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The Mythology and Religion of Primitive People.

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OUR earth, as Herder says, "owes the seed of all higher culture to religious tradition, whether literary or oral." At a certain stage in the life of every people we find ideas and fancies presented in the historical form, which represent their religious belief, and generally their oldest traditions. The oldest theology of all nations is the form of myths, hence the great importance of mythological study in order to reach the fundamental ideas belonging to the moral and religious nature of man, as they have been embodied by the imaginative faculty of the most favoured races.

It is difficult to comprehend the attitude of primitive humanity in its personifying stage of thought, a system of thought not reasoned or abstract, as one's is now, but felt and imagined, as was natural in the case of those human beings who had developed no reasoning faculties, but were all made of senses in the highest physical perfection, and of the most vigorous imaginations. In their total ignorance of causes they wondered at everything; and their poetry was all divine, because they ascribed to gods the object of their wonder, and thought that beings like themselves but greater, could alone have caused them; thus they were like children, taking into their hands inanimate things, and playing and talking with them as though they were living persons.

Religion rests upon ethics and emotion. In its primitive stage the ethical phase is entirely occupied by a sense of duty to demoniac powers—a slavish sense of duty as to a master who must be obeyed in fear and trembling; and the emotion is wholly a sense of wonder at inexplicable facts and processes, mainly of the physical universe, which spurs the fancy to express the superhuman in terms of the human, and in a shape we call a myth. The history of cult and ceremonial religion traces the development of an ethical sense, from physical offering and sacrifice through symbolical rites, up to the notion of duty to one's fellows, as an outcome of duty to one's God. The history of all religious emotion, on the other hand, is for all early stages a part of the history of poetry, and must chronicle the attempts of the human mind to set in order and realize the sense of wonder at the supernatural. The realization of this sense of wonder is expressed in the myth, and a series of myths may foster a primitive creed. From both these great religious factors, the ceremony and the myth, constantly there slips out and escapes the living faith which gives them being.

In one sense, every religion was a true religion, being the only religion which was possible at the time, which was compatible with the language, the thoughts, and the sentiment of each generation, which was appropriate to the age of the world. The idea of the soul which is held by uncultured races, and is the foundation of their religion, is not difficult for us to understand if we can fancy ourselves in their place, ignorant of the very rudiments of science, and trying to get at the meaning of life by what the senses seem to tell. The great question which forces

itself on their minds is one that we, with all our knowledge, cannot half answer: what the life is which is sometimes in us, but not always. We ought, therefore, to put the most charitable interpretation on the apparent absurdities, the follies, and the errors of ancient religion.

The primitive religion of Egypt was ancestor worship, but as long ago as the founding of the pyramid this had been superseded by a more advanced stage of thought. The oldest form of prayer extant, dating from 3766 B.C. to 3366 B.C., shows us that the Egyptians in their most ancient propitiation of ancestors, always made it through prayer, not to the ancestor but to Anubis, Osiris, or some other god; while the deceased is described in the funeral inscription as "faithful to the great god." The monotheistic intuition," says Max Muller, "is inseparable from the conception of religion, and we find traces of it in all places and throughout all times, and this monotheistic intuition is always accompanied by faith in the persistence of the human personality after death; and in the ancient traditions of many nations the belief that their laws were communicated directly by God to the lawgiver is quite general."

The inscriptions of old Accad and Babylon clearly express the ideas of the early people, of creation, and of Providence; how man came into being; how God was the directive force in the ordering of the world; how He was worshipped in the first ages; and how He communicated His will to man. Sometimes their ideas are crude and mythical, but they evidently had a perception of the truth. In the higher and more gifted minds of ancient Accad we find a pure monotheism.

Modern research has discovered the temple in which Abraham worshipped and the name of the god he adored and the psalm of adoration which for forty years he chanted. The temple was that of Sin, the male moon god of Ur. Referring to the religion of the early Chinese, the Rev. Geo. Owen tells us: "The old classics of China going back to the time of Abraham, show a wonderful knowledge of God. There are passages in those classics about God worthy to stand side by side with kindred passages in the Old Testament. The founders of the Chinese race believed in an omniscient, omnipotent, and omnipresent God, the moral governor of the world and the impartial judge of man. In Greece, as in India, the worshippers often rose into a region immeasurably higher than that of their mythology. To both the name for the bright heaven had become a name for the One only God." This is the *Dyaus pitar* of the Vedas, the *Zeus pater* of the Greek, and *Jupiter* of the Romans; and that means in all these languages what it meant before they were torn asunder—it means Heaven-Father!

WHEN God sends his people on a pilgrimage, He gives them a staff to support them by the way.—TAYLOR.

FAITH is the hand that lays hold on Christ, the eye that looks to Christ, the ear that hears the voice of Christ, the mouth that feeds on Christ, the finger that touches Christ, and the key that unlocks the treasures of Christ.—REV. F. HARPER.