are practised in our own time among savage tribes in many parts of the world.<sup>4</sup> The complete initiation of a worshipper, we know, was an elaborate and even a painful process, involving many austerities, trial by water, trial by fire, by cold, by hunger, by thirst, by scourging, by branding or bleeding,<sup>5</sup> and the mock menace of death.<sup>6</sup> Of these austerities different but vague and scanty accounts are given. According to some accounts they lasted fifteen days; according to others, for forty eight:<sup>6</sup> one old writer<sup>7</sup> alleges eighty different kinds

<sup>1</sup> *Præscr.* c. 40. Cp. *De Bapt.* c. 5; *De Corona*, c. 15.

<sup>2</sup> *Præscr.* 40.

<sup>3</sup> Cp. Cumont, i, 315-316.

<sup>4</sup> On this see Mr. King's *Gnostics*, p. 139, citing Aug. in Johann. i, 7. Mem. Revelation, xiii, 17; also Gregory Nazianzen's *First Invective against Julian*, c. 70.

<sup>5</sup> On this see the details collected by Mr. Frazer, *Golden Bough*, 2nd ed. iii, 422-445, of the primitive cults in which "death at initiation" is a ritual feature. This is one of the origins of the idea of being "born again."

<sup>6</sup> Sainte-Croix, *Recherches*, ii, 126, n.

<sup>7</sup> Nonnus, cited by Selden, *De Diis Syris*, Syntag. i, c. 5; and by Windischmann, p. 69. See there also the important citation from Elias of Crete, according to whom the trials were twelve, and were "per ignem, per frigus, per famem, per sitim, per flagra, per itineris molestiam, aliaque id genus." Compare Suidas, as cited pp. 328-9. As to the origin of the trials, see Darmesteter on *Mihir Yasht*, xxx, 122. Darmesteter suggests that the trials may be traceable to that passage, which runs:—"Ahuramazda answered, Let them wash their bodies three days and three nights; let them undergo thirty strokes for the sacrifice and prayer unto Mithra....Let them wash their bodies two days and two nights; let them undergo twenty strokes for," etc.



of trials. It is more likely that they numbered twelve, seeing that on the Mithraic monuments we find representations of twelve episodes, probably corresponding to the twelve labours in the stories of Herakles, Samson, and other sun-heroes; but probably also connected with the trials of the initiated.<sup>1</sup> More explicitly we know from Porphyry and from Jerome that the devotees were divided into a number of different degrees, symbolically marked by the names of birds and animals, and apparently by wearing, during some of the rites, the skins or heads of these animals.<sup>2</sup> Porphyry<sup>3</sup> mentions grades of lions, lionesses, and crows, and higher grades of eagles and hawks; Jerome<sup>4</sup> speaks of crow, gryphon, soldier, lion, Persian (or Perses), sun, Bromios = roarer (or, the bull), and father. Out of the various notices, partly by hypothesis, M. Lajard has constructed a not quite trustworthy scheme,<sup>5</sup> representing twelve Mithraic degrees: three terrestrial, the soldier, the lion,<sup>6</sup> and the bull; three aërial, the vulture, the ostrich, and the raven; three igneous, the gryphon, the horse, and the sun; and three divine, the grade of fathers, named eagle, sparrow-hawk, and father of fathers.<sup>7</sup> It makes a sufficiently grotesque

<sup>1</sup> On the twelve episodes, cp. Sainte-Croix, as cited, with King, *Gnostics*, p. 128. Compare the "twelve stoles," in the mysteries of Isis, mentioned by Apuleius (*Metam.*, B. xi). There is a remarkable correspondence between the twelve Mithraic trials and twelve forms of Hindoo penance (especially as regards the last), as described by Maurice, *Indian Antiquities*, 1794, v. 981. These twelve orders of fast include trials lasting fifteen days; and the whole would cover more than eighty days.

<sup>2</sup> On this practice cp. Cumont, as last cited, and W. Simpson, *Jonah*, 1899, pp. 29-33.

<sup>3</sup> *De Abstinencia*, iv, 16.

<sup>4</sup> *Epistola cvii* (vii), *ad Lætam*.

<sup>5</sup> *Recherches sur le Culte Public et Mystères de Mithra*, ed. 1867, p. 132, *et seq.* The main authority for twelve degrees is Porphyry's citation from Pallas as to the signs of the zodiac; but M. Lajard's list is not zodiacal. The grade of the ostrich is particularly ill made-out (p. 338).

<sup>6</sup> Every animal's name used must have had a symbolical meaning. Thus we have it through Tertullian (*Against Marcion*, i, 13), that "the lions of Mithra are mysteries of arid and scorched nature."

<sup>7</sup> Apart from dubieties of detail, it may be taken as certain that the common principle of quadrature, or grouping in fours, was distinctly recognised in the Mithraic cult; and likewise the principle of trinities or sets of three. In an old Mithraic monument at Mycenê are figured three rings and four balls. For the Persians, too, as for Greeks and Romans, the



list, in this or any other form; but it is the old story— all religions are absurd to those who do not believe them;<sup>1</sup> and it is not well for those who keep a private conservatory, however small, to throw stones.

§ 8.—*The Creed.*

We have thus far briefly examined what may for the most part be termed the skeleton or dry bones of the Mithraic religion, so far as we can trace them, at the period when it seemed to be successfully competing with Christianity. What of the inner life, the spiritual message and attraction which there must have been to give the cult its hold over the Roman Empire? Here it is that our ignorance becomes most sharply felt. So far as Christian zeal could suppress all good report of Mithraism, this was done, when Christianity—I will not say overthrew, but—absorbed the Mithraic movement. There were in antiquity, we know from Porphyry,<sup>2</sup> several elaborate treatises setting forth the religion of Mithra; and every

Sun's chariot had four horses (*Mihir Yasht*, xxxi, 125), who stood for the four seasons as well as the "four elements"—earth, air, fire, and water. Heaven, too, was by them represented as quadrate. See Bähr, *Symbolik des Mosaischen Cultus*, 1837, i, 166; also ii, 147, as to the priestly arrangement of the 12 signs in 4 rows of threes; and Creuzer, as there cited. That four and seven (4 + 3) were numbers always occupying the Persian mystics we may gather from a quatrain of Omar Khayyam (cited by Bähr, p. 167) exhorting a Sufi to give them up and drink wine.

<sup>1</sup> There is a curious correspondence between M. Lajard's four grades and the emblems of the four evangelists given by Augustine: Matthew = lion, Mark = man (this order often reversed), Luke = ox, John = eagle. See "Variorum Teachers' Bible," *Aids to Students*, p. 10. These, however, were introduced into Judaism from Assyrian sources at the exile. Cp. Ezekiel, i, 10; x, 14; and Rev. iv, 7. It is interesting to note in this connection that the four Egyptian amenthes or genii of Hades, the mediators for the dead, had respectively the heads of a man, a hawk, an ape, and a dog (Sharpe, *Hist. of Egypt*, 7th ed. i, 163), while the Assyrian cherubim were compounded of lion, eagle, and man, with a general approximation to the ox. The Arabs had the same symbols (Wait, as cited, p. 155). There is yet another source for the idea in the zodiac, which figures so largely in the Apocalypse. The four "corner" constellations were the Lion, the Bull, the Waterman, and the Scorpion. But the latter, being an evil and destructive sign, could not be given to an Evangel, so there would naturally be substituted that of the Eagle, which rises before that of the Man, and like that is opposite the Lion.

<sup>2</sup> *De Abstinencia*, ii, 56; iv, 16.



one of these has been destroyed by the care of the Church.<sup>1</sup> They doubtless included much narrative as well as much didactic matter, the knowledge of which would colour the whole religious consciousness of Mithra's worshippers. We shall see later that clues still exist, some of which have been overlooked in studies of Mithraism, to some of the myths of the cult; and we may safely decide in general that just as the Brahmanas prove the currency of myths concerning the Vedic Gods which are not mentioned in the Vedic hymns, so there must have existed a Mithraic mythology which is not contained in the Zendavesta, that being, though not a simple collection of hymns, a compilation for purposes of worship. The reconstruction of that mythology, however, is now hopeless. Too little attention, perhaps, has been paid to Creuzer's theory that the name Perseus = Perses, "the Persian," and that the Perseus myth is really an early adaptation of the Mithra myth.<sup>2</sup> The story of Perseus certainly has an amount of action and colour unusual in Greek myth, and no less suggestive of Oriental origin than is the legend of Herakles. But unless new evidence be forthcoming, such a hypothesis can at most stand for a possibility.

And so with the didactic side of Mithraism: we must limit our inferences to our positive data. These include the evidence of the Vendidad ritual that there was associated with the cult a teaching of happy immortality for the righteous, very much on the lines of that of Christianity. An extract<sup>3</sup> will make the point clear<sup>4</sup>:—

27 (89) " (Zarathustra asked) O Maker of the material

<sup>1</sup> It is remarkable that even the treatise of Firmicus is mutilated at a passage (v) where he seems to be accusing Christians of following Mithraic usages, and at the beginning, where he may have made a similar proposition.

<sup>2</sup> See Guigniaut's French ed. of Creuzer's *Symbolik*, i, 368, ii, 158. Cp. Cox, *Myth. of Aryan Nations*, p. 303, as to the identity of the Perseus and Herakles myths.

<sup>3</sup> *Vendidad*, Fargard, xix. I have put synonyms in the place of one or two reiterated terms, to give the passage some of the literary benefit that is constantly lent in this way by the translators of the Bible.

<sup>4</sup> For a recent study on the Mazdean conception of a future state on somewhat pro-Christian lines see the research of M. Nathan, *La vie future d'après le Mazdéisme, à la lumière des croyances parallèles dans les autres religions*. Annales du Musée Guimet. Paris, 1901.



world, thou Holy One! Where are the rewards given? Where does the rewarding take place? Where is the recompense fulfilled? Whereto do men come to take the reward that, during their life in the material world, they have won for their souls?

- 28 (90) "Ahura Mazda answered: When the man is dead, when his time is past, then the wicked, evil-doing Dævas cut off his eyesight. On the third night, when the dawn appears and brightens, when Mithra, the God with beautiful weapons, reaches the all-happy mountains, and the sun is rising:
- 29 (94) "Then the fiend, named Vizaresha, O Spitama Zarathustra, carries off in bonds the souls of the wicked Dæva-worshippers who live in sin. The soul enters the way made by Time, and open both to the wicked and to the righteous. At the end of the Kinvad bridge, the holy bridge made by the Mazda, they ask for their spirits and souls the reward for the worldly goods which they gave away here below.
- 30 (98) "Then comes the beautiful, well-shapen, strong and graceful maid, with the dogs at her sides, one who can discern, who has many children, happy and of high understanding. She makes the soul of the righteous one go up above the Hara-berezaiti; above the Kinvad bridge; she places it in the presence of the heavenly Gods themselves.
- 31 (102) "Uprises Vohu-manô from his golden seat; Vohu-manô exclaims: How hast thou come to us, thou Holy One, from that decaying world into this undecaying one?
- 32 (105) "Gladly pass the souls of the righteous to the golden seat of Ahura-Mazda, to the golden seat of Amesha-Spentas, to the Garôumânem [house of songs], the abode of Ahura-Mazda, the abode of the Amesha-Spentas, the abode of all the other holy beings.
- 33 (108) "As to the godly man that has been cleansed, the wicked evil-doing Dævas tremble at the perfume of his soul after death, as doth a sheep on which a wolf is pouncing.
- 34 (110) "The souls of the righteous are gathered together there: Nairyô-Sangha is with them: a messenger of Ahura-Mazda is Nairyô-Sangha."



It is noteworthy, further, that in some codices of the Avesta is found this formula: "He has gained nothing who has not gained the soul: He shall gain nothing who shall not gain the soul." The meaning is "gain a place in Paradise,"<sup>1</sup> and the passage looks very like an original form of a well-known Christian text.

For the rest, the Zendavesta, like most other Sacred Books, insists on the normal morals strenuously enough. It has strange special teachings as to the sacro-sanctity of the dog; and its veto alike on the burning and the burying of bodies<sup>2</sup> is peculiar to Mazdeism; but these beliefs do not seem to have affected later Mithraism; whereas probably its special stress on truthfulness—not paralleled in the Ten Commandments—was maintained. We cannot, indeed, tell how the Mithraic priests dealt with the special problems of the life of the Roman Empire; but we are entitled none the less to protest against the loose revival of unfounded and exploded charges against the cult. To this day we find Christian scholars either saying or hinting that Mithraism was signalised in the Roman period by human sacrifices. For this there is no justification.<sup>3</sup> We do know that during the whole of the first three or four centuries it was charged against the Christians, by Jews or Pagans, that they were wont to sacrifice a child at their mysteries.<sup>4</sup> That charge was doubtless false, but it was constantly made. On the other hand, the only kind of record founded-on for the charge against Mithraism is one which rebuts it. Sainte-Croix, following a plainly worthless suggestion of the ecclesiastical historian Socrates,<sup>5</sup> referred<sup>6</sup> to a passage in the life of Commodus by Lampridius, in the Augustan history, in support of his insinuation that Mithraism involved human sacrifice. But this passage<sup>7</sup> explicitly says that Commodus

<sup>1</sup> Darmesteter's Zendavesta, i, 370, 2nd ed. (*Fragments*).

<sup>2</sup> Darmesteter, *Introd.* p. lxxvii.

<sup>3</sup> Cp. Cumont, i, 69.

<sup>4</sup> Cp. Origen, *Against Celsus*, vi, 27; Minucius Felix, *Octavius*, c. 9; Tertullian, *Apol.* c. 7.

<sup>5</sup> B. iii, c. 2; B. v, c. 16.

<sup>6</sup> *Recherches*, ii, 135. This false suggestion is implicitly copied by Milman, *Hist. of Chr.* B. I. c. 1, *note*.

<sup>7</sup> Cap. 9. Sainte-Croix offers an extraordinary mistranslation of the passage.



“polluted the rites of Mithras by a real homicide, where it is usual for something to be said or done for the purpose of causing terror” (*quum illic aliquid ad speciem timoris vel dici vel fingi solent*). The same scholar makes another reference which equally serves to confute him;<sup>1</sup> yet an English writer later speaks of “the dark and fearful mysteries” of Mithra, repeating the old insinuation.<sup>2</sup> Selden<sup>3</sup> quotes from Photius<sup>4</sup> a statement that men, women, and boys were sacrificed to Mithra; but that assertion also is plainly valueless, coming as it does from a Christian writer of the tenth century, and being absolutely without ancient corroboration. What seems to have happened was a symbolical sacrifice, perhaps followed up by a symbolical eating of the God’s image—proceedings which, there is good reason to suppose, occurred in the mysteries of the early Christians.<sup>5</sup>

But there is far more testimony, such as it is, for the charge of infamous procedure against the Christians than against the Mithraists. The Mithraic mysteries, save for the fact that they involved real austerities and a scenic representation of death,<sup>6</sup> were no more dark and fearful than the Christian mysteries are known to have been, not to speak of what these are *said* to have been. There lies against them no such imputation of licence as was constantly brought against the midnight meetings of the Christians, or as is specifically brought by St. Paul against his own converts at Corinth. Their purpose was unquestionably moral as well as consolatory.<sup>7</sup> In the words of Suidas, the worshipper

<sup>1</sup> To Porphyry, *De Abstin.* ii, 56; a passage which says only that down till the time of Hadrian it was the custom to sacrifice a virgin to Pallas at Laodicea. Sainte-Croix seems to have blundered over the context, in which the detail as to the sacrifice at Laodicea is referred to a historian Pallas, who had *written so well* on the mysteries of Mithra. This may be the basis also of the assertion by Creuzer (*Symbolik*, i, 363) that Hadrian’s edict was directed against Mithraism.

<sup>2</sup> Wright, *The Celt, the Roman, and the Saxon*, 4th ed. p. 328. The insinuation is found also in the encyclopædias.

<sup>3</sup> *De Diis Syris*, Syntag. i, c. 6.

<sup>4</sup> *In Athanasii vita*, cod. 258.

<sup>5</sup> Above, pp. 134–5, 201–4. Cp. *Christianity and Mythology*, pp. 218–224, 386–392; Grant Allen, *Evolution of Idea of God*, p. 345. And see below, p. 334.

<sup>6</sup> Even this may have been an early Christian usage. Note the force of Gal. iii, 1; vi, 17.

