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## **Tree and serpent worship**

**Fergusson, James**

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Introductory Essay.

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NOTES  
ON  
TREE AND SERPENT WORSHIP.

INTRODUCTION.

PART I.—WESTERN WORLD.

THERE are few things which at first sight appear to us at the present day so strange, or less easy to account for, than that worship which was once so generally offered to the Serpent God. If not the oldest, it ranks at least among the earliest forms through which the human intellect sought to propitiate the unknown powers. Traces of its existence are found not only in every country of the old world; but before the new was discovered by us, the same strange idolatry had long prevailed there, and even now the worship of the Serpent is found lurking in out-of-the-way corners of the globe, and startles us at times with the unhallowed rites which seem generally to have been associated with its prevalence.

Although the actual worship of Trees is nearly as far removed from our ordinary forms of faith as Serpent Worship, still it can hardly be considered as more than an exaggerated perversion of many of the ideas now current; and we can hardly wonder that in an early stage of human civilization, it may have assumed considerable importance. There is such wondrous beauty in the external form of trees, and so welcome a shelter beneath their over-arching boughs, that we should not feel surprise that in early ages groves were considered as the fittest temples for the gods. There are also, it must be remembered, few things in nature so pleasing to the eye as the form or the colour of the flowers which adorn at seasons the whole vegetable kingdom, and nothing so grateful to the palate of the rude man as the flavour of the fruits which trees afford. In addition to these were the multifarious uses to which their wood could always be applied. For buildings, for furniture, for implements of peace or war, or for ornament, it was indispensable. In ancient times it was from wood alone that man obtained that fire which enabled him to cook his food, to warm his dwelling, or to sacrifice to his gods. With all their poetry, and all their usefulness, we can hardly feel astonished that the primitive races of mankind should have considered trees as the choicest gift of the gods to men, and should have believed that their spirits

still delighted to dwell among their branches, or spoke oracles through the rustling of their leaves.

On the other hand, when it comes to be more closely examined, the worship of the Serpent is not so strange as it might at first sight appear. As was well remarked by an ancient author,\* "The serpent alone of all animals without legs or arms, or any of the usual appliances for locomotion, still moves with singular celerity;" and he might have added—grace, for no one who has watched a serpent slowly progressing over the ground, with his head erect, and his body following apparently without exertion, can fail to be struck with the peculiar beauty of the motion. There is no jerk, no reflex motion, as in all other animals, even fishes, but a continuous progression in the most graceful curves. Their general form, too, is full of elegance, and their colours varied and sometimes very beautiful, and their eyes bright and piercing. Then, too, a serpent can exist for an indefinite time without food or apparent hunger. He periodically casts his skin, and, as the ancients fabled, by that process renewed his youth. Add to this his longevity, which, though not so great as was often supposed, is still sufficient to make the superstitious forget how long an individual may have been revered in order that they may ascribe to him immortality.

Though these qualities, and others that will be noted in the sequel, may have sufficed to excite curiosity and obtain respect, it is probable that the serpent never would have become a god but for his exceptional power. The destructive powers of tigers or crocodiles are merely looked upon as ordinary exaggerations of a general law, but the poison fang of the serpent is something so exceptional, and so deadly in its action, as to excite dread, and when we find to how few of the serpent tribe it is given, its presence is only more mysterious. Even more terrible, however, than the poison of the Cobra is the flash-like spring of the Boa—the instantaneous embrace and the crushed-out life—all accomplished faster almost than the eye can follow. It is hardly to be wondered at that such power should impress people in an early stage of civilization with feelings of awe; and with savages it is probably true that most religions sprung from a desire to propitiate by worship those powers from whom they fear that injury may be done to themselves or their property. Although, therefore, fear might seem to suffice to account for the prevalence of the worship, on looking closely at it we are struck with phenomena of a totally different character. When we first meet Serpent Worship, either in the Wilderness of Sinai, the Groves of Epidaurus, or in the Sarmatian huts, the Serpent is always the Agathodæmon, the bringer of health and good fortune. He is the teacher of wisdom, the oracle of future events. His worship may have originated in fear, but long before we become practically acquainted with it, it had passed to the opposite extreme among its votaries. Any evil that ever was spoken of the serpent, came from those who were outside the pale, and were trying to depreciate what they considered as an accursed superstition.

