

the light of revelation, connects itself with the idea of a promised redeemer or deliverer. In most religions we find some deity or hero who fills the place of a saviour and intercessor. Bel, Osiris, and Vishnu have this function, and this element enters largely into most systems of heathenism, in which it allies itself with sacrifice, a priesthood, and too often with base and venal priestly absolution. Let us not wonder that this was the case of old, when we see what has happened to Christianity in modern times. Jesus of Nazareth, who represented Himself as the fulfilment of all the ancient prophecies of a coming redeemer, and who stigmatizes all previous pretenders to that title as "thieves and robbers," instituted no priesthood, founded no temples or altars, required no special emblems, whether sculptured or pictorial, and no special vestments or ceremonies. Yet how soon there grew up among His professed followers all these things in as full development as in the more ancient systems! We may, therefore, ask, if Christianity now appears in this guise, can we detect any similar outgrowths in the ancient heathen religions? With this clew in our hands we can thread the labyrinth of primitive mythology, and shall find that the old idea of a coming hero and deliverer to remedy all human evils—that seed of the woman who was to bruise the serpent's head—is the root from which sprung many of the most perplexing features of the ancient cults. It would require too much space to follow this into details; but I may refer to a few leading points now coming out from the mass of recent discoveries and discussions.

Nothing is more certain than that throughout heathen antiquity a mother goddess—mother of men and also mother of a god, hero or deliverer—formed a central point of worship, and whatever adoration might be given to any other or higher god or gods, she was the favorite intercessor of the people, just as the Blessed Virgin now is in the Catholic and Greek churches. Sometimes she is absolutely a goddess, sometimes has very human attributes; sometimes she is identified with the moon or the evening star. Sometimes she has a pure and holy character, sometimes her worship is licentious and unchaste. Under all these forms, however, her main attributes are the same, and it is now generally admitted that Ishtar of Chaldea, Astarte or Ashtaroth of Syria, Athor and possibly Isis of Egypt, Artemis of Greece and Asia Minor, and some forms of Aphrodite, are modifications of the same original idea. Endless hypothetical solutions may be given of this ancient worship, but we have lately had an authoritative explanation in those interesting deluge tablets of ancient Chaldea first introduced to English readers by the late George Smith, and which, though known to us only in Assyrian copies of the time of the Hebrew kings, were probably taken from very ancient Chaldean originals. In these Ishtar appears in the character of the mother of men, and as mourning the death of her children devoured by the flood, and beseeching the gods to deliver them. This is the most ancient document in which the goddess appears, and we see at once that as the mother of men she