<sup>7</sup> See Origen, *Against Celsus*, iii, 59; Julian, *Cæsares*, end. Homerid.



went through his trials in order that he should become holy and passionless. In the course of the initiation, as we know from the unwilling admiration of Tertullian,<sup>1</sup> the devotee, called the soldier of Mithra, was offered a crown, which it was his part to refuse, saying that Mithra was his crown. And everything points to the enunciation of a theory of expiation of and purification from sin, in which Mithra figured as Mediator and Saviour, actually undergoing a symbolic sacrifice, and certainly securing to his worshippers eternal life.<sup>2</sup> As to the doctrine of immortality being pre-Christian, it is now quite unnecessary to speak; and the whole Mithraic symbolism implies such a teaching. On most of the bull monuments, it will be remembered, there stand beside Mithra two figures, one holding a raised and one a lowered torch. These signified primarily sunrise and sunset, or rising spring sun and sinking autumn sun; but, as Lessing<sup>3</sup> long ago showed, they were also the ancient symbols for life and death, and would further signify the fall and return of the soul.<sup>4</sup>

Nor was this the only point at which Mithraism is known to have competed with Christianity in what pass for its highest attractions. The doctrine of the *Logos*, the Incarnate Word or Reason, which Christianity absorbed through the Platonising Jews of Alexandria, was present in Mithraism, and of prior derivation. That Mithra was "the Word" appears from the Avesta.<sup>5</sup> In the Vendidad, too,<sup>6</sup> Zarathustra is made to praise successively Mithra "of the most glorious weapons," Sraosha, "the Holy One," and "the Holy Word, the most glorious," thus

*Hymn to Demeter*, end; K. O. Müller, *Introd. to Mythology*, ch. xii, § 23. Cp. Preller, *Griechische Mythologie*, i, 497; and, as to the other pagan mysteries, the admissions of Mosheim, notes on Cudworth, Harrison's ed. iii, 296-7.

<sup>1</sup> *De Corona*, c. 15. This is corroborated by a scene on one of the monuments (reproduced in Roscher's *Lexikon*) in which the initiate greets Mithra, and seems to receive from him his solar nimbus. See it in Cumont, ii, 336.

<sup>2</sup> See Garucci, *Les Mystères du Syncretisme Phrygien*, passim. Cp. Windischmann (p. 53) as to the older cultus; and Roscher, s.v. *Mithra*, 3055 (20-33) as to the God's being a Saviour-Sacrifice.

<sup>3</sup> *Wie die Alten den Tod gebildet*. See p. 51 in 1869 ed. of *Werke*, Bd. v, and figures.

<sup>4</sup> So Creuzer, *Das Mithræum von Neuenheim*, pp. 41-2.

<sup>5</sup> Khordah Avesta, xxvi, 107.

<sup>6</sup> Fargard xix, 15 (52-4).



joining and in effect identifying Mithra with the Word as well as joining him with the Holy Spirit. And Emanuel Deutsch<sup>1</sup> was of opinion that the Metatron<sup>2</sup> of the Talmud (which he equates with the Ideas of Plato, the *Logos* of Philo, the "World of Aziluth" of the Kabbalists, the *Sophia* or Power of the Gnostics and the *Nous* of Plotinus)<sup>3</sup> was "most probably nothing but Mithra."<sup>4</sup> As the Metatron is on the Jewish side identified with the "Angel" promised as leader and commander to the Hebrews in Palestine,<sup>5</sup> and that angel is quasi-historically represented by Joshua = Jesus, the chain of allusion from Mithra to the Christ is thus curiously complete. In respect of the concept of a Trinity, as we have already seen, the parallel continues. By the admission of a Catholic theologian, the Gods Ahura-Mazda, Sraosha, and Mithra constitute an ostensible trinity closely analogous to that of the later Christists;<sup>6</sup> and yet again Mithra, himself approaching to supreme status, rides to battle with Sraosha at his right and Rashnu at his left hand;<sup>7</sup> or else with Rashnu on his right, and Kista, the holy one (female) white-clothed, on his left.<sup>8</sup>

There seems no good reason for supposing that the doctrines of the *Logos* and the Trinity reached the Persians through the Greeks:<sup>9</sup> on the contrary, they probably acquired them from Babylonian sources, on which the Greeks also drew; and it was not improbably their version of the *Logos* idea that gave the lead to the Philonic and Christian form, in which the Word is explicitly "the light of the world."

<sup>1</sup> *Literary Remains*, p. 50.

<sup>2</sup> As to whom see Hershon, *Genesis with a Talmudical Commentary*, pp. 23-4.

<sup>3</sup> He is further the "Angel of Great Counsel" (Isaiah, ix, 5, Sept.) and heavenly judge, here again equating with Mithra. Cp. Oxlee, *Christ. Doct. on the Principles of Judaism*, ii, 329.

<sup>4</sup> Cp. Darmesteter, *Introd. to Zendavesta*, 2nd ed. c. 5, as to Jewish and Persian interactions. M. Darmesteter leant unwarrantably to the view that the Persians were the borrowers, but finally pronounces (p. lxxviii) Jew and Persian alike to have borrowed from Platonism. See above, Part II, ch. ii, § 2, for a criticism of this view.

<sup>5</sup> Cahen's *Bible*, note on Exod. xxiii, 21; Hershon, as cited.

<sup>6</sup> E. L. Fischer, *Heidenthum und Offenbarung*, 1878, pp. 121, 130, points to the presence of both *Logos* and Trinity in the Mithraic system. As to the trinitarian idea, cp. Cumont, i, 298, 331.

<sup>7</sup> *Mihir Yasht*, xxv. 100.

<sup>8</sup> *Id.* xxxi, 126.

<sup>9</sup> Above, p. 214, sq.



§ 9.—*Mithraism and Christianity.*

Of course we are told that the Mithraic rites and mysteries were borrowed and imitated from Christianity.<sup>1</sup> English scholars of good standing are still found to say that the Mithraic and other mysteries "furnish a strange and hardly accidental parody of the most sacred mysteries of Christianity."<sup>2</sup> The refutation of this notion, as has been pointed out by M. Havet,<sup>3</sup> lies in the language of those Christian fathers who spoke of Mithraism. Three of them, as we have seen, speak of the Mithraic resemblances to Christian rites as being the work of devils. Now, if the Mithraists *had* simply imitated the historic Christians, the obvious course for the latter would be simply to say so. But Justin Martyr expressly argues that the demons *anticipated* the Christian mysteries and prepared parodies of them beforehand. "When I hear," he says,<sup>4</sup> "that Perseus was begotten of a virgin, I understand that the deceiving serpent counterfeited also this." Nobody now pretends that the Perseus myth, or the Pagan virgin myth in general, is later than Christianity. Justin Martyr, indeed, is perhaps the most foolish of the Christian fathers; but what he says about the anticipatory action of the demon or demons plainly underlies the argumentation also of Tertullian and Julius Firmicus.<sup>5</sup>

When, again, Justin asserts<sup>6</sup> that the Mithraists in their

<sup>1</sup> So Sainte-Croix, *Recherches*, ii, 147; and Beugnot, *Hist. de la Destr. du Paganisme*, i, 157, 158.

<sup>2</sup> G. H. Rendall, *The Emperor Julian*, 1879, Introd. p. 15. Cp. Elton, *Origins of English History*, 2nd ed. 1890, p. 337.

<sup>3</sup> *Le Christianisme et ses Origines*, iv, 133. <sup>4</sup> *Dial. with Trypho*, c. 70.

<sup>5</sup> Paul, as M. Havet remarks, would be in the way of knowing the cults of Cilicia. Tarsus, indeed, was a Mithraic centre. (Preller, *Röm. Mythol.*, p. 758; Cumont, i, 19, 240). This connects with the vogue of the cult among the Cilician pirates (below, p. 343). In Asia Minor and Syria it seems to have been confined to the seaports they frequented. It is highly probable that it is Mithra who was represented by several of the figures identified with Apollo and other deities in the *Lares and Penates* of Messrs. Barker and Ainsworth (1853), which deals with antiquities discovered at Tarsus, and with the cults of Cilicia, without once mentioning Mithra or Mithraism. We know that on the coins of Kanerki, an Indo-Scythian king of the first century of our era, the same aureoled figure is alternately represented as Helios and Mithra. Windischmann, p. 60, citing Lassen, *Indische Alterthumskunde*, ii, 837.

<sup>6</sup> Last cit.



initiation *imitate* not only Daniel's utterance "that a stone without hands was cut out of a great mountain," but "the whole of [Isaiah's] words" (Isa. xxxiii, 13-19), he merely helps us to realise how much older than Christianity is that particular element of Christian symbolism which connects alike Jesus and Peter with the mystic Rock. That Mazdeism or Mithraism borrowed this symbol from Judaism, where it is either an excrescence or a totemistic survival,<sup>1</sup> is as unlikely as it is likely that the Hebrews borrowed it from Babylonia or Persia.<sup>2</sup> In Polynesian mythology, where (as also in the rites of human sacrifice) there are so many close coincidences with Asiatic ideas, it was told that the God Taaroa "embraced a rock, the imagined foundation of all things, which afterwards brought forth the earth and sea."<sup>3</sup> Here again we are in touch with the Græcised but obviously Semitic myth of the rock-born Agdestis, son of Jupiter.<sup>4</sup> Even the remarkable parallel between the myth of Moses striking the rock for water and a scene on one of the Mithraic monuments suggests rather a common source for both myths than a Persian borrowing from the Bible. In the monument,<sup>5</sup> Mithra shoots an arrow at a rock, and water gushes forth where the arrow strikes. As the story of the babe Moses is found long before in that of Sargon,<sup>6</sup> so probably does the rock-story come from Central Asia.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Cp. Jevons, *Introd. to Hist. of Religion*, ch. 11.

<sup>2</sup> Cp. Cumont, i, 165-6; Haug, *Essays*, p. 5. Haug rightly suggests that both Jews and Persians may have drawn from a central source.

<sup>3</sup> Ellis, *Polynesian Researches*, 2nd ed. i, 324-5.

<sup>4</sup> Arnobius, *Adv. Gentes*, v, 5.

<sup>5</sup> That found at Neuenheim. See Cumont, i, 165.

<sup>6</sup> Jastrow, *Religion of Babylonia and Assyria*, p. 562; Maspero, *Hist. ancienne des peuples de l'orient*, 4e édit. p. 157; Sayce, *Hibbert Lectures*, pp. 26-8.

<sup>7</sup> Prof. Cumont is satisfied that the rock is here, as in Vedic mythology, the symbol of the cloud, which the Sun-God transfixes with his spear or shaft. On this view, the shooting at the rock may be simply a myth-duplicate of the stabbing of the bull. See above, p. 310, *note*. It is certain that the sky was very commonly conceived in the ancient East as solid. Cp. *Yasna xxx, 5, b*, as trans. by Mills (*Zendav.* iii, p. 31), and by Haug from the Pahlavi (*Essays*, 3rd ed. p. 346). So also among the Tongans (Mariner, *Tonga Islands*, ii, 99). There is something to be said also for Mr. Jevons's theory that rude rock-altars came to be regarded as Gods through being drenched with the blood of sacrifices which the Gods were supposed to enter the stone



The passage in Isaiah, which strongly suggests the Mithraic initiation, seems to have been tampered with by the Jewish scribes; and corruption is similarly suspected in the passage Gen. xlix, 24, where "the Shepherd, the Stone of Israel," points to some credence latterly thrust out of Judaism. Above all, the so-called Song of Moses<sup>1</sup> (in which both Israel and his enemies figure as putting their faith in a divine "Rock," and the hostile "Rock" is associated with a wine sacrament) points to the presence of such a God-symbol in Hebrew religion long before our era. There is a clear Mazdean element, finally, in the allusion to the mystic stone in Zechariah,<sup>2</sup> the "seven eyes" being certainly connected with the Seven Ameshaspentas, of whom Mithra on one view, and Ormazd on another, was chief.<sup>3</sup> And when we find in the epistles<sup>4</sup> phrases as to Jesus being a "living stone" and a "spiritual rock," and read in the Gospels<sup>5</sup> how Jesus said, "Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church," we turn from the latter utterance, so obviously unhistorical, back to the Mithraic rite, and see in the mystic rock of Mithra, the rock from which the God comes—be it the earth or the cloud—the source alike of the Roman legend and the doctrine of the pseudo-Petrine and Pauline epistles.

The Mithraic mysteries, then, of the burial and resurrection of the Lord, the Mediator and Saviour; burial in a rock tomb and resurrection from that tomb; the sacrament of bread and water, the marking on the forehead with a

to consume (though it is not clear that he had the "Rock of Israel" in view). But this theory takes a stronger form in the argument of Mr. Grant Allen (*Evolution of the Idea of God*, ch. v) that the altar-stone was originally a tomb-stone, erected over an ancestor, and that he was the spirit identified with the stone. That all altars, and all temples, are evolved from grave-stones and grave mounds is well proved by Mr. Spencer, *Principles of Sociology*, §§ 137-9. On this basis, myths of the origination of men and Gods from rocks become newly intelligible. See Mr. Allen again (p. 248, sq. and p. 389) for the suggestion that the divine "corner-stone" may signify a victim slain as foundation-spirit.

<sup>1</sup> Deut. xxxii.

<sup>2</sup> Zech. iii, 9. Cp. Dan. ii, 34.

<sup>3</sup> Windischmann, p. 62; Seel, p. 215; Darmesteter, *Ormazd et Ahriman*, p. 38.

<sup>4</sup> 1 Peter ii, 4, 5; 1 Cor. x, 4. In the first case the Greek word is *lithos*; in the second *petra*.

<sup>5</sup> Matt. xvi, 18.

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initiation *imitate* not only Daniel's utterance "that a stone without hands was cut out of a great mountain," but "the whole of [Isaiah's] words" (Isa. xxxiii, 13-19), he merely helps us to realise how much older than Christianity is that particular element of Christian symbolism which connects alike Jesus and Peter with the mystic Rock. That Mazdeism or Mithraism borrowed this symbol from Judaism, where it is either an excrescence or a totemistic survival,<sup>1</sup> is as unlikely as it is likely that the Hebrews borrowed it from Babylonia or Persia.<sup>2</sup> In Polynesian mythology, where (as also in the rites of human sacrifice) there are so many close coincidences with Asiatic ideas, it was told that the God Taaroa "embraced a rock, the imagined foundation of all things, which afterwards brought forth the earth and sea."<sup>3</sup> Here again we are in touch with the Græcised but obviously Semitic myth of the rock-born Agdestis, son of Jupiter.<sup>4</sup> Even the remarkable parallel between the myth of Moses striking the rock for water and a scene on one of the Mithraic monuments suggests rather a common source for both myths than a Persian borrowing from the Bible. In the monument,<sup>5</sup> Mithra shoots an arrow at a rock, and water gushes forth where the arrow strikes. As the story of the babe Moses is found long before in that of Sargon,<sup>6</sup> so probably does the rock-story come from Central Asia.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Cp. Jevons, *Introd. to Hist. of Religion*, ch. 11.

<sup>2</sup> Cp. Cumont, i, 165-6; Haug, *Essays*, p. 5. Haug rightly suggests that both Jews and Persians may have drawn from a central source.

<sup>3</sup> Ellis, *Polynesian Researches*, 2nd ed. i, 324-5.

<sup>4</sup> Arnobius, *Adv. Gentes*, v, 5.

<sup>5</sup> That found at Neuenheim. See Cumont, i, 165.

<sup>6</sup> Jastrow, *Religion of Babylonia and Assyria*, p. 562; Maspero, *Hist. ancienne des peuples de l'orient*, 4e édit. p. 157; Sayce, *Hibbert Lectures*, pp. 26-8.

<sup>7</sup> Prof. Cumont is satisfied that the rock is here, as in Vedic mythology, the symbol of the cloud, which the Sun-God transfixes with his spear or shaft. On this view, the shooting at the rock may be simply a myth-duplicate of the stabbing of the bull. See above, p. 310, *note*. It is certain that the sky was very commonly conceived in the ancient East as solid. Cp. *Yasna xxx, 5, b*, as trans. by Mills (*Zendav.* iii, p. 31), and by Haug from the Pahlavi (*Essays*, 3rd ed. p. 346). So also among the Tongans (Mariner, *Tonga Islands*, ii, 99). There is something to be said also for Mr. Jevons's theory that rude rock-altars came to be regarded as Gods through being drenched with the blood of sacrifices which the Gods were supposed to enter the stone



The passage in Isaiah, which strongly suggests the Mithraic initiation, seems to have been tampered with by the Jewish scribes; and corruption is similarly suspected in the passage Gen. xlix, 24, where "the Shepherd, the Stone of Israel," points to some credence latterly thrust out of Judaism. Above all, the so-called Song of Moses<sup>1</sup> (in which both Israel and his enemies figure as putting their faith in a divine "Rock," and the hostile "Rock" is associated with a wine sacrament) points to the presence of such a God-symbol in Hebrew religion long before our era. There is a clear Mazdean element, finally, in the allusion to the mystic stone in Zechariah,<sup>2</sup> the "seven eyes" being certainly connected with the Seven Ameshaspentas, of whom Mithra on one view, and Ormazd on another, was chief.<sup>3</sup> And when we find in the epistles<sup>4</sup> phrases as to Jesus being a "living stone" and a "spiritual rock," and read in the Gospels<sup>5</sup> how Jesus said, "Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church," we turn from the latter utterance, so obviously unhistorical, back to the Mithraic rite, and see in the mystic rock of Mithra, the rock from which the God comes—be it the earth or the cloud—the source alike of the Roman legend and the doctrine of the pseudo-Petrine and Pauline epistles.

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mystic mark—all these were in practice, like the Egyptian search for the lost corpse of Osiris, and the representation of his entombment and resurrection, before the publication of the Christian Gospel of a Lord who was buried in a rock tomb, and rose from that tomb on the day of the sun, or of the Christian mystery of Divine communion, with bread and water or bread and wine, which last were before employed also in the mysteries of Dionysos, Sun-God and Wine-God, doubtless as representing *his* body and blood.<sup>1</sup> But even the eucharist of bread-and-wine, as well as a bread-and-meat banquet, was inferribly present in the Mithraic cultus,<sup>2</sup> for the Zoroastrian Hom or Haoma, identical with the Vedic Soma,<sup>3</sup> was a species of liquor, and figured largely in the old cult as *in itself a sacred thing*, and ultimately as a deity = the Moon = a king.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, this deification of a drink is held to be the true origin of the God Dionysos,<sup>5</sup> even as Agni is a deification of the sacrificial fire. And whereas the Mazdean lore associated the Haoma-Tree with the Tree of Life in Paradise,<sup>6</sup> so do we find the Catholic theologians making that predication concerning the Christian Eucharist.<sup>7</sup> The “cup” of Mithra had in itself a mystical significance: in the monuments we see drinking from it the sacred serpent, the symbol of wisdom and healing.<sup>8</sup> Again, as there is record of an actual eating of a lamb in early Christian mysteries<sup>9</sup>—a detail still partly preserved

<sup>1</sup> Cp. Frazer, *Golden Bough*, 2nd ed. i, 359; ii, 366.

<sup>2</sup> Cp. Cumont, i, 146, 197, 320.

<sup>3</sup> Spiegel, *Avesta*, i, 8, citing Windischmann, *Ueber den Somakultus der Arier*; Max Müller, *Physical Religion*, p. 101; *Psychological Religion*, p. 65.

<sup>4</sup> Max Müller, as cited, and in *Psych. Rel.*, pp. 121, 139-140, 147. Cp. in the *Zendavesta*, *Yasna* iii, iv, vii, viii, ix. In *Yasna* ix, Haoma becomes house-lord, clan-lord, tribe-lord, and chieftain of the land. Cp. Mills on *Yasna* ix (*S. B. E.* xxxi, 230) as to the antiquity of the idea; and see Spencer, *Principles of Sociology*, vol. i, ch. 23, as to its causation. Mr. Spencer makes a striking suggestion in this connection as to the origin of the idea of the tree of knowledge in Genesis.

<sup>5</sup> Roscher, *Ausführliches Lexikon*, 3045; Max Müller, *Anthropological Religion*, p. 355.

<sup>6</sup> Cp. *Bundahish* xviii, 2, 3; xxvii, 4; xxx, 25 (*S. B. E.* vol. v); *Yasna* x (*S. B. E.* xxxi); and Mrs. Philpot's monograph, *The Sacred Tree*, 1897, pp. 13, 123, 130-1.

<sup>7</sup> Fischer, *Heidenthum und Offenbarung*, p. 150.

<sup>8</sup> Creuzer, *Das Mithræum von Neuenheim*, p. 37.

<sup>9</sup> Below, p. 337.



in the Italian usage of blessing both a lamb and the baked figure of a lamb at the Easter season,<sup>1</sup> but officially superseded by the wafer of the Mass—so in the old Persian cult the sacrificed flesh was mixed with bread and baked in a round cake called *Myazd* or *Myazda*,<sup>2</sup> and sacramentally eaten by the worshippers.

Nor was this all. Firmicus<sup>3</sup> informs us that the devil, in order to leave nothing undone for the destruction of souls, had beforehand resorted to deceptive imitations of the cross of Christ. Not only did they in Phrygia fix the image of a young man to a tree<sup>4</sup> in the worship of the Mother of the Gods, and in other cults imitate the crucifixion<sup>5</sup> in similar ways, but in one mystery in particular the Pagans were wont to consecrate a tree and, towards midnight, to slay a ram at the foot of it. This cult may or may not have been the Mithraic,<sup>6</sup> but there is a strong

<sup>1</sup> See the *Order of Divine Service for Easter, according to the use of the Church of Rome*, London, Art and Book Co., 22, Paternoster Row, 1899, p. 99, note.

<sup>2</sup> Haug, *Essays on the Parsis*, 3rd ed. pp. 112, 139, 368.

<sup>3</sup> *De Errore*, xxviii.

<sup>4</sup> See Julian (*In deorum matrem*, c. 5) on the tree of Attis, which was "cut down at the moment when the sun arrives at the extreme point of the equinoctial arc."

<sup>5</sup> Suggestions of the crucifix appear in the Mazdean monuments. See the development from the winged figure, in Lajard's "Atlas"; and compare the plates in Bryant, i, 294; R. K. Porter, *Travels in Georgia, etc.*, 1821-2, i, 668; ii, 154; and Texier, *Descrip. de l'Arménie, etc.*, pl. 111—the two latter reproduced by Justi, *Geschichte des alten Persiens*, pp. 52, 69. See there also, p. 13, the tomb of Midas, covered with ornamentation of crosses. That the "crown of thorns" is a variation on a nimbus has long been surmised. Mithra, of course, had a nimbus, and this appears from the monuments (Cumont, ii, 336) to be the kind of crown given in the mysteries to the initiate. In the older Persian form of the cult, again, the Sun-God rode "with his hands lifted up towards immortality" or heaven (*Mihir Yasht*, xxxi; in Darmesteter, ii, 152). He would further be associated with that form of the cross which stood for the four-spoked sun-wheel, as in the myth of Ixion. See Böttger's *Sonnencult der Indogermanen*, 1891, p. 160, citing E. Rapp's essay, *Das Labarum und der Sonnencultus*; and compare the Assyrian sculpture of the Sun-God with the solar-wheel in presence as his symbol.

<sup>6</sup> This tree cult is assumed by Mr. Frazer (*Golden Bough*, 2nd ed. ii, 132, note) to have been that of Attis, in which the tree figured so prominently; but that is one of the points at which the cults were likely to converge, both being associated with that of the Magna Mater. Firmicus, in the chapter cited, seems in separate passages to point to two tree cults, mentioning the ram in the second reference only and the *simulacrum juvenis* in the first. See above (p. 320) as to Mr. Frazer's similar ascription to the Attisian cult of the rock-tomb, which presumptively belongs to the Mithraic.



presumption that Mithraism included such a rite. We have seen<sup>1</sup> that a ram-lamb was sacrificed in the Mithraic mysteries; and not only are there sacred trees on all the typical Mithraic monuments, but the God himself is represented as either born of or placed within a tree—here directly assimilating to Osiris and Dionysos and Adonis,<sup>2</sup> and pointing to the origins of the Christian Holy-Cross myth. The Christian assimilation of Mithraism is, however, still more clearly seen in the familiar Christian symbol in which Christ is represented as a lamb or ram, carrying by one forefoot a cross. We know from Porphyry<sup>3</sup> that in the mysteries “a place near the equinoctical circle was assigned to Mithra as an appropriate seat; and on this account he bears the sword of the Ram [Aries], which is a sign of Mars [Ares].”<sup>4</sup> The sword of the Ram, we may take it, was simply figured as the cross, since a sword is a cross.<sup>5</sup> Again, as we have seen, Porphyry explains<sup>6</sup> that “Mithra is the Bull Demiurgos and lord of generation.” Here then would be, as we have already seen, a symbolical slaying, in which the deity is sacrificed by the deity;<sup>7</sup> and

<sup>1</sup> Above, p. 313.

<sup>2</sup> On the Adonis myth see Frazer, *Golden Bough*, 2nd ed. ii, 115 sq. And see in Guigniaut's edition of Creuzer (figure 139 *b*, vol. iv) the representation of Osiris as the Sun-God emerging from a tree. Dionysos was similarly figured. Cp. Frazer, ii, 160, and refs.

<sup>3</sup> *De Antro*, xxiv.

<sup>4</sup> The later Persians specially celebrated the entrance of the sun into Aries as the “new day” (Nùrùz). “The public Nùrùz [as distinguished from that of the nobles] falls on the first day of the month Ferwardin [March], which happens as the sun enters the first point of Aries; and when it arrives at this first point it is the Spring. They say that Almighty God on this day created the world, and that all the seven planets revolved towards the ascending nodes of their orbit, and all these ascending nodes were in the first degree of Aries, on which day it is firmly believed that they enter on their march and circle. He also created on this day Adam (on whom be peace!)—on this account likewise they call it Nùrùz.” *Berhan-î Katteā*, cited by Wait, *Antiquities*, p. 187. The Nùrùz of the courtiers was six days later (another parallel to the Christian system); and “the Khosrùs every year, from the public Nùrùz to that of the courtiers, which was a space of six days, were in the constant habit of relieving the poor, of liberating the prisoners, of granting pardon to the malefactors, and of entirely devoting themselves to mirth and gladness” (*ib.* p. 190).

<sup>5</sup> Note, on this, the astronomical “crossing” of lines at the “first point of Aries” (see English or Chambers' *Encyclopedia*, art. *Zodiac*); and see it imaged in the old figure in Brown's ed. of Aratos.

<sup>6</sup> Last cit.

<sup>7</sup> Firmicus tells (vi) that the people of Crete destroyed a bull to represent the destruction of Dionysos; and in the Egyptian slaying of the ram for



we may fairly infer that the symbolic ram in turn would be sacrificed by the Mithraists on the same principle. Now, it is, as we have said, the historic fact that among the early Christians a ram or lamb was sacrificed in the Paschal mystery. It is disputed between Greeks and Latins whether at one time the slain lamb was offered on the altar, together with the mystical body of Christ; but it is admitted by Catholic writers—and this, by the way, is the origin of a certain dispute about singing the *Agnus Dei* in church—that in the old *Ordo Romanus* a lamb was consecrated, slain, and eaten, on Easter Day, by way of a religious rite.<sup>1</sup> Of this lamb, too, the blood was received in a cup.<sup>2</sup> Everything thus goes to show not only that the Lamb in the early Christian cultus was a God-symbol from remote antiquity, but that it was regarded in exactly the same way as the symbolical lamb in the Mithraic cult.<sup>3</sup> In the Apocalypse, one of the earliest quasi-Christian documents, and one that exhibits to us the stage in which Jesuism and the Lamb-God-symbol were still held parts of Judaism, the Gentile differentiation being repudiated,<sup>4</sup> we have the Slain Lamb-God described as having seven horns and seven eyes, “which are the seven Spirits of God, sent forth unto all the earth,” and as holding in his right hand seven stars<sup>5</sup>—that is to say, the seven planetary Mazdean “Amshaspands” or Amesha-Spentas, before mentioned, of which Mithra was the chief and as it were the embodiment.

Amun the ram was mourned for by the worshippers, and was put *put on the image of Amun*, an image of “Herakles” (presumably = Khonsu) being then placed beside it (Herodotus, ii, 42). “We may conjecture,” says Mr. Frazer (*Golden Bough*, 2nd ed. ii, 167), “that wherever a God is described as the eater of a particular animal, the animal in question was originally nothing but the God himself.” Cp. Lang, *Myth, Ritual, and Religion*, 2nd ed. ii, 251-4.

<sup>1</sup> Bingham, *Christian Antiquities*, B. xv, c. 2, § 3; Hatch, Hibbert Lectures, p. 300.

<sup>2</sup> Casalius, *De Veterib. Christ. Ritib.* ii, 4, cited by Dupuis.

<sup>3</sup> A sacramental quality attached to the lamb also in the worship of Apollo, whose oracle at Larissa was given by a priestess who once a month tasted of the blood of a sacrificed lamb, and so became possessed by the God. Pausanias, ii, 24.

<sup>4</sup> See above, p. 132.

<sup>5</sup> *Rev.* i, 16; v, 6; iii, 1; v, 6; etc.



§ 10.—*Further Christian Parallels.*

Still further does the parallel hold. It is well known that whereas in the Gospels Jesus is said to have been born in an inn stable, early Christian writers, as Justin Martyr<sup>1</sup> and Origen,<sup>2</sup> explicitly say he was born in a cave. Now, in the Mithra myth, Mithra is both rock-born and born in a cave; and the monuments show the new-born babe adored by shepherds who offer first-fruits.<sup>3</sup> And it is remarkable that whereas a cave long was (and I believe is) shown as the birthplace of Jesus at Bethlehem, Saint Jerome actually complained<sup>4</sup> that in his day the Pagans celebrated the worship of Thammuz (= Adonis), and presumably, therefore, the festival of the birth of the sun, Christmas Day, at that very cave.

Given these identities, it was inevitable that, whether or not Mithra was originally, or in the older Mazdean creed, regarded as born of a Virgin, he should in his western cultus come to be so regarded.<sup>5</sup> As we saw, there was a primary tendency, Aryan as well as Semitic, to make the young God the son of the Supreme God, like Dionysos, like Apollo, like Herakles; and when Mithra became specially identified, like Dionysos, with the Phrygian God Sabazios,<sup>6</sup> who was the "child as it were of the [great] Mother,"<sup>7</sup> he necessarily came to hold the same relation to the Mother-Goddess.<sup>8</sup> But in all likelihood there were ancient Persian

<sup>1</sup> *Dialogue with Trypho*, c. 78.

<sup>2</sup> *Against Celsus*, i, 51. Compare the Apocryphal gospels: Protev. xii, 14; Infancy, i, 6; xii, 14. Note, too, that Dionysos, like Zeus and Hermes, was said to have been nurtured in a cave (Pausanias, iii, 24; Diodorus Siculus, iii, 67).

<sup>3</sup> Cumont, i, 162. The birth takes place beside a river or fountain.

<sup>4</sup> Epist. 58, *ad Paulinum* (Migne, *Patrologiæ Cursus Completus*, ser. i, vol. xxii, col. 581).

<sup>5</sup> Above, p. 96.

<sup>6</sup> Preller, *Römische Mythologie*, 1865, p. 761; Cumont, i, 235, 314; Creuzer, *Das Mithræum von Neuenheim*, pp. 35-6; Gruter, p. 74; Garucci, *Mystères*, pp. 14, 18.

<sup>7</sup> Strabo, x, 3, § 15.

<sup>8</sup> There were yet other affiliations. Eunapius (cited in edit. note on Hammer-Purgstall, *Mithriaca*, p. 22) represents the same priest as hierophant of the Eleusinia and father of the initiation of Mithra; and this gives plausibility to the view (rejected, however, by M. Cumont) that the presence of "the priest Mithras" in Apuleius' account of the mysteries of Isis (*Metamorphoses*, B. xi) implies a similar joining of the Mithraic and Isiac cults.



forms of the conception to start from. It seems highly probable that the birth-legend of the Persian Cyrus<sup>1</sup> was akin to or connected with the myth of Mithra,<sup>2</sup> Cyrus (Koresh) being a name of the sun,<sup>3</sup> and the legend being obviously solar. Thus it would tend to be told of Mithra that he was born under difficulties, like the other Sun-Gods;<sup>4</sup> and his being cave-born would make it the more easy.

It was further practically a matter of course that his divine mother should be styled Virgin, the precedents being uniform. In Phrygia the God Acdestis or Agdistis, a variant of Attis, associated with Attis and Mithra in the worship of the Great Mother, is rock-born;<sup>5</sup> like Mithra he is twy-sexed, figuring in some versions as a female; and the coarse Greek story of the manner of his birth is evidently a myth framed to account for an epithet. Further, the Goddess Anahita or Anaitis, with whom Mithra was anciently paired, was preëminently a Goddess of fruitfulness and nutriency,<sup>6</sup> and as such would necessarily figure in her cultus as a Mother; and as Mithra never appears (save in worshipful metaphor) as a father, he would perforce rank as her son. Precisely so does Attis in the Orphic theosophy figure as the son of Athenè, the Virgin Goddess,<sup>7</sup> who in turn is a variant of Anaitis and Tanith.<sup>8</sup> Finally, as the preëminent spirit Sraosha (=Vohumano) came to be identified with Mithra,<sup>9</sup> so would there be a blending or assimilation of Mithra with Saoshyas or Saoshyant, the Saviour and Raiser of the Dead, who in the Parsee mythology is virgin-born, his mother having miraculously conceived him from Zarathustra.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Herodotus, i, 107, sq.

<sup>2</sup> In Ezra i, 8, the treasurer of Cyrus is named Mithredath = Mithradates.

<sup>3</sup> Plutarch, *Artaxerxes*, i.

<sup>4</sup> Cp. *Christianity and Mythology*, pp. 188-9. See again pp. 168, 318, as to the bestowal of the title of "Virgin" on all the Mother-Goddesses; and cp. Tiele, *Hist. of the Egypt. Rel.* p. 193, as to the duality of the Asiatic Goddesses, who were on the one side virgins and on the other mothers.

<sup>5</sup> Arnobius, *Adv. Gentes*, v, 5, 10; cp. Pausanias, vii, 17.

<sup>6</sup> Meyer, *Geschichte des Alterthums*, i, 542. <sup>7</sup> *Orphica, Ad Musæum*, 42.

<sup>8</sup> Tiele, *Egyptian Religion*, p. 135.

<sup>9</sup> Tiele, *Outlines*, p. 172. Above, p. 307, note.

<sup>10</sup> Tiele, p. 177; Cumont, i, 161, 188, 314; Haug, *Essays*, p. 314.



As a result of all these myth-motives, we find Mithra figuring in the Christian empire in the fourth and fifth centuries, alongside of the Christ, as supernaturally born of a Virgin-Mother and of the Most High God;<sup>1</sup> and if the Christians made much of some occult thesis that Mithra was his own father, or otherwise the spouse of his mother, they were but keeping record of the fact that in this as in so many ancient cults, and more obscurely in their own, the God had been variously conceived as the Son and as the lover of the Mother-Goddess.<sup>2</sup> In all probability they took from, or adopted in emulation of, Mithraism the immemorial ritual of the birth of the Child-God; for in the Mithraic monuments we have the figure of the tree overshadowing the new-born child<sup>3</sup> even as it does in the early Christian sculptures.<sup>4</sup>

So long as Mithraism was allowed to subsist, the competition continued. Even as Jesus in the historic creed makes the Descent to Hades, like so many elder Gods, so in the ancient Persian system Mithra was slain and passed to the under-world, this at the time of the autumnal equinox, when the sun enters Libra, the current month bearing Mithra's name (Mihir). The evidence for the myth is peculiarly interesting, inasmuch as it is embodied in a

<sup>1</sup> Cumont, i, 234-5. See the passage in Elisæus, the Armenian historian (5th c.), *History of Vartan*, tr. by C. F. Neumann, 1830, p. 17 (cited by Windischmann, pp. 61, 62, and by Cumont, ii, 5, from Langlois' trad. of the *History of Vartan*, ii, 193).

<sup>2</sup> See *Christianity and Mythology*, pp. 322-3, as to the cults of Adonis, Attis, Osiris, and Horus, and the problem of the two mourning Marias in the Gospel myth; and compare J. G. Müller, *Geschichte der Amerikanischen Urreligionen*, p. 608, as to the same principle in the myth of Tezcatlipoca, son of the Virgin Goddess Coatlicue.

<sup>3</sup> See Cumont, i, 162-3.

<sup>4</sup> Cp. *Christianity and Mythology*, pp. 193, 210, as to the presence of this myth-motive in other cults. The reason for surmising that Mithraism was the point of contact for the Christists is the Persian aspect of the figures and names of the *Magi*. Even the "stable" myth has a curious connection with Mithraism. See the Greek formula in Firmicus (c. v (iv)—passage corrupt): "The sacred heifers have lowed, hold we the solemn feast of the most august Father." M. Darmesteter has argued (*Ormazd et Ahriman*, p. 152, n.) that "the legends of Gods born or reared in stables; among shepherds (Krishna); even that of Mithra as *πετρογενής*, in virtue of the synonymy of stone, mountain, stable—*adri-gotra*"—all derive from the widespread bull or cow myth. But for an interesting astronomical signification of the stable (=the Augean) see Dupuis, *Origine de tous les Cultes*, ed. 1835-6, vii, 104.



tradition and a custom which have locally survived even the knowledge that there ever was such a deity. It is a Christian archæologist who writes that "Mihrgân (or Mīhrjân) is the name of the sixteenth day of any month, and is the name of the seventh month of the solar year; and during its continuance the sun which enlightens the world is in the sign of Libra, which is the beginning of the autumnal season, and with the Persians ranks next in honour to the feast and holiday of the Nûrûz."<sup>1</sup> Here, too,<sup>2</sup> the public day is at the beginning and the courtiers' day at the end of a festival week. In the late legend, Mithra being lost sight of, the autumnal festival was explained by a story that "the Persians had a king of the name of Mihr, who was a very great tyrant, and that in the middle of the month he *arrived at the regions of torment*, for which reason they gave the name of Mihrgân, which signifies the death of a tyrannical king; for Mihr has been allowed to mean *to die*, and Gân, a tyrannical king."<sup>3</sup> The etymology is of course nonsense, Mihr being simply, as we have seen, the true Persian form of the God-name Mithra, after whom was named the seventh month of the solar year. And the clear inference is that in the old myth the God went to the underworld at the proper solar date, the autumnal equinox, perhaps to "rise again," fittingly, at the vernal equinox. Here we should have the proper pair of solar dates, which in the Christian cult are combined by making the God die and rise again at the spring equinox in the manner of Attis and Adonis and the other Gods of Vegetation; though on the other hand Jesus is tempted as the Sun-God by the Goat-God at the beginning of his career (Sun in Capricorn), and rides on two asses like Dionysos at the beginning of his decline (Sun in Cancer).<sup>4</sup> In the Roman Calendar we find still further traces of the old doubling in the setting of the Festival of the Transfiguration and the *Festum Nominis Jesu* on August 6th and 7th, and of the Assumption of Mary

<sup>1</sup> *Antiquities*, p. 193, citing the *Berhan-î Kattêâ*.

<sup>2</sup> See above, p. 336, note.

<sup>3</sup> Wait, as cited. Cp. Creuzer-Guigniaut, as cited, i, 313, note.

<sup>4</sup> Cp. *Christianity and Mythology*, pp. 345, 350, 368.



on August 15th; while the day of the *Exaltatio Sacræ Crucis* is 14th September, and that of St. Michael, the conqueror of the dragon of Hades, is September 29th. When we remember that the myth of the descent of Apollo to Hades was in time completely lost sight of by the Greeks, to the extent even of their forgetting that Admetus had been a name of Hades,<sup>1</sup> we can readily understand the similar process in the case of Mithra.<sup>2</sup>

§ 11.—*The Vogue of Mithraism.*

In view of this long series of signal parallels between the Mithraic and the Christian cults, it is impossible to doubt that one has imitated the other; and it may now be left to the candid reader to pass his own judgment on the theory that it was Mithraism which copied Christism. The Christian imitation took place, be it observed, because the features imitated were found by experience to be religiously attractive; Mithraism itself having, as we have seen, developed some of them on the lines of other Oriental cults. Its history as far as we can trace it is a series of adaptations to its environment. Mithraism in fact had spread in the west with just such rapidity as Christians have been wont to count miraculous in the case of their own creed. And we, looking back on Christian and other religious history with sociological eyes, can perfectly understand how such a cultus, with an elaborate ceremonial and an impressive initiation, with the attraction of august and solemn mysteries and the promise of immortal life, could spread throughout the Roman Empire in the age in which the primitive Roman religion crumbled away before the advance of far more highly specialised and complicated systems and a more philosophic thought.<sup>3</sup> So special was

<sup>1</sup> K. O. Müller, *Introd. to Mythology*, Eng. tr. pp. 244-6.

<sup>2</sup> In a late legend Zarathustra likewise descends into hell (Malcolm, *History of Persia*, ed. 1829, i, 495); and as Zarathustra like Mithra is born beside a river (*Bundahish*, xxiv, 15), and like the Sun-Gods in general is sought to be slain in infancy (West, *Pahlavi Texts*, i, 187, 317: *S. B. E.* v), the two legends may be regarded as interfluent.

<sup>3</sup> See Pliny, *Hist. Nat.* ii, 4-5 (6-7) for a passage acclaiming the sun as the true divinity, which is rightly connected by Mr. King with the religion of Mithra.



the favour accorded to it in Rome that a Mithræum was permitted to be dug in the Capitoline Hill under the Capitol, the most venerated spot in the city.<sup>1</sup> Above all was it popular in the army, which, though the type of the social disease, really seems to have been to some extent a school, albeit a savage one, of moral strength and order at a time when an appalling abjection was overtaking the Roman world, men reverencing rank as dogs reverence men. One of the first stages in the initiation, for men, consisted in the devotee's receiving a sword, and being called a soldier of Mithra.<sup>2</sup> Hence the association of Mithra with Mars, and his virtual absorption of Janus, whose attributes he duplicated. Thus Mithraism was specially the faith of the soldiery;<sup>3</sup> and in doing honour to the Invincible Sun-God Mithra—*Deo Soli Invictæ Mithræ*, as the monuments have it—the Emperor Constantine vied with the most loyal Mithraists long after his so-called conversion to Christianity.<sup>4</sup>

The explanation of this phase seems to be that it was through oriental militarism that the cult reached the west. We have it from Plutarch<sup>5</sup> that Mithraism was first introduced to Rome through the Cilician pirates, whom Pompey put down; and it is known that those pirates were a confederation of soldiers and others formerly employed by Asian rulers (in particular by Mithradates, in whose army Mithraism would be the natural cult) and thrown on their

<sup>1</sup> Lajard, *Recherches*, pp. 564–5. Cp. Beugnot, *La Destruction du Paganisme*, i, 159; Cumont, *Textes et Monuments*, ii, 193. It seems possible that the cave utilised was an early *mundus*. Chapels of the Egyptian deities also, however, had been set up in the temple of the Capitol, towards the end of the Republic. Boissier, *Religion Romaine d'Auguste aux Antonins*, 3e édit. i, 349, citing *Corp. inscr. lat.* i, 1034. Cumont (i, 352–4) gives a list of identified Mithræums in Rome—30 in all. "C'est la minorité."

<sup>2</sup> Tertullian, *De Corona*, c. 15; Garucci, *Mystères du Syncretisme Phrygien*, 1854, p. 34.

<sup>3</sup> Of old, as we have seen, Mithra was a war-God. The institution of the great quadriennial Mithraic games was the work of the soldierly Aurelian. Lajard notes that the great majority of the monuments found seem to have been at military forts (*Recherches*, p. 565); and this is amply borne out by Prof. Cumont.

<sup>4</sup> See his coins. Cp. Gibbon, cc. xx, xxviii; and Beugnot, i, 92–6.

<sup>5</sup> *Life of Pompey*, c. 241.



own resources by the Roman conquest.<sup>1</sup> As such piracy was not reckoned discreditable, and Pompey took many of the defeated pirates under his patronage,<sup>2</sup> their religion had a good start with the Roman army, in which so many of them entered, and which was for centuries afterwards so largely recruited from the East.

Among the non-military congregations, we learn from the inscriptions, there were both slaves and freedmen,<sup>3</sup> so that the cult was on that side as receptive as the Christian. But in one other respect it seems to have been less so. Among all the hundreds of recovered inscriptions there is no mention of a priestess or woman initiate, or even of a donatress; though there are dedications *pro salute* of women, and one inscription telling of a Mithræum erected by the priest and his family.<sup>4</sup> It would seem then that despite the allusion of Tertullian to the "virgins"<sup>5</sup> of Mithra, women held no recognised place in the main body of the membership.<sup>6</sup> It would seem, indeed, that inasmuch as the cult was conjoined in the West with that of the Great Mother, Cybelê, as in the East with that of Anaitis, women must have been thus associated with it;<sup>7</sup> but if they were apart from the Mithraists proper the latter would be to that extent seriously disadvantaged in their competition with Christianity.

Such an attitude of exclusiveness is probably to be set down in part to the spirit of asceticism which, on Tertullian's testimony, marked the Mithraic cultus as it did the Manichæans<sup>8</sup> and several of the Christian sects. Of none of the ancients can sexual asceticism be predicated more certainly than of Julian, the most distinguished Mithraist of all; and such facts dispose of the Christian

<sup>1</sup> Finlay, *History of Greece*, Tozer's ed. i, 29.

<sup>2</sup> *Id.* pp. 30, 31.

<sup>3</sup> Cumont, i, 327-8.

<sup>4</sup> *Id.* i, 330.

<sup>5</sup> M. Cumont recognises this testimony, but does not attempt to meet it save by the negative testimony of the monuments.

<sup>6</sup> Jerome's list of the grades of initiates obscurely specifies one which has been variously read as "hyenas" and "lionesses" (cp. De Sacy's note on Sainte-Croix, ii, 128); but the passage being corrupt, no inference can be drawn from it.

<sup>7</sup> See Cumont, i, 334, note, as to *matres sacrorum*.

<sup>8</sup> Baur (*Das manich. Religionssystem*, p. 355, note) traces the Manichæan separation between *electi* and *auditores* to the Mithraic example.



attempt to charge upon the rival religion a cultus of sensuality. On a picture of the "banquet of the seven priests" in the Mithraic catacomb<sup>1</sup> there are found phrases of the "Eat and drink, for to-morrow we die" order;<sup>2</sup> and these may stand for an antinomian tendency such as was from the first associated with Christism;<sup>3</sup> though it is not at all unlikely that they were inscribed in a hostile spirit by the hands of Christian invaders of the Mithraic retreat. However that may be, there is absolutely no evidence that Mithraism ever developed such disorders as ultimately compelled the abolition of the love-feast among the Christians. The Mithraic standards, in fact, seem to have been the higher; though both cults alike were sustained mainly by the common people, apart from the special military vogue of the older system. A Christian historian has even held it likely that "what won sympathy for the worship of Mithra in Rome was the fundamental ethical thought that the deity is set in constant strife with evil.....The pure and chaste God of light, of whom no myth related anything but virtue and strife against evil, won many hearts from sin-stained Olympus.....Above all, the most ideal characters in the history of imperial Rome gave their protection to the Mithra-worship."<sup>4</sup>

In all probability it was the poorer cult of the two, lacking as it did the benefactions of rich women. It has been inferred, from the special developments of Mithraism among the soldiers and the Syrian traders who followed the camp, that it was primarily, in the West, a religion of the humble,<sup>5</sup> like Christianity, and that like Christianity it only slowly attained wealth. But inasmuch as it never imitated the propagandist and financial methods which the Church took over from the later Judaism of the Dispersion,

<sup>1</sup> See *Christianity and Mythology*, pp. 237-8.

<sup>2</sup> Garucci, *Mystères*, passim.

<sup>3</sup> 1 Cor. Cp. Jean Réville, *La Religion à Rome sous les Sévères*, p. 95.

<sup>4</sup> Hausrath, *History of the New Testament Times: Times of the Apostles*, Eng. tr. 1895, i, 95-6—instancing Antoninus Pius, Constantius Chlorus, and Julian, and citing Lampridius, *Commod.* 8; Himerius, vii, 2. The former reference tells only of Commodus; and it is but fair to add that Elagabalus also was *tauroboliatus* (Lamprid. *Heliogab.* 7).

<sup>5</sup> Cumont, i, 327-8.



( and always maintained a highly esoteric character, it escaped certain of the lowering forces of the Christist movement. One of these was the practice of systematic almsgiving, which attracted a motley mass of both sexes to the Christian churches. Mutual aid there probably was among the Mithraists, who in their capacity of organised groups or *sodalitia* were able to own their congregational property;<sup>1</sup> but their different religious outlook and tradition excluded large financial developments.

§ 12.—*Absorption in Christianity.*

Now, however, arises the great question, How came such a cultus to die out of the Roman and Byzantine empire after making its way so far and holding its ground so long? The answer to that question has never, I think, been fully given, and is for the most part utterly evaded, though part of it has been suggested often enough. The truth is, as aforesaid, that Mithraism was not overthrown; it was merely transformed.

It had gone too far to be overthrown: the question was whether it should continue to rival Christianity or be absorbed by it. While Julian lived, Mithraism had every prospect of increased vogue and prestige; for the Emperor expressly adopted it as his own cultus. "To thee," he makes Hermes say to him, "I have given to know Mithras, thy Father. Be it thine to follow his precepts, so that he may be unto thee, all thy life long, an assured harbour and refuge; and, when thou must needs go hence, full of good hope, thou mayest take this God as a propitious guide."<sup>2</sup> It is the very tone and spirit of the cult of the Christ; and as we have seen the Christian Fathers with almost one consent saw in Mithraism the great rival of their own worship. The spirit of exclusiveness which Christianity had inherited from Judaism—a spirit alien to the older paganism but essential to the building up of an organised and revenue-raising hierarchy in the later Roman empire—made a struggle between the cults inevitable.

<sup>1</sup> Cumont, i, 326.

<sup>2</sup> *Caesares*, end. Cp. *In regem solem*, end.



The critical moment in the career alike of Mithraism and of Christianity was the death of Julian, who, though biassed in favour of all the older Gods, gave a special adherence to the War-God Mithra. Had Julian triumphed in the East and reigned thirty years, matters might have gone a good deal differently with Christianity. His death, however, was peculiarly disastrous to Mithraism; for he fell at the hands of the Persian foe, the most formidable enemy of the later empire; and Mithra was "the Persian" *par excellence*, and the very God of the Persian host. There can be little doubt that Jovian's instant choice of Christianity as his State creed was in large measure due to this circumstance; and that at such a juncture the soldiery would be disposed to acquiesce, seeking a better omen. Yet, even apart from this, we are not entitled to suppose that Mithraism could ever have become the general faith, save by very systematic and prolonged action on the part of the State, to the end of assimilating its organisation with that of the church.

Religions, we say, like organisms and opinions, struggle for survival, and the fittest survive. That is to say, that one survives which is fittest for the environment—not fittest from the point of view of another and higher environment. Now, what was the religion that was fittest, that was best adapted, for the populations of the decaying Roman Empire, in which ignorance and mean subjection were slowly corroding alike intelligence and character, leaving the civilised provinces unable to hold their ground against the barbarians? Well, an unwarlike population, for one thing, wants a sympathetic and emotional religion; and here, though Mithraism had many attractions, Christianity had more, having sedulously copied every one of its rivals, and developed special features of its own. The beautiful and immortal youth of the older sun-worships, Apollo, Mithras, Dionysos, was always soluble into a mysterious abstraction: in the Christian legend the God was humanised in the most literal way; and for the multitude the concrete deity must needs replace the abstract. The Gospels gave a literal story: the Divine Man was a



carpenter, and ate and drank with the poorest of the poor. So with the miracles. The priesthoods of the older religions often, if not always, explained to the initiated in the mysteries, the mystical meaning which was symbolised by the concrete myths; and in some early Christian writers, as notably Origen, we find a constant attempt so to explain away concrete miracle and other stories as allegories. But gradually the very idea of allegory died out of the Christian intelligence; and priests as well as people came to take everything literally and concretely, till miracles became everyday occurrences. This was the religion for the dark ages, for the new northern peoples which had not gone through the Pagan evolution of cults and symbolisms and mysticisms, but whose own traditional faith was too vague and primitive to hold its ground against the elaborate Christian theology and ritual.

We may say indeed that the preference for such a God as Jesus over such a one as Mithra was in full keeping with the evolution of æsthetic taste in the Christian period. Some may to-day even find it hard to conceive how the Invincible God of the Sun could ever call forth the love and devotion given to the suffering Christ. As we have seen, Mithra too was a suffering God, slain and rising again, victorious over death; so that to him went out in due season all the passion of the weeping worship of Adonis; but it is in his supernal and glorious aspect that the monuments persistently present him; and for the decaying ancient world it was still possible to take some joy in the vision of beauty and strength. Many there must still have been who wondered, not at the adoration given to the mystically figured Persian, beautiful as Apollo, triumphant as Ares, but at the giving of any similar devotion to the gibbeted Jew, in whose legend figured tax-gatherers and lepers, epileptics and men blind from birth, domestic traitors and cowardly disciples. Ethical teaching there was in Mithraism; and for the Mithraists it would be none the less moving as coming from an eternal conqueror, the type of dominion. But even as the best Mithraic monuments themselves tell of the decline of the



great art of Greece, so the art of Christism tells of a hastening dissolution in which æsthetic sense and craftsmanship alike sink to the levels of barbarism. In the spheres alike of Byzantium and of papal Rome, the sculptured Mithra would yearly meet fewer eyes that looked lovingly on grace and delightedly on beauty; more and more eyes that recoiled pessimistically from comeliness and turned vacantly from allegorical or esoteric symbols.

The more we study the survival of Christianity, the more clearly do we see that, in spite of the stress of ecclesiastical strife over metaphysical dogmas, the hold of the creed over the people was a matter of concrete and narrative appeal to every-day intelligence. Byzantines and barbarians alike were held by literalism, not by the unintelligible: for both alike the symbol had to become a fetish; and for the Dark Ages the symbol of the cross was much more plausibly appealing than that of the God slaying the zodiacal bull. Other substitutions followed the same law of psychological economy. Thus it was that Christianity turned the mystic rock, *Petra*, first into the Christ,<sup>1</sup> but later into the chief disciple, *Petros*; made an actual tunic of the mystic seamless robe of the Osirian and Mazdean mysteries, the symbol of light and sky; caused to be performed at a wedding-feast, for the convenience of the harder drinkers among the guests, the Dionysiak miracle of turning water into wine; made Jesus walk on the water not merely in poetry and symbol, as did Poseidon, but for the utilitarian purpose of trying Peter's faith and saving him; and put the scourge of Osiris in the Lord's hand for the castigation of those who defiled the temple by unspiritual traffic.<sup>2</sup> There can be little question as to which plane of doctrine was the more popular. The Christian tales, in a different moral climate, represent exactly the commonplace impulse which built up the bulk of Greek mythology by

<sup>1</sup> 1 Cor. x, 4. Jesus, too, bore the keys in the earlier Judaic cult (Rev. i, 18) before the development of the myth of Peter. Cp. Rev. iii, 7 as to "the key of David."

<sup>2</sup> On these and other assimilations see *Christianity and Mythology*, Part III, Div. i.



way of narratives that reduced to an anecdotal basis mystic sculptures and mysterious rites.

But that was not all. The fatal weakness of Mithraism, as pitted against Christianity, was that its very organisation was esoteric. For, though an esoteric grade is a useful attraction, and was so employed by the Church, a wholly esoteric institution can never take hold of the ignorant masses. Mithraism was always a sort of freemasonry,<sup>1</sup> never a public organisation.<sup>2</sup> What the Christians did was to start, like Rome herself, from a republican basis, combining the life-elements of the self-supporting religious associations of the Greeks with the connecting organisation of the Jewish synagogues,<sup>3</sup> and then proceeding to build up a great organisation on the model of that of republican and imperial Rome—an organisation so august for an era of twilight that the very tradition of it could serve the later world to live by for a thousand years. The Christian Church renewed the spell of imperial Rome, and brought actual force to make good intellectual weakness. And so we read that the Mithraic worship was by Christian physical force suppressed in Rome and Alexandria, in the year 376 or 377,<sup>4</sup> at a time when, as the inscriptions show, it was making much headway.<sup>5</sup> At Rome, the deed was done by the order of the Christian prefect Gracchus; but the proceeding was specifically one of ecclesiastical malice, since even so pious an emperor as Gratian dared not yet decree a direct assault upon an esteemed pagan cult. But, once begun, the movement of destruction spread, and the Church which still makes capital of the persecution it suffered at pagan hands, outwardly annihilated the rival it could not spiritually defeat. In an old Armenian history of the reign of Tiridates,<sup>6</sup> it is told how St. Gregory destroyed

<sup>1</sup> I originally wrote this without knowing that Renan had already said it. *Marc-Aurèle*, p. 577.

<sup>2</sup> On the significant smallness of the Mithraic caves, see Cumont, i, 65. Cp. p. 73 as to the esoteric attitude.

<sup>3</sup> Cp. *A Short History of Christianity*, pp. 18, 57-8, 82-4.

<sup>4</sup> Jerome, *Epist. cvii, ad Lætam* (Migne, xxii, col. 869); Socrates, *Ec. Hist.*, B. v, c. 16.

<sup>5</sup> Renan, as last cited, pp. 579-80.

<sup>6</sup> Langlois, *Hist. ancienne de l'Arménie*, i, 168, cited by Cumont, ii, 4.



in the town of Pakaiaridj the temple of Mihr "called the son of Aramazd," took its treasure for the poor, and consecrated the ground to the Church.

But such acts of violence, which had been made easy by the earlier check to Mithraism in its special field, the army, only obscured the actual capitulation made by the Church to the Mithraic as to the other cults which it absorbed. Even the usages which it could not conveniently absorb, and therefore repudiated, prevailed within its own fold for centuries, so that in the eighth century we find Church Councils commanding proselytes no more to pay worship to fanes and rocks.<sup>1</sup> And there were other survivals.<sup>2</sup> But all that was a trifle as compared with the actual survival of Mithraic symbols and rites in the very worship of Christ. As to the sacrifice of the lamb we have seen; and though at the end of the seventh century a general Council ventured to resist the general usage of picturing Christ as a lamb,<sup>3</sup> the veto was useless; the symbol survived. Some Mithraic items went, but more remained. The Christian bishop went through a ceremony of espousing the Church, following the old mystery in which occurred the formula, "Hail to thee, new spouse; hail, new light."<sup>4</sup> His mitre was called a crown, or tiara, which answered to the headdress of Mithra and the Mithraic priests, as to those of the priests of Egypt; he wore red military boots, now said to be "emblematical of that spiritual warfare on which he had entered," in reality borrowed from the military worship of Mithra, perhaps as early as Constantine. And the higher mysteries of communion, divine sacrifice, and resurrection, as we have seen, were as much Mithraic as Christist, so that a Mithraist could turn to the Christian worship and find his main rites unimpaired, lightened only of the burden of initiative austerities, stripped of the old obscure mysticism, and with all things turned to the literal and

<sup>1</sup> "Nullus Christianus ad fana, vel ad Petras votas reddere præsumat." *Indic. Paganiarum in Concilio Leptinensi*, ad ann. Christ. 743; cited by Bryant, *Analysis*, i, 294.

<sup>2</sup> See note by Mosheim on Cudworth, Harrison's ed. i. 478.

<sup>3</sup> Bingham, *Christian Antiq.* B. viii, c. 8, § 11.

<sup>4</sup> Firmicus, xx.



the concrete, in sympathy with the waning of knowledge and philosophy throughout the world. The Mithraic Christians actually continued to celebrate Christmas Day as the birthday of the sun, despite the censures of the Pope;<sup>1</sup> and their Sunday had been adopted by the supplanting faith. When they listened to the Roman litany of the holy name of Jesus, they knew they were listening to the very epithets of the Sun-God—God of the skies, purity of the eternal light, king of glory, sun of justice, strong God, father of the ages to come, angel of great counsel. In the epistles of Paul they found Christian didactics tuned to the very key of their mystical militarism. Their priests had been wont to say that “he of the cap” was “himself a Christian.”<sup>2</sup> They knew that “the Good Shepherd” was a name of Apollo;<sup>3</sup> that Mithra, like Hermes and Jesus, carried the lamb<sup>4</sup> on his shoulders; that both were mediators, both creators, both judges of the dead. Like some of their sacred caves, and so many pagan temples, the Christian churches looked toward the east. Their soli-lunar midnight worship was preserved in midnight services, which carried on the purpose of the midnight meetings of the early Christians, who had simply followed Essenian, Egyptian, Asiatic, and Mithraic usage; there being no basis for the orthodox notion that these secret meetings were due to fear of persecution.<sup>5</sup> Their *mizd*, or sacred cake, was preserved in the *mass*, which possibly copied the very name.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See the sermons of Saint Leo, xxii, 6, cited by Dupuis and Havet, and by Gieseler, *Compend. of Ec. Hist.* Eng. trans. 1846, ii, 43. Others than Mithraists, of course, would offend, Christmas being an Osirian and Adonisian festival also. Macrobius, *Saturnalia*, i, 18.

<sup>2</sup> Augustine in Joh. i, Dis. 7; cited in King, *Gnostics*, p. 119. Prof. Cumont (ii, 58) suggests that by “him of the cap” was meant Attis. This seems to me unlikely; but if the priests of Attis could so speak, those of Mithra could well do likewise.

<sup>3</sup> Macrobius, *Saturnalia*, i, 17.

<sup>4</sup> Or the bull. See Lajard's *Atlas*, Pl. xcii; and Garucci, as cited. It is now generally admitted that the Christian figure of the lamb-bearing Good Shepherd is taken from the statues of Hermes *Kriophoros*, the Ram-bearer (Pausanias, iv, 33). But see also Jastrow's *Talmudic Dict.* s.v. **לֵיִל**, for a Jewish parallel.

<sup>5</sup> Cp. 1 Thess. v.

<sup>6</sup> King, *Gnostics*, p. 124, following Seel. As to the ordinary interpretation see *A Short History of Christianity*, pp. 237-9. The word *missa* might come, however, from the Greek *maza*, a name for a barley cake.



Above all, their mystic Rock, Petra, was presented to them in the concrete as the rock Peter, the foundation of the Church. It has been elsewhere shown<sup>1</sup> that the myth of the traitorous Peter connects with those of Proteus and Janus as well as with that of Mithra, inasmuch as Janus also had "two faces," led the twelve months as Mithra presided over the zodiacal signs and Peter over the twelve apostles, and, like Proteus and Peter and the Time-God in the Mithraic cult, bore the heavenly keys. Here again the mythic development of Peter probably follows on that of Jesus; at all events Jesus too has constructively several of the attributes of Proteus-Janus: as "I am the door";<sup>2</sup> "I stand at the door and knock"; "I am in the Father and the Father in me" (= Janus with the two faces, old and young, seated in the midst of the twelve altars); "I have the keys of death and of Hades." The function of Janus as God of War is also associable with the dictum, "I came not to bring peace, but a sword." Finally, the epiphany is in January. But there is to be noted the further remarkable coincidence that in the Egyptian *Book of the Dead*<sup>3</sup> Petra is the name of the divine doorkeeper of heaven—a circumstance which suggests an ancient connection between the Egyptian and Asiatic cults. On the other hand, the early Christian sculptures which represent the story of Jesus and Peter and the cock-crowing suggest that it originated as an interpretation of some such sculpture; and the frequent presence of the cock, as a symbolic bird of the Sun-God,<sup>4</sup> in Mithraic monuments, raises again a presumption of a Mithraic source. There is even good ground for the view that the legend of St. George is but an adaptation of that of Mithra;<sup>5</sup> and it is nearly certain that St. Michael, who in the Christian east is the bearer of the heavenly keys, is in this aspect an adaptation from the Persian War-God.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Christianity and Mythology*, pp. 379–83.

<sup>2</sup> John x, 9.

<sup>3</sup> Ch. 68. Budge's trans. p. 123.

<sup>4</sup> As to its holiness, see the *Bundahish*, xix; the *Vendidad*, Fargard xviii, § 2; and note to latter (trans. p. 197).

<sup>5</sup> Gutschmidt, cited by Cumont, ii, 92.

<sup>6</sup> Lueken, *Michael*, 1898, p. 46 sq., cited by Cumont.



From the Mithraists too, apparently, came the doctrine of purgatory,<sup>1</sup> nowhere set forth in the New Testament save in the spurious epistle of Peter.<sup>2</sup> And though their supreme symbol of Mithra slaying the bull was perforce set aside, being incapable of assimilation, they knew that the Virgin Mother was but a variant of the Goddess-Mothers whose cults had at various times been combined with those of Mithra, and some of whose very statues served as Madonnas;<sup>3</sup> even as the doctrines of the Logos and the Holy Spirit and the Trinity were borrowed from their own cult and those of Egypt alike.

It has chanced, indeed, that those Christian sects which most fully adopted the theosophies of Paganism have disappeared under the controlling power of the main organisation, which, as we have said, held by a necessity of its existence to a concrete and literal system, and for the same reason to a rigidly fixed set of dogmas. We know that the Gnostics adopted Mithra, making his name into a mystic charm, from which (spelling it *Μειθρας*) they got the number 365, as from the mystic name Abraxas.<sup>4</sup> Manichæism, too, the greatest and most tenacious of all the Christian schisms, carried on its ascetic front the stamp of the Persian environment in which it arose, and visibly stands for a blending of the ascetic and mystic elements of Mithraism and Christianity. For the celebration of the slain Christ it practically substituted that of the slain Manes, at the paschal season; reducing the crucifixion to a mere allegory of the cult of vegetation, and identifying the power and wisdom of the Saviour-God with the Sun and Moon.<sup>5</sup> Neither its adherents nor its opponents avowed that it was thus a fresh variant of Mithraism; but the Mithraists cannot have failed to see and signalise alike the heretical and the orthodox adaptation, and it is clear that Mithraism not only entered into Manichæism but prepared

<sup>1</sup> Cp. N. Söderblom, *La vie future d'après le Mazdéisme*, as cited, p. 126; and West, *Pahlavi Texts*, ii, 115 (*S. B. E.* xviii).

<sup>2</sup> 1 Peter, iii, 19.

<sup>3</sup> Cp. *Christianity and Mythology*, pp. 166-70.

<sup>4</sup> Jerome, in *Amos*, c. 2, on vv, 9-10.

<sup>5</sup> Augustine, *Contra Epist. Manichæi*, viii; *Contra Faustum*, xv, 5; xx, 1-4, 8.



the way for it in the West.<sup>1</sup> The more reason why Mithras should be tabooed by the organised Church. Thus, then, we can understand why the very name seemed at length to be blotted out. And yet, despite all forcible suppression, not only do the monuments of the faith endure to tell how for centuries it distanced its rival; not only do its rights and ceremonies survive as part of the very kernel of the Christian worship; but its record remains unknowingly graven in the legend on the dome of the great Christian temple of Rome, destined to teach to later times a lesson of human history, and of the unity of human religion, more enduring than the sectarian faith that is proclaimed within.

• § 13.—*The Point of Junction.*

And still we have to note what appears to be the strangest concrete survival of all, cherished where we should least count on finding it. At Rome there is religiously preserved a chair which is alleged to be that of St. Peter. It is significant of the measure of knowledge and judgment with which the Church has been governed that this belief should subsist concerning a chair which ostensibly bears representations of the signs of the zodiac, and the twelve labours of the Sun-God.<sup>2</sup> Peter, we are to suppose, having found his way to Rome, and established a Latin Church with the facility which belonged to inspiration and the gift of tongues, proceeded to commission a sculptor, Pagan or Christian, to carve him an episcopal chair, ornamented with the best-known symbols of the heathenism which Christians were supposed to be bent on overthrowing. Such a legend need not be discussed.<sup>3</sup>

We have already seen how at a variety of points the

<sup>1</sup> Cp. Lea, *Hist. of Sacerdotal Celibacy*, 2nd ed. pp. 43-4; Baur, *Das manichäische Religionssystem*, 1831, pp. 91, 208, 241, 407; Neander, *Gen. Hist. of the Chr. Relig.* Eng. tr. ii, 174-9, 194.

<sup>2</sup> Bryce, *The Holy Roman Empire*, 8th ed. p. 49, note.

<sup>3</sup> It is now abandoned even by orthodox Catholic scholars (*e.g.*, Orazio Marucchi, *S. Pietro e S. Paolo in Roma*, 1900, p. 99), though the chair is still officially cherished.



myth of Peter is a development of that of Jesus, and how, alike as leader of the twelve, fisherman, "rock," and bearer of the keys of heaven and hell, the first disciple assimilates with Mithra and Janus, who severally or jointly had those attributes, and whose joint cult acquired a special status in the Roman empire as being at once that of the army and (on the side of Janus) that of the immemorial city. And whereas the legendary Peter thus closely conformed in symbol to the "God out of the Rock," the chief priest of the Mithraic cult at Rome compared no less closely with the Christian bishop, ultimately distinguished as *Papa* = Father. Among the grades of the Mithraists were that of the *Patres Sacrorum*, or Fathers of the Mysteries, and that of the *Pater Patrum*, Father of the Fathers, whose seat was at Rome; and while there was a sacred Mithraic cave under the Capitol, we know from monumental remains that Mithraic worship was conducted on the Vatican Mount, where also was a temple of the Mother-Goddess Cybele, and where also dwelt the *Archi-Gallus*, or arch eunuch, the head of the cult of Cybele and Attis.<sup>1</sup> As the ruling tendency of the later paganism was to combine or "syndicate" all the leading cults, and as Roman patricians were then wont to hold at once the priesthoods of various Gods, it is not surprising to find that in the year 376, under the emperors Valens and Valentinian, one Sextilius Agesilaus Ædesius was *Pater Patrum Dei Solis Invicti Mithræ*, "born again for eternity through the *taurobolium* and the *criobolium*," and at the same time priest of Hecate and of Bacchus, as well as an adorer of the Mother of the Gods and Attis.<sup>2</sup> On the Vatican Mount, then, if anywhere, would be the seat of the pagan Pope who looked to the Sun-God as his Saviour, and worshipped the Mother of the Gods.

It has been unsuspectingly asserted on the Christian side that the pagans raised their later shrines on the

<sup>1</sup> Beugnot, *Hist. de la Destr. du Paganisme en Occident*, 1835, i, 159.

<sup>2</sup> Beugnot, i, 334-5, citing the inscription from Gruter, p. 28, No. 2. Cp. the other, on p. 334, also from Gruter, p. 1087, No. 4; also that on p. 335 from Muratori, p. 387, No. 2; and those cited on pp. 162-4.



Vatican Mount by way of profaning the site of the grave of St. Peter. We are now entitled to conclude that, on the contrary, the grave of St. Peter was located by tradition on the Vatican Mount because that was the Roman site of the pagan cult to which the myth of Peter was specially assimilated. His grave was assigned where his legend was adumbrated, and, it may be, where his chair was found. For there is strong reason to suppose that the "chair of St. Peter" is simply the chair of the *Pater Patrum*, the supreme pontiff of Mithra at Rome.

In reality, the "Chair of St. Peter" is a somewhat nondescript object, of which the ornamentation does not fully exhibit either the twelve signs of the zodiac or the twelve labours of Herakles. It was exhibited to the public in 1867, photographed, and at that time examined by the eminent archæologist de Rossi, who pronounced it to be in part of old oak much worn, containing a number of inlaid panels of carved ivory in the classic style, representing the labours of Hercules; the whole structure, however, having been renewed by supports and cross-pieces of acacia-wood, of which the ornamentation is medieval.<sup>1</sup> In Rossi's opinion the older portions probably formed originally the curial chair of a senator; and it may well be that the whole thing is thus a fortuitous importation, like so many other ecclesiastical relics. But there is at least a possibility that it is a relic of a pre-Christian cult.

The ivory panels, eighteen in number, and not easy to decipher in a photograph, answer in part to the labours of Herakles; a few have simply the zodiacal signs from which the legend of the twelve labours was originally framed; some suggest rather the labours of Perseus; and some closely resemble episodes in the Mithraic monuments. It is not impossible, then, that the whole is an ancient artist's combination, for a syncretic cult, of a number of the

<sup>1</sup> *Guido di Roma e suoi dintorni*, ed. Ila, a cura del Prof. F. Porena, Torino, 1894, p. 383. I am indebted for the extract and a photograph of the chair to the good offices of M. W. Lessevitch. See a copy in Marucchi's *S. Pietro e S. Paolo*, as cited.



symbols of oriental sun-worship, to which all three legends belong. The myth of Perseus (perhaps = the Persian) is at bottom identical with that of Herakles; and in Rome the Mithraists would be very ready to bracket the later conquering Sun-God with the older, the more so because their monuments presented scenes of the same order, and conjunction of cults was the fashion of the day. The old Roman Hercules, it will be remembered, was a quite different deity from the Grecian Herakles, who was a variant of the Semitic Melkarth and Samson; and though that Herakles was worshipped under the later pagan emperors by his Latin name, it does not appear that at Rome his cult was latterly flourishing. There were two shrines of Hercules Victor on the Capitoline Hill, and some three other *aedes* in other districts;<sup>1</sup> but the inscriptions of the period show no such interest in his cult as in those of Mithra and other eastern deities. There was in fact no ritualistic worship of Hercules or Herakles at Rome; nothing to account for the use of such a chair; whereas the mysteries of Mithra were among the most elaborate then in existence, and the Mithraic priesthood one of the most august. Finally, we know from Porphyry, and from the monuments,<sup>2</sup> that Mithra was habitually represented in the midst of the zodiacal circle, so that the pretended Petrine chair is in every way congruous with his worship. The fact that, in the Mithraic monuments, the zodiac begins with Aquarius, who in ancient art is represented somewhat as a fisherman, would of course appeal to the champions of Peter, whose ancient festival at Rome (Jan. 18) coincided with the sun's entering Aquarius in the calendar; and it is the historic fact that the Mithraic order of the zodiac, beginning on the right with Aquarius and ending on the left with Capricorn, was imitated in Christian art.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Beugnot, i, 259-65.

<sup>2</sup> See that found at Housesteads and preserved in the Black Gate at Newcastle—represented in the local guide of the Society of Antiquaries, p. 11.

<sup>3</sup> See the admissions of Wellbeloved, *Eburacum*, 1842, p. 86, as to the zodiacal arch of the Church of St. Margaret's in Walmgate, York.



In taking over the status of the Mithraic pontiff, the Christian *Papa* of Rome would acquire whatever remained of his influence in the army and in the civil service, besides completing the process of uniting in his own person the symbolisms in virtue of which he was head of the visible Church. It was thus in many ways fitting that he should take to himself the actual chair of the *Pater Patrum*. However that may be, the historical and documentary facts enable us to infer broadly the line of adaptation of Mithraism to the Christian cult. It was presumably thus:—

1. Before the gospels were written, Jesus as "Lamb" was assimilated to Mithra in respect (a) of his attributes of "Seven Spirits" and "seven stars"; (b) of his symbol of the Rock; and (c) of the mystic keys borne by the Time-God in his mysteries. In all three cases there seem to have been ancient Judaic myths to proceed upon.

2. The resurrection ritual, with its rock tomb, and the eucharist of bread and wine, may have been equally ancient even in Jewry: but there is reason to suppose that both were consciously assimilated to the Mithraic mysteries.

3. As the Mithraic *Pater Patrum* assumed the symbols of the God, and the Christian bishop of Rome imitated the *Pater Patrum*, the tradition came to transfer from Jesus to Peter, the reputed founder of the Roman see, the attributes of the Persian God, and of those with whom he was identified in Rome. Thus whereas Jesus had been key-bearer and Rock before the gospels were current, Peter finally was foisted on the gospel in both capacities, while the more exclusively divine attribute of headship of the Seven Spirits was practically dropped from Christian doctrine; and even the symbol of the lamb was discountenanced. They had done their work, and were finally both incongruous and inconvenient.







## PART IV.

### THE RELIGIONS OF ANCIENT AMERICA

#### § 1.—*American Racial Origins.*

IN the study of the native religions of North and South America, there is a special attraction bound up with the special perplexity of the subject. These religions, like the peoples which have held them, seem to stand historically apart from the rest of humanity, unrelated, underived, independent. The first question that occurs to the ethnologist when he looks at the native American races is, How and when did they get there? With which of the other human families are they most nearly connected? And though in the past this question used to be put on the traditional assumption of an original creation of one human pair, from whom all mankind are descended, it is still perfectly relevant to the present state of science, since the only plausible and economical hypothesis in regard to human evolution is that the development of early man from some ape-like form went on, however slowly, over one particular area, and not independently, in widely separate parts of the world at the same time. That is to say, in the present state of knowledge, we still infer a "unity" in the human race, and hesitate to believe that different human species were independently evolved from lower forms in different continents, acquiring the same physical structure under widely varying conditions. The suggestion to this effect by Waitz<sup>1</sup> represents the state of speculation before the bearings of the Darwinian theory had been realised.

<sup>1</sup> *Anthropologie der Natureölker*, iii, 1-2 (1862).



It is therefore fitting that ethnologists should try to trace a connection between the native races of America and the races of Asia, which are the nearest to them in geographical position. Until that hypothesis is either established or overthrown, our anthropology and our moral science must remain in large part unsettled. It has been argued that "we may safely leave to ethnologists the task of deciding whether the whole human race descends from one original couple or from many; for, spiritually speaking, humanity in any case is one. It is one same spirit that animates it and is developed in it; and this, the incontestable unity of our race, is likewise the only unity we need care to insist on."<sup>1</sup> But this defines rather the theological than the scientific attitude: for the very question whether an alleged spiritual unity is independent of a biological or genealogical unity is one of the preliminary problems of true "spiritual" science.

As we go into detail, we shall see some remarkable coincidences between American and Asiatic and European religious systems; and our conception of human nature must alter a good deal according as we decide that certain peculiar superstitions and ritual practices were reached alike by various races who grew separately out of pre-human species, and these out of still lower species, in different parts of the world, without intermixture; or decide that the whole of the man-like family developed interconnectedly over one area, and that the different races now existing did not branch off from the central stem till they had already acquired what we call human characteristics—that is, until they had reached the stage of speech, weapons, and fire.

Suppose, for instance, that the American races came many thousands of years ago from Asia, and that they are kindred to the earlier Asiatic races: they would already have the germs of myths and a certain religious bias in common with peoples whose descendants subsist in Asia;

<sup>1</sup> Prof. A. Réville, Hibbert Lectures, 1884, *On the Native Religions of Mexico and Peru*, p. 40.



and the coincidences in their religion would have to be pronounced historical, that is, they represent a sequence of phenomena substantially determined by one original set of conditions within a given area and territory. If, on the other hand, we suppose that evolution proceeded in different parts of the planet and in widely different environments on identical lines from the lowest forms of life through many others, up to the anthropoid and the human, our whole conception of evolutionary law is affected, and that in turn must affect our philosophy. Looking inductively for evidence, we find what appear to be traces of the existence of man in the Mississippi valley between fifty and sixty thousand years ago, or perhaps even in the "inter-glacial" period. But to whatever conclusions the palæologist may come on that head,<sup>1</sup> the original scientific and logical veto on the hypothesis of two independent evolutions of the human species must for the present hold good.

However remote be the time of the first migration, then, we are shut up to the assumption that the American races derive from Asia, either directly or by way of Polynesia,<sup>2</sup> since the alternative is a hypothesis of a human evolution from pre-human forms in the New World, with the result of yielding an identical human species, while the fauna and flora in general are markedly different. As to the possibility of such an evolution in America, Haeckel gives an emphatic negative. Putting the two hypotheses of immigration from north-east Asia and from Polynesia, he adds: "In any case the original inhabitants of America came from the Old World, and are certainly not, as some suppose, evolved from American apes. Catarrhine or small-nosed apes have at no period existed in America."<sup>3</sup> The fact that men are so much alike in the two hemispheres,

<sup>1</sup> See the history of the discussion in Winsor, *Narrative and Critical History of America*, 1889, i, 336, 367-8, 382-395. Mr. Haynes (*id.* pp. 367-8) thinks that man evolved from the palæolithic to the neolithic stage in the region of the Delaware, and that the ancestors of the present Indians are later arrivals.

<sup>2</sup> For a history of this discussion see Winsor, as cited, i, 76-81, 369-376.

<sup>3</sup> *Natürliche Schöpfungsgeschichte*, 2te Aufl. p. 613.

note



MB | while the animals are so widely different, is a proof that the former are not autochthonous in America.<sup>1</sup>

Nor is there any physical difficulty over the hypothesis that the American races proceeded, by successive waves of emigration, from Asia.<sup>2</sup> At Behring's Straits Asia and America are almost within sight of each other; and at one time they were united. And if we suppose a migration of tribes like the Kamtskadals, who easily bear extreme cold, being but slightly civilised, we dispose of all such difficulties as the suggestion that pastoral Mongols would never have crossed without some of their animals. Prescott, however, remarks that "it would be easy for the inhabitant of Eastern Tartary or Japan to steer his course from islet to islet, quite across to the American shore, without being on the ocean more than two days at a time";<sup>3</sup> and this hypothesis is open. The question is one for the exact solution of which we have not yet sufficient materials, since we have yet to cultivate properly some of the lines of research on which that solution must depend; and it must be admitted that some ethnologists have thus far come to their conclusions in a sufficiently irresponsible fashion. It has been said of Pickering, for instance, that he set up a connection between the Malay and the Californian because each had an open countenance, one wife, and no tomahawk.<sup>4</sup> Happily we need not resort to such inductions as these. Nor need we be deterred from the scientific search by the fact that some of the guesses made have been wildly absurd. There is said to be widely current in Peru a legend, fully believed by the

<sup>1</sup> In an article entitled "America the Cradle of Asia," by Stewart Culin, in *Harper's Magazine* for March, 1903, there is claimed "the same, if not a higher, antiquity for man on the American continent as is revealed by the most remote historical perspective of Egypt or Babylon" (p. 536)—the implication being that *civilisation* was thus early developed. The grounds offered for this uncritical proposition are certain parallels or identities of popular games and accessories found among American and Asiatic races. All of these data are perfectly compatible with an Asiatic derivation of the former. Mr. Culin's main principle appears to be a "patriotic" desire to prove that "American culture" has not been "sterile."

<sup>2</sup> See Oscar Peschel's *Races of Man*, Eng. tr. p. 400 sq. Cp. A. H. Buckland, *Anthropological Studies*, 1891, pp. 61-2.

<sup>3</sup> *Conquest of Mexico*, App. Part I. On this cp. Winsor, i, 78, and see the testimonies cited by Buckle, 3-vol. ed. i, 99, note.

<sup>4</sup> H. H. Bancroft, *Native Races of the Pacific States*, i, 24.



natives, that the name of the first Inca, Manco Capac, arose in the actual advent of a shipwrecked Englishman, who got to be known as *Ingasman*, and who married the daughter of one *Cocapac*, his son being accordingly called *Ingasman Cocapac*, whence the name and title *Inca Manco Capac*.<sup>1</sup> That is droll enough; but we need not therefore proceed with Dr. Réville dogmatically to decide that "*everything shows that the civilisations of Mexico and Peru are autochthonous, springing from the soil itself.*"<sup>2</sup> If it be meant merely that the higher forms of those civilisations (for there were many separate processes) may have subsisted for many centuries without foreign influence, there is no dispute; but the statement as it stands is an unwarranted assertion of a separate human evolution from pre-human forms.

In the nature of the case, the separation of the American from the Asiatic races being admittedly very remote, there are not many close parallels to be expected. A number of extraordinary correspondences, however, have been traced—that, for instance, between the Aztec calendar signs and the Mongolian zodiac. "The symbols in the Mongolian calendar are borrowed from animals. Four of the twelve are the same as the Aztec. Three others are as nearly the same as the different species of animals in the two hemispheres would allow. The remaining five refer to no creature then found in Anahuac. The resemblance went as far as it could."<sup>3</sup> And no less remarkable is the "analogy between the Mexican system of reckoning years by cycles and that still in use over a great part of Asia," seeing that

<sup>1</sup> W. B. Stevenson, *Twenty Years' Residence in South America*, 1825, i, 394-6. Stevenson gives the story as a purely native invention. Mr. A. H. Buckland, who (*Anthropological Studies*, 1891, pp. 96-7) ingeniously parallels the Peruvian legend of Manco Capac and Mama Ocello with the known case of a group of white men and women wrecked among the Kaffirs on the south-east coast of Africa early in the eighteenth century, presumably does not suppose the "Ingasman" theory to be probable. But the Peruvian story in any case will not square with that of Quma and the Kaffirs, where it is not pretended that a great evolution of culture took place, as in the Peruvian myth.

<sup>2</sup> Lectures cited, p. 242. Dr. Réville, singularly enough, mentions all the weak hypotheses, but does not allude to that of a migration by Behring's Straits.

<sup>3</sup> Prescott, *Conquest of Mexico*, App. I.



“this complex arrangement answers no useful purpose, inasmuch as mere counting by numbers, or by signs numbered in regular succession, would have been a far better arrangement.”<sup>1</sup> Such a correspondence must be allowed to count for much; and there is also a remarkable, though perhaps not a conclusive, resemblance between the Mexican and Peruvian temple-pyramids and those of Babylonia and Assyria,<sup>2</sup> which derived from the earlier Akkadians or Sumerians. Those temples or “mountain houses” doubtless began as graves, and grew into long mounds of earth, like those found in the Mississippi valley;<sup>3</sup> and the Asiatic like the Mexican pyramid was latterly one of several stages. Five seems to have been long a common number in Asia, the Babylonian number seven being reached only at a late period;<sup>4</sup> and five was the number of stages or stories in the great temple of Huitzilopochtli, the Mexican national God.<sup>5</sup> When such oblong pyramid temples, carefully covered with masonry, and having likewise five stages, are found in many of the South Sea islands,<sup>6</sup> we have a fresh reason for supposing an ancient distribution of races eastwards from Asia, in repeated waves of migration.<sup>7</sup> So, too, we are entitled to surmise kinship, when we find that the Mexicans had a fixed usage of throwing the first morsels of their meals into the fire,<sup>8</sup> and that many Tungusian, Mongolian, and Turkish tribes persistently do the same thing to this

<sup>1</sup> Tylor, *Researches into the Early History of Mankind*, 1865, pp. 92-3.

<sup>2</sup> J. G. Müller, *Amerikanische Urreligionen*, pp. 645-6. For the Peruvian analogue see the cut in Squier's *Primeval Monuments of Peru*, p. 9, reproduced in Winsor, i, 250.

<sup>3</sup> Also like that altar of Lycæan Zeus in Arcadia, where human sacrifices were offered—a Semitic survival. See Pausanias, viii, 2.

<sup>4</sup> Jastrow, *Religion of Babylonia and Assyria*, pp. 613-615.

<sup>5</sup> Clavigero, *Hist. of Mexico*, Eng. tr. ed. 1807, i, 262; Müller, p. 646.

<sup>6</sup> See the illustration in Ellis's *Polynesian Researches*, 2nd ed. i, 341; and in T. Williams, *Fiji and the Fijian Islands*, i, 215, 223. B. Seeman (*Fiji and its Inhabitants*), in F. Galton's *Vacation Tourists, and Notes of Travel*, 1862, p. 269, states that “all Fijian temples have a pyramidal form, and [they] are often erected on terraced mounds,” the same rule holding in Eastern Polynesia. Cp. Moerenhout, *Voyage aux Îles du Grand Ocean*, 1837, i, 467. Strictly, however, some in Fiji are conical, though still terraced (see Williams, as cited, p. 223).

<sup>7</sup> See also above, p. 146, as to the resemblances between Polynesian and Khond sacrifices. The Polynesians, too, have the Hindu myth of the eight uncreated Gods, children of one pair. Ellis, i, 325.

<sup>8</sup> J. G. Müller, as cited, p. 167.



day;<sup>1</sup> and it is difficult to believe that the peculiar usages of sacrificing a "messenger" or "ambassador" to the Sun, painting him red, and hanging up his and other victims' skins, stuffed, as possessing a sacred efficacy,<sup>2</sup> were independently evolved in the two hemispheres. Even the practice of scalping seems to be peculiar to the redskins and the kindred Polynesians, and, in a modified form,<sup>3</sup> to the Mongols;<sup>4</sup> and, as we shall see, the Mexicans, like the ancient Semites and their Sumer-Akkadian teachers, passed their children "through the fire" to the Fire-God. What is more significant, they had the Semitic usage of making certain of their special sacrificial observances last for five days.<sup>5</sup>

And there are remarkable concrete parallels in the religious practices and symbolisms of Asia and Mexico, apart from those which may be taken as universal. Thus a stone or metal mirror was the symbol, and the source of the name, of the Mexican God Tezcatlipoca; and it is also the outstanding symbol in Japanese Shintoism,<sup>6</sup> recognisably a very primitive Asiatic cult. It is told, again, of the national God and War-God Huitzilopochtli that when the people came to Mexico from their home, his wooden image with certain war-emblems was carried by four priests in an ark or chest, called the Seat of God. Here we have a widespread usage;<sup>7</sup> but it is significant that it is found in some closely similar form among Mongols, Chinese, and Japanese. So with the casting of children's horoscopes.<sup>8</sup> More specific is the parallel between certain Mexican usages and those of the Buddhist priests of Thibet and Japan—such as red and yellow headdresses and black robes,<sup>9</sup> which

<sup>1</sup> Castrén, *Vorlesungen über die Finnische Mythologie*, 1853, p. 57.

<sup>2</sup> Above, p. 181, and Part II, ch. ii, § 15.

<sup>3</sup> Ellis, *Polynesian Researches*, iv, 159.      <sup>4</sup> J. G. Müller, p. 597.

<sup>5</sup> Cp. Exod. xii, 3, 6; *Infra*, p. 375; Clavigero, *Hist. of Mexico*, Eng. tr. ed. 1807, B. vi, §§ 31, 35 (i, 300), 310, 312; Grant Allen, *Evolution of the Idea of God*, 1897, pref. p. vi.

<sup>6</sup> *Religious Systems of the World*, p. 106; Thunberg, *Voyages au Japon*, trad. fr. 1796, iii, 255.

<sup>7</sup> J. G. Müller, p. 594.

<sup>8</sup> *Id.* p. 656.

<sup>9</sup> *Id.* p. 648. A line of investigation that might be worth pursuing is suggested by the resemblances of the Mexican use of colour to Chinese and Japanese methods. There is also a curious similarity in the folding of Mexican and Japanese books. Cp. Müller, p. 551.



were in all likelihood pre-Buddhistic. But still more significant, perhaps, is a circumstance which has not been much considered by the ethnologists though it has been noted by the anthropologists—the fact, namely, that both in ancient Asia and in ancient America men kept records by means of knots in strings.<sup>1</sup> The Chinese in old times are known to have done so;<sup>2</sup> and it is told of the Dravidian Khonds of Orissa, that when brought to European knowledge sixty years ago they “kept all accounts by knots on strings,” and conceived of their Gods as recording men’s faults in the same fashion.<sup>3</sup> This would seem to be exactly the method of mnemonics used by the Peruvians when they were discovered by the Spaniards, their *quipus* being described in the same terms; and there is evidence that the same device was used in Central America, and perhaps among the Tlascalans, though it had gone into disuse among the Mexicans, who had attained to the use of “hieroglyphics.”<sup>4</sup>

There remains the question of the source and nature of those hieroglyphics. To examine it in detail is beyond the scope of this survey; and it must suffice to say that as the Mexican hieroglyphic system proper represents an early stage in the evolution of writing from pictures to phonetic symbols, with a phonetic system developed alongside of it,<sup>5</sup> the phenomena are quite consistent with the hypothesis of culture influences from Asia at a remote period. It is not necessary to identify glyphs in order to realise that the Chinese, Egyptian, and Aztec systems are akin. The Egyptian symbols remained substantially undeveloped for at least two thousand years;<sup>6</sup> and recent specialists are satisfied that “many of the elements of hieroglyphic writing had been growing upon the banks of the Nile

<sup>1</sup> Tylor, *Researches into the Early History of Mankind*, 1865, pp. 154–8.

<sup>2</sup> Lao-Tsze, *Tau Têh King*, ch. 80 (Chalmers’ trans. p. 61); Pauthier, *Chine Moderne*, 1853, p. 359.

<sup>3</sup> Macpherson, *Memorials of Service in India*, as before cited, p. 359.

<sup>4</sup> J. G. Müller, *Amerikanische Urreligionen*, p. 549. Cp. Prescott, p. 48, note.

<sup>5</sup> Tylor, *Researches*, 91, 94–9; Champollion, *Précis du système hiéroglyphique*, 1824, p. 280.

<sup>6</sup> Champollion, p. 281; Tylor, p. 99.



long before the time of the first historic dynasty."<sup>1</sup> Given such a slow rate of growth, and noting the fact that Mexican and Egyptian hieroglyphics, and Chinese script, are all written in columns, we are entitled to see in all three the stages of a continuous evolution.<sup>2</sup>

It is true that the American languages, while demonstrably akin to each other, like the Indo-European group, show little or no relation to any of the languages of Asia. But though the difficulty of fully proving affinities of language between American and Asiatic races is great, and we seem thus bound to suppose a very remote separation indeed; on the other hand, the observed facts as to the rapid changes of language among South Sea islanders, when isolated from each other, go to suggest that very wide deviation may occur in a few thousands of years among people of one stock who have separated at a stage in which they have no literature, no word signs, and only the beginnings of a ritual. Beyond this we need not go. It suffices that there is no conceptual obstacle to the assumption that the civilisation of pre-Christian America grew from the central Asiatic roots which fed the beginnings of civilisation as we know it in Mediterranean Asia and Europe; and that from the practical certainty of an original migration of Asiatics to America there follows the probability that there occurred several, at different stages of Asiatic evolution.<sup>3</sup> The hypothesis which seems best to meet all the facts is that America was first peopled

<sup>1</sup> A. J. Evans, "Further Discoveries of Cretan and Ægean Script" in *Jour. of Hellenic Studies*, xvii (1897), 384. Cp. Champollion, p. 280.

<sup>2</sup> Cp. Tylor, pp. 99-100. Mr. Culin (as cited above) quotes Dr. Brinton as saying: "the inner stronghold of those who defended the Asiatic origin of Mexican and Central American civilisation is, I am well aware . . . the Mexican calendar, the game of Patolli, and the presence of Asiatic jade in America" (Paper "On various supposed relations between the American and Asiatic races" read at the International Congress of Anthropology, 1893). It is odd that Dr. Brinton should see no force in the identity of *quipus* and temple structures (both of which were noted by McCulloh as early as 1816), and horoscopes.

<sup>3</sup> "There can be no doubt that America was populated in some way by people of an extremely low culture at a period even geologically remote. There is no reason for supposing, however, that immigration ceased with these original people" (Dall, *Third Report of U. S. Bureau of Ethnology*, p. 146, cited by Winsor, i, 76). Cp. Major J. W. Powell, "Whence came the American Indians?" in *The Forum*, Feb. 1898, p. 688.



from Asia at an extremely remote period; that there slowly grew up American races with a certain definite type of language; and that later immigrants from Asia or Polynesia, perhaps coming as conquerors in virtue of importing a higher civilisation, were linguistically absorbed in the earlier mass, as conquering invaders have repeatedly been in the known history of Europe.

§ 2.—*Aztecs and Peruvians.*

All this was recognised by the industrious Swiss historian of the American religions forty years ago,<sup>1</sup> when the reality of the human race was still obscure, in that it was affirmed on such fantastic bases as the myth of an originally created pair and the counter-hypothesis of creation "in nations"—either of monkeys or men;<sup>2</sup> and when congenital theories of a peopling of America by the "ten lost tribes" were much in vogue. There need then be no serious dispute over the thesis<sup>3</sup> that "the origin of the ancient American religions is to be sought for in the nature of their human spirit"—a different thing from saying that they are autochthonous. The true proposition is neither that, as Müller says, the American peoples did *not* receive their religions from the peoples of the Old World, nor that they *did*: both formulas are misleading. Inasmuch as their ancestors were distinctly human when they passed from Asia to America, the germs of religion and of many rites were derivative; but like all other peoples they evolved in terms of universal law. And as their migrations are likely to have occurred in different epochs, and from different stocks, we may look to find in them, scattered as they are over an entire hemisphere, hardly less variations in language, aspects, and civilisation than were to be traced in the races of the old world a few thousand years ago.

Such variation is actually seen when we seek to ascertain

<sup>1</sup> J. G. Müller, pp. 7-8.

<sup>2</sup> Cp. Nott and Gliddon, *Types of Mankind*, 1854, p. 283; *Indigenous Races of the Earth*, 1857, p. 648.

<sup>3</sup> Müller, p. 9.



the connection of the different peoples of Ancient America with each other. For among these there is fully as much variation as is found among the peoples of Europe. To go no farther, the Aztecs or Mexicans differ noticeably in certain physical characteristics from the Redskins; and these again show considerable variations of type. A decisive theory of the culture-histories of these peoples cannot yet be constructed, inasmuch as we are still very much in the dark as to the civilisations which existed in Central and South America before those of Mexico and Peru. For the title of this paper, "The Religions of *Ancient America*," is designed only to mark off the religions flourishing so lately as four hundred years ago, and the aboriginal religions still existing, from that Christian religion which was introduced into Mexico and Peru by the Spaniards, and into North America by the English and French. The two religious systems we have chiefly to consider, the Mexican and Peruvian as they existed before the Spanish Conquest, are not very ancient in their developed form; because even the two civilisations were comparatively modern. The Aztecs and the Peruvians professed only to date back a few centuries from the Conquest; and in both Peru and Mexico there were and still are the architectural remains of civilisations, some of which were themselves so ancient<sup>1</sup> as to be unintelligible to the nations found by the Spaniards. Thus, near Lake Titicaca in Peru<sup>2</sup> there are vestiges of structures which by their size suggested giant builders, the work of a race of whom the Incas had no knowledge; and yet further there are remains of rude circles of standing stones which belonged to a primitive civilisation more ancient still. So, in Mexico, there are ancient ruins, such as those at Palanque, which suggest a civilisation higher, on the side of art and architecture, and at the same time much older, than that of the Aztecs.<sup>3</sup>

All we can say with any safety is that, as it was put by

<sup>1</sup> Cp. Kirk's note on Prescott, p. 1, and Dr. Tylor, *Anahuac*, p. 189, as to the pre-Toltec civilisation of Mexico.

<sup>2</sup> Squier, *Peru*, 1877, ch. 20; J. G. Müller, pp. 334-5.

<sup>3</sup> Bancroft, iv, 289-346.



Buckle, the earlier civilisations grew up in those regions where there were combined the conditions of a regular, easy, and abundant food supply—namely, heat and moisture, without an overwhelming proportion of the latter, such as occurs in Brazil.<sup>1</sup> Now, from the point of view of the needs of an early civilisation, the golden mean occurs, in South America, only in the territories which were covered by the empire of the Incas, and farther north, from the Isthmus of Panama to Mexico. We surmise then a long-continued movement of population southwards, one wave pushing on another before it, till some reached Patagonia. After a time, however, there might be refluxes. It is admitted that Mexican tradition points to early developments of civilisation about the Isthmus and Central America, and then waves of migration and conquest northwards. And then, in accordance with the law that an already civilised people can get good results out of a territory which could not originate a civilisation,<sup>2</sup> it may have been that some of these early nations were driven north of Mexico, and so established those forgotten States of which the mysterious and fascinating remains have been discovered in modern times. And it may have been that the people called the Toltecs, who flourished in Mexico before the Aztecs, and were in several respects more highly civilised than they,<sup>3</sup> represented yet again a backflow of one of these peoples from the north, according to the tradition.<sup>4</sup> Their alleged silent disappearance, after four centuries of national life, is the standing puzzle of Mexican history.<sup>5</sup> All that we know is, that Mexico remained the seat of the most

<sup>1</sup> *Introd. to the Hist. of Civilisation in England*, 3-vol. ed. i, 101-8.

<sup>2</sup> Dr. Tylor (*Anahuac*, p. 192) has some remarks on this head, to which I can attach no definite meaning.

<sup>3</sup> Clavigero, *History of Mexico*, Eng. tr. ed. 1807, i, 86 (B. ii, § 2).

<sup>4</sup> Compare ch. i of Prescott's *Conquest of Mexico*, and J. F. Kirk's notes on it (Sonnenschein's edition) with Réville, *Lect. i*. But the tradition may also derive from the general movement of population southwards. Clavigero's chronology, c. 8, is to the effect that the Toltecs arrived from the north about 648, the Chichimecs in 1170, the "Acolhuans" about 1200, and the Aztecs in 1296.

<sup>5</sup> Kirk's note on Prescott, p. 7.



flourishing empires, mainly because it could best yield an abundant and regular supply of vegetable food, as maize; and that when Cortès invaded it, the civilisation of the Aztecs, who constituted the most powerful of the several Mexican States then existing, was among the most remarkable.<sup>1</sup>

And herein lies the instructiveness of these civilisations, with their religions, that they supply us with a set of results practically independent of all the known history of Europe and Asia. It has been remarked that the great drawback of most of the moral or human sciences is that they do not admit of experiments as do the physical sciences. You must take the phenomena you get and try to account for them, with no aid from planned repetitions of cases. But, on the other hand, the human sciences as latterly organised have an enormous wealth of data lying ready to hand, and some collocations of data have for us the effect of new revelations in human affairs. After men became absorbed in the conception of European civilisation, with its beginnings, on the one hand in Aryan barbarism, on the other in the Eastern and Egypto-Semitic culture, they seemed to be shut up to a certain body of conclusions about human nature and its tendencies of thought and action. What was worse, the conclusions were presented ready made in terms of the reigning religion, which takes all previous life as so much preparation, planned by a sagacious Deity, for its own particular way of looking at life; and when some sought to think out matters on saner principles, they found their path cumbered at every step by falsified records and prejudiced evidence. But when we go to the records of the cultures and creeds of Mexico and Peru, records wonderfully preserved in the teeth of the fanaticism which would have destroyed them all if it could, we stand clear of the frauds and prejudices alike of Jew and Christian; we are in a measure spared the old contrast between pretended monotheism and polytheism, the eternal sugges-

<sup>1</sup> The Acolhuan or Tezcucan civilisation, however, seems to have been much more intellectual than that of Mexico proper. See Prescott, B. i, c. 6, end; and below, § 5.



tion of the possible diffusion of revealed truth,<sup>1</sup> the perpetual comparison between Christendom and Paganism. We are faced by a civilisation and a religion that reached wealth and complexity by normal evolution from the stages of early savagery and barbarism without ever coming in contact with those of Europe till the moment of collision and destruction. And to study these American civilisations aright is to learn with clearness lessons in sociology, or human science in general, which otherwise could only have been reached imperfectly and with difficulty. The culture-histories of the two hemispheres, put side by side, illuminate each other as do the facts of comparative anatomy.

§ 3.—*Primitive Religion and Human Sacrifice.*

Whatever may have been the variety of the stocks that immigrated from Asia, it holds good that we may look in the less advanced American races for traces of the steps in the religious and social evolution of Mexico and Peru. The non-Aztec peoples of Central America, to begin with, had developed religious systems which in their main features recall the Goddess-worships of Semitic and Hellenistic antiquity; the most marked difference, as regards the historic period of the latter, being the American proclivity to human sacrifice. The summary given of some of them by Mr. H. H. Bancroft will serve to illustrate the old process by which the human mind reached the same essential results out of a superficial variety of materials:—

“The most prominent personage in the Isthmian Pantheon was Dabaiba, a goddess who controlled the thunder and lightning, and with their aid devastated the lands of those who displeased her. In South America, thunder and lightning were held to be the instruments used by the sun to inflict punishment

<sup>1</sup> That is, now. Lord Kingsborough wrought hard in the last generation to prove that the Biblical system was known to the Mexicans; and there was an early theory that St. Thomas, that ubiquitous missionary, had given them Christianity. Prescott, pp. 233, 641; Clavigero, B. vi, § 4.



upon its enemies, which makes it probable that Dabaiba was a transformed sun-goddess. Pilgrims resorted from afar to her temple at Urabá, bringing costly presents and human victims, who were first killed and then burned, that the savoury odours of roasting flesh might be grateful in the nostrils of the goddess. Some describe her as a native princess, whose reign was marked by great wisdom and many miracles, and who was apotheosized after death. She was also honoured as the mother of the Creator, the maker of the sun, the moon, and all invisible things, and the sender of blessings, who seems to have acted as mediator between the people and his mother, for their prayers for rain were addressed to him, although she is described as controlling the showers; and once, when her worship was neglected, she inflicted a severe drought upon the country. When the needs of the people were very urgent, the chiefs and priests remained in the temple, fasting and praying with uplifted hands; the people meanwhile observed a four-days' fast, lacerating their bodies and washing their faces, which were at other times covered with paint. So strict was this fast, that no meat or drink was to be touched until the fourth day, and then only a soup made from maize-flour. The priests themselves were sworn to perpetual chastity and abstinence, and those who went astray in these matters were burned or stoned to death. Their temples were encompassed with walls, and kept scrupulously clean; golden trumpets, and bells with bone clappers, summoned the people to worship."<sup>1</sup>

At a lower stage of civilisation we find human sacrifice already well established, on historic lines, where temples and priesthoods are still insignificant. Thus among the Tupinambos of north-eastern Brazil there was practised a form of sacrifice which recalls at once the rite among the Indian Khonds and the better known one in Mexico, so often described. Among the lower tribes the human sacrifice here figures as primarily an act either of propitiation of their own dead slain in war or of providing

<sup>1</sup> Bancroft, *The Native Races of the Pacific Coast*, iii, 498-9, citing Peter Martyr, dec. vii. lib. x; Irving's *Columbus*, iii, 173-4; Müller, *Amerikanische Urreligionen*, p. 421.



them with food in the other world, they having become Gods in virtue of falling in battle;<sup>1</sup> and, secondarily, as an act of sacrament. The Tupinambos and their congeners sought in battle not to slay but to capture enemies; and when they had a captive he was taken to their village in triumph and received with fife-music, supplied by the bones of previous prisoners. For a whole year he was carefully treated, well fed, and supplied with a well-favoured maiden as wife and servant. At length, on the day of the feast, he was adorned with feathers, and festally led to sacrifice, his body being immediately cut in pieces and distributed among the heads of houses or minor chiefs; or, otherwise, eaten in a general feast.<sup>2</sup> If he had a child by his wife, it was brought up, as among the Khonds, for the same fate.<sup>3</sup>

Of the more general usage of sacrificing children, which we have seen to be primordial in Central Asia, there are many traces among the North-American Indians. Thus those of Florida at the time of the Spanish conquest are recorded to have sacrificed first-born children to the sun;<sup>4</sup> and in Virginia there was at times offered up the sacrifice of the "only begotten son." More general seems to have been the simple usage of sacrificing boys to the God Oki and other deities.<sup>5</sup> Oki was held to "suck the blood from the left breast"; and the theory of the sacrifice seems to have been that it secured good fortune in war. But there was practised in addition an annual spring sacrifice—an instance of which is known to have occurred as late as 1837 or 1838—on the Khond principle of ensuring a good harvest, the propitiated deity in this case being the "great star" Venus. Prisoners were the usual victims; and the last and best-known case is that of the sacrifice of a Sioux maiden, who was bound to a stake and slain with arrows.

<sup>1</sup> Müller, p. 282.

<sup>2</sup> Robertson, *History of America*, B. iv, and Note xx (Works, ed. 1821, viii, 45, 416).

<sup>3</sup> Müller, p. 283.

<sup>4</sup> Waitz, *Anthropologie der Naturvölker*, iii, 207, citing Garcilasso, *Hist. de la Conquête de Floride*, 1737, ii, 3, 11.

<sup>5</sup> *Id. ib.* citing Strachey, *History of Travaile into Virginia*, ed. 1849, pp. 82, 93 sq.; A. Young, *Chronicles of the Pilgrim Fathers*, 1841, p. 358, and others.



Before she died, pieces of her flesh were cut off in the horrible fashion of the Khonds, and the blood made to fall on the young seed-corn.<sup>1</sup>

Next to a human sacrifice seems to have ranked, among some tribes, that of a white dog, the dog being for the redskin a valuable possession,<sup>2</sup> and whiteness being held by them, as among the Greeks and Romans, a mark of purity and distinction in animals. Always it was something important or typically desirable that must be offered to the God. And in all cases the act of sacrifice seems to have lain near the act of sacrament, in which we know the identification of the God with the victim, whether as totem or otherwise, to have been a normal conception. The white dog, like the victim in the ancient Dionysiak sacrifice among the Greeks, seems at times to have been torn to pieces and so eaten.<sup>3</sup> But there is an overwhelming amount of testimony to prove that among the redskins at the time of the Spanish conquest cannibalism was common.<sup>4</sup> It was as a rule, perhaps, prisoners of war who were eaten; and it is recorded that when in the Florida war of 1528 famishing Spaniards were driven to eat the corpses of their own comrades, the Floridan natives, who were wont to eat their captives, were horrorstruck<sup>5</sup>—this though they had no agriculture, and fared precariously at all times.<sup>6</sup> But though this holds good at certain periods of certain anthropophagous tribes, there is only too much evidence in others that cannibalism occurred on other pretexts;<sup>7</sup> and as all primitive feasts were more or less sacramental, and the sacramental eating of human flesh is seen to have subsisted among the Aztecs long after simple cannibalism had disappeared, there can be little doubt that

<sup>1</sup> *Id. ib.*, citing J. Irving, *Indian Sketches*, 1835, ii, 136, and Schoolcraft, iv, 50; v, 77.

<sup>2</sup> *Id. ib.*, citing Kohl, *Kitschi-Gami*, Bremen, 1859, i, 86.

<sup>3</sup> *Id.* p. 208, citing Nuttall, *Journal of Travels into the Arkansas Territory*, Philadelphia, 1821.

<sup>4</sup> J. G. Müller, pp. 141-8 and refs. Cp. Robertson, *History of America*, B. iv (Works, ed. 1821, viii, 43) and refs.

<sup>5</sup> Robertson, as cited, vol. viii, Note XIX, citing Torquemada.

<sup>6</sup> *Id. ib.* Note III.

<sup>7</sup> Cases have occurred down till the middle of the nineteenth century. Müller, as cited.



originally the human sacrifice was eaten among the American peoples.

Even in the "savage" stage, however, there can be traced the beginnings of the recoil not only from the sacrifice but from the cannibal sacrament. The letting of blood seems to have been in certain rites substituted for slaying;<sup>1</sup> and in the story of Hiawatha the Heaven-God, who lived as a man among the Onondagas and had a mortal daughter, we find a parallel to the modified legends of Iphigeneia and Jephthah's daughter. Heaven ordered that the maiden should be sacrificed, and her father sadly brought her forth; but there came a mighty sound as of a wind, and the people, looking on high, saw a dark object approaching with terrific speed, whereupon they all fled. The father and daughter stayed resignedly, and lo! the coming thing was an enormous bird, which hurled itself with such force on the maiden that she disappeared, and the bird was buried up to the neck in the earth.<sup>2</sup> Late or early, the legend was framed with a purpose.

In the tribal stage, necessarily, there was little development of the priesthood. Its beginnings were represented by the "medicine-men" or sorcerers, who set up secret religious societies or orders, to at least one of which, in the historic period, sorcerers of various types and tongues could belong.<sup>3</sup> Of the temple, too, the beginning is seen in the sacred hut, to which in certain tribes only the king or the medicine man has entrance, and in which begin to be stored idols and sacred objects.<sup>4</sup> As we go southward, towards the region of the higher civilisation, we find an increasing development of the priestly function, sometimes in combination with the kingly, as among the Natchez of Florida, among whom in the seventeenth century was found the worship of the sun, symbolised in the hut-temple by an ever-burning fire.<sup>5</sup> There the king-priest was "brother of

<sup>1</sup> Müller, p. 143.

<sup>2</sup> *Id.* p. 144, citing Schoolcraft. Cp. the story cited from Stöber.

<sup>3</sup> Waitz, iii, 215.

<sup>4</sup> *Id.* p. 203.

<sup>5</sup> This seems to have been a common institution among the redskins before the advent of the whites. Cp. L. Carr, *The Mounds of the Mississippi Valley*, in Smithsonian Report for 1891, pp. 535-7.



the Sun," and the royal family constituted an aristocracy with special privileges, though bound to marry outside their caste.<sup>1</sup>

In the midway civilisations of Central America, this development has gone far towards the state of things seen in the kingdom of the Aztecs. In Yucatan, for instance, there was a hierarchy of priests, with a head; and the order seems to have had extensive judicial powers.<sup>2</sup> The temples, too, had become considerable buildings, to which the leading men made roads from their houses.<sup>3</sup> Alongside of the priests, all the while, remained the sorcerers or "medicine-men," also an official class with different types or orders, members of which, however, were privately employed by the nobles,<sup>4</sup> after the manner of "Levites" among the early Hebrews; and these private priests competed with the hierarchy in the matter of receiving formal confessions from penitents and patients.<sup>5</sup> Convents existed for virgins, and of those who spent their whole lives in them the statues were after death worshipped as Goddesses, while the king's daughter ranked as the "Fire Virgin," and to her others were sacrificed.<sup>6</sup> Idols of all kinds abounded; and wooden ones, like the Hebrew *teraphim*, were accounted precious family heirlooms.<sup>7</sup> Human sacrifices, of course, were frequent, children being made victims in great numbers when captives were lacking, and legitimate sons when the sons of slave women ran short,<sup>8</sup> "not even the only son being spared."<sup>9</sup> Surrogate sacrifices in the form of blood-letting were normal; but the cannibal sacrament does not seem to have been so; though it took place in Guatemala, where the king and priests and nobles partook of the victims slain to "the highest God" at the

<sup>1</sup> Waitz, iii, 217-220.

<sup>2</sup> Spencer's *Descriptive Sociology*, No. II, p. 21, col. 2, citing Liçana and Landa.

<sup>3</sup> *Id. ib.* col. 3, citing Peter Martyr.

<sup>4</sup> *Id. ib.*, citing Landa.

<sup>5</sup> *Id.* p. 22, col. 1, citing Herrera and Liçana.

<sup>6</sup> *Id.* p. 21, col. 3, and p. 40, col. 2, citing Collogudo.

<sup>7</sup> *Id.* p. 21, col. 3, citing Landa.

<sup>8</sup> *Id.* p. 21, col. 3, citing Liçana, Landa, and Herrera.

<sup>9</sup> This is told of the people of Vera Paz. *Id.* p. 22, col. 4, citing Ximenez.



time of Lent, the high-priest and the king getting the hands and feet.<sup>1</sup>

In the case of this particular sacrifice, the chosen victims, who were slaves, were each allowed for a week the peculiar privileges accorded to similar victims in the Old World,<sup>2</sup> down to the detail of dining with the king; and for this sacrifice, it is recorded, the victims were "brought together in a particular house near the temple, and there got to eat and drink until they were drunk," apparently on the principles of the Khonds and Rhodians.<sup>3</sup> It seems now difficult to doubt that the religion of ancient America is of Asiatic derivation; and that the pyramidal altar-temples of Mexico and Babylon are alike developments from simpler mounds or "high places" shaped by the prehistoric peoples of Asia, who first carried the practice with them to the New World. It is now reasonably established that the "Mound-Builders" of the Mississippi valley were simply North American Indians, living very much at the culture-stage of those found by the first whites, though there as elsewhere there may have been partial retrogression in certain tribes and territories under stress of war.<sup>4</sup>

From the tribal state, civilisation had risen to a stage at which, in Central America, even outside the Aztec State, as in Yucatan, there were schools in the temples where the children of the priests and nobles were taught such science as the priests possessed, from books<sup>5</sup> in which had been evolved a hieratic script on the basis of hieroglyphics,<sup>6</sup> as in ancient Egypt. They had advanced far in agriculture, cultivating many plants and fruits; had

<sup>1</sup> *Id.* p. 22, col. 2, citing Fr. Roman, in Ximenez.

<sup>2</sup> Above, pp. 112, 115, 120, 130, 146.

<sup>3</sup> Above, pp. 113, 115, 116, 129, 131, *note*.

<sup>4</sup> See the whole problem thoroughly discussed by Mr. Lucien Carr in his treatise on *The Mounds of the Mississippi Valley*, in the Smithsonian Report for 1891. Cp. Winsor, as before cited, i, 397-410. "That many Indian tribes built mounds and earth-works is beyond doubt; but that all the mounds and earth-works of North America are by these same tribes and their immediate ancestors is not thereby proved." Professor Putnam, cited by Winsor, i, 402, *note*. The Toltec theory of the mounds, once common (*e.g.*, J. D. Baldwin, *Ancient America*, 1872, pp. 200-205, and his authorities), is practically exploded.

<sup>5</sup> Spencer, as cited, p. 21, col. 2, citing Landa.

<sup>6</sup> *Id.* p. 51, col. 3, citing Wilson, *Prehistoric Man*, 2nd ed. ii, 133 sq.



numerous stone buildings, and excellent stone-paved roads; and had made some little progress in sculpture. But there had been no transcending of the primeval concepts of religion; and human blood flowed for the Gods far more freely than in the state of savagery. The savage's "happy hunting ground" had been specialised into a heaven and a hell;<sup>1</sup> the medicine-man into a great priestly order; from his primitive symbolism had been evolved the sacrament of baptism; his simple sun-worship had become a vast ceremonial; and in many territories the "heathen" had so far anticipated Christian civilisation as to have established the practice of confession. But the stamp of primeval savagery, conserved by the spirit of religion, is clear through it all: there is no gainsaying the fundamental relationship of the lower and the higher cults. Around the civilisations of Peru and Mexico, at the time of the Spanish conquest, there stretched north and south a barbarism in which we know to have existed the germs of universal historic religion—human sacrifices constituting sacraments; beliefs in deities and spirits beneficent and maleficent; practices of prayer and witchcraft, ritual and worship, festival and ordinance, the whole in part conducted by the community as a whole, but guided by the soothsayers and sorcerers who are the beginnings of priesthoods. From such antecedents everywhere has all "higher" religion been evolved.

#### § 4.—*The Mexican Cultus.*

When we turn from this stage of religious history to that of Aztec Mexico, the first and most memorable difference that faces us is the immense expansion of the power of the priests. If we can trust the Spanish writers,<sup>2</sup> five thousand priests were connected with the principal temple in the city of Mexico alone, where there were in all some 600 temples, and where the total population was perhaps about

<sup>1</sup> *Id.* p. 40, col. 1, citing Landa.

<sup>2</sup> Clavigero, *History of Mexico*, B. vi, § 14 (vol. i, p. 270).