If fear were the only or even the principal characteristic of Serpent Worship, it might be sufficient, in order to account for its prevalence, to say, that like causes produce like effects all the world over; and that the serpent is so terrible and so unlike the rest of creation that these characteristics are sufficient to explain everything. When more narrowly examined, however, this seems hardly to be the case. Love and admiration,

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\* Sanchoniathon quoting Taatus ap Eusebium, Præp. Evangel. 40.

more than fear or dread, seem to be the main features of the faith, and there are so many unexpected features which are at the same time common to it all the world over, that it seems more reasonable to suspect a common origin. In the present state of our knowledge, however, we are not in a position to indicate the locality where it first may have appeared, or the time when it first became established among mankind.

In so far as such glimmerings as we possess enable us to guess the locality of its origin, I would feel inclined to say that it came from the mud of the Lower Euphrates, among a people of Turanian origin, and spread thence as from a centre to every country or land of the Old World in which a Turanian people settled. Apparently no Semetic, or no people of Aryan race, ever adopted it as a form of faith. It is true we find it in Judea, but almost certainly it was there an outcrop from the older underlying strata of the population. We find it also in Greece, and in Scandinavia, among people whom we know principally as Aryan, but there too it is like the tares of a previous crop springing up among the stems of a badly-cultivated field of wheat. The essence of Serpent Worship is as diametrically opposed to the spirit of the Veda or of the Bible as is possible to conceive two faiths to be; and with varying degrees of dilution the spirit of these two works pervades in a greater or less extent all the forms of the religions of the Aryan or Semetic races. On the other hand, any form of animal worship is perfectly consistent with the lower intellectual status of the Turanian races, and all history tells us that it is among them, and essentially among them only, that Serpent Worship is really found to prevail.

## HUMAN SACRIFICES.

The almost universal association of human sacrifices with the practice of Serpent Worship would render it extremely desirable to ascertain, if it were possible, how far the connexion between the two is real, or to what extent the juxtaposition may be only accidental. The subject is, however, very seriously complicated by the circumstance of the very different form which the rite took in various ages, and the different points of view from which it must consequently be at times regarded.

In its earliest and simplest form, human sacrifice seems merely to have been regarded in the nature of a tithe. A cannibal savage shared with his cannibal god the spoils of victory as he did the products of the chase, or he sought to sanctify his revenge or his sensuality by making his deity a participator in his crimes. Another form arose from the idea that death was only a change, and that the future state was little more than a continuation of this world. It became consequently necessary for his enjoyment of it, that a man should be accompanied by his cattle, and his slaves, male and female, and in its most refined form the wife voluntarily sacrificed herself to rejoin her beloved husband. A third form sprung from a higher and more religious motive: it arose from a conviction of man's own unworthy and sinful nature as compared with the greatness and goodness of God, and the consequent desire to atone for the one by the sacrifice of whatever was most dear, and to propitiate the favour of the deity by offering up whatever was most precious and most beloved—even one's own, and it might be only, child. A fourth form, equally compatible with the highest civilisation, was the national sacrifice of one to atone for the sins of the many. Serpent Worship is associated in a greater or less degree with all these forms of the human rite, and so much

so that it is nearly correct to say that wherever human sacrifices prevailed, there Serpent Worship is found also, though the converse does not appear so capable of proof. Serpent Worship did continue to exist when, at least, human sacrifices had ceased to be performed, though even then it is not quite clear whether it was not only from the disuse of one part of what had once been associated.

In Egypt human sacrifices never assumed the position of a religious or domestic institution. The victorious king dedicated the prisoners taken in war to the gods, but beyond this it does not seem to have been carried; and Serpent Worship in Egypt seems likewise to have been sporadic and of little importance.

In Judea, so long as any traces of Serpent Worship prevailed, the idea of human sacrifices seems to have been familiar, but after Hezekiah's time we simultaneously lose all traces of either.

So long as Greece was Pelasgic, Serpent Worship and human sacrifices went hand in hand, but with the return of the Heraclidæ, the latter went out of fashion, though the former still lingered long, but in a modified form. In Rome, on the other hand, as we shall presently see, the worship of the Serpent was a later introduction, but as it strengthened, so did the prevalence of human sacrifices; and till Christianity put a stop to them they certainly were considered an important means of appeasing the wrath or propitiating the favour of the gods. It may, in Rome, have been to some extent derived from Etruria, or encouraged by the example of Carthage, where human sacrifices certainly prevailed till the destruction of the city, and wherever Moloch—"horrid king"—was worshipped; and in all these instances the practice seems to have risen and fallen with Serpent Worship.

In Mexico and Dahomey, where in modern times human sacrifices have been practised to an extent not known elsewhere, there too Serpent Worship was and is the typical and most important form of propitiation; while in India, there can be little doubt but that the two existed together from the earliest time. The sacrifice of men could not, however, stand before the intellectual acumen of the Aryan, and was utterly antagonistic to the mild doctrines of the Buddhist. It consequently was abolished wherever it was possible to do so; but the more innocent worship of the Serpent cropped up again and again wherever neglected, and remained in many places long after the sister form had practically lost its meaning. Both still exist in India at the present day, but not apparently practised together or by the same tribes. It is not, however, by any means clear whether the dissociation is real, or whether we merely assume it is so in consequence of our ignorance of the subject. Human sacrifices, especially among the Khonds, have attracted the attention both of governments and of individuals. No one has turned his attention to the modern forms of Serpent Worship.

Notwithstanding all these coincidences—and they might easily be extended—it must not be overlooked that nowhere can we trace any direct connexion between the two forms of faith. No human sacrifice was anywhere made to propitiate the serpent, nor was it ever pretended that any human victim was ever devoured by the snake god. In all instances the serpent is the Agathodæmon, the bringer of health or good fortune, the protector of men or of treasure, and nowhere was it sought to propitiate him by sacrifice of life beyond what was necessary for food, or to appease him by blood offerings.

When the subject has been more thoroughly investigated than has hitherto been the case, it may be possible to trace a more direct connexion between the two forms

of faith than we are now able to do. At all events we shall then be in a position to say whether it was a real partnership or only an accidental juxtaposition. In the meanwhile, all that is required in this place is to draw attention to the subject, and to point out a coincidence which is so remarkable that when investigated it may hereafter lead to the most important results.\*

## EGYPT.

In an attempt to investigate any form of ancient mythology from an historical point of view, we naturally turn first to Egypt; for not only was Egypt the earliest civilized of all the countries of the ancient world, in so far at least as we at present know, but she was pre-eminently the parent of all idolatries. With the Egyptians all knowledge was considered as divine, and whatever they saw, they worshipped. Their gods had been kings; their kings were gods; and all the animal kingdom was considered worthy of worship in a greater or less degree. From bulls to beetles, or from crocodiles to cats, it made little difference; all came alike to a people so essentially religious as the Egyptians seem to have been. It is little wonder, therefore, that Serpents, and it may be Trees, should be included in their multifarious Pantheon, and it is easy to detect numerous instances of the honours bestowed on both. Still it would be straining the argument beyond its legitimate issue to describe the Egyptians as in any sense an essentially Tree or Serpent worshipping people. The serpent was worshipped on the banks of the Nile among other animals, perhaps in some instances with a certain degree of pre-eminence;† but on the whole the accounts are hardly sufficient to enable us to say that the serpent was more honoured than his associated animal gods. At the same time it must be admitted that the serpent very frequently appears in the sculptures of the Temple walls, and frequently in a place of honour, as on the brow of the king, or as a prominent ornament of his dress, but hardly ever there with that pre-eminence he attained in other countries.

The relative position of Tree Worship among the Egyptians seems to be almost the same. It is true that the important part which the Tamarisk (*Ερλίκη*) plays in the legend of Isis and Osiris, as told by Plutarch,‡ might tend to a somewhat different conclusion, and the prominence given to the other tree (*Μηρίδην*), which marked and shaded the tomb of Osiris in the same legend, might lead to the conclusion that a form of Tree Worship prevailed in Egypt before the multifarious Theban pantheon was elaborated. The authority, however, for these facts is not such as can be relied upon, and the sculptures again do not favour the belief that Trees were considered as divine on the banks of the Nile, though they may justify the belief that the sycamore was sacred to the goddess Netpe, and the persea to Athor.§

\* As human sacrifices hardly form part of the subject of the work, I have not thought it necessary to encumber the text of this section with notes or references. The subject has been exhaustively treated by Kalish, in his Commentary on Leviticus XXIII. p. 381 to 416. I am also much indebted to an unpublished essay by Sir John Acton, where the whole question is treated with his usual depth of learning.

† Herodotus, II. 74. Ælian, de Animal. XVII. 5. Clemens Alex. III. 2. p. 93.

‡ Plutarch, de Iside et Osiri, 11. Wilkinson's Ancient Egyptians, vol. V. p. 261, et seq.

§ Wilkinson, vol. IV. p. 391, plates 36 and 54, &c.

The great test of such a subject in Egypt are the sculptures which cover the walls of the Temples. These are the Bible of the Egyptians, in so far at least as we know it. Any one studying these with that object might easily pick out fifty or a hundred examples which would tend to show that the Egyptians were both Tree and Serpent worshippers; but, on a fair review of the whole subject, these would probably be found to be only a fractional part of the nature worship of the Egyptians, and neither the most prominent nor the most important.\* In spite, therefore, of the passages in classical authors which may be quoted against this view, it would probably be incorrect to include the ancient Egyptians among the votaries either of the Serpent or of Trees.

#### JUDEA.

The earliest distinct allusion which we have to those mysterious properties which the ancients attributed to certain Trees, is to be found in the second and third chapters of Genesis. The planting of the Trees of Life and Knowledge in the Garden of Eden is there described in minute detail, and judging from subsequent forms of the story, their custody seems to have been intrusted to the serpent. Taken by itself, this narrative has always appeared one of the least intelligible parts of the Pentateuch, and numberless theories have been formed to account for what seemed so completely outside the range of ordinary human experience. With the knowledge we now possess, it does not seem so difficult to understand what was meant by the curse on the serpent, or the prohibition to eat the fruit of the trees. When the writers of the Pentateuch set themselves to introduce the purer and loftier worship of the Elohim, or of Jehovah, it was first necessary to get rid of that earlier form of faith which the primitive inhabitants of the earth had fashioned for themselves. The serpent, as the principal deity of that early religion, was cursed "above all cattle, and above every beast of the field;"† and in future there was to be for ever enmity between the serpent and "man of woman born." The confusion of ideas on this subject seems to have arisen from the assumption that the curse was directed at the reptile as such, and not rather at a form of worship which the writers of the Pentateuch must have regarded with horror, and which they thought it necessary to denounce in the strongest terms and in the form they believed would be most intelligible by those to whom it was addressed. The tree it was not necessary should be cursed; the fruit of the tree of knowledge had been eaten, and no further result could be obtained by access to it, while the tree of life was guarded by a cherub with a flaming sword, and all approach prevented. Its fruits could not then be obtained, nor have they to the present day.

The two chapters which refer to this, however,—as indeed the whole of the first eight of Genesis,—are now generally admitted by scholars to be made up of fragments of earlier books or earlier traditions belonging, properly speaking, to Mesopotamian rather than to Jewish history, the exact meaning of which the writers of the

\* On such a monument, for instance, as the Sarcophagus of Menepthah, in Sir John Soane's Museum, where the Serpent occurs more frequently than on any monument of the same extent I am acquainted with, and in a more important character, there is not one instance in which it can be said he is being worshipped. He is the representative of heaven—is a good or evil genius—a protector or destroyer—a mere hieroglyphic—anything, in short, but never a god.—See Bonomi's published account of the Sarcophagus: Longman, 1864.

† Genesis, iii. 14.

Pentateuch seem hardly to have appreciated when they transcribed them in the form in which they are now found. The history of the Jews and of the Jewish religion commences with the call of Abraham, and from that time forward the worship of Serpents and Trees took an infinitely less important position, though still occasionally cropping up, often when least expected, but apparently not as a religion of the Jews, but as a backsliding towards the feelings of the pre-existing races among whom they were located.

There is apparently no mention of serpents, either in the Bible or in any of the traditions in connexion with Abraham or his immediate descendants; but that Patriarch "planted a grove at the well of the covenant (Beersheba), and called there "on the name of the Lord"\*—a circumstance the more worthy of note, as it is the earliest mention of a form of worship to which continual allusions are afterwards made in Jewish history. The oak, or rather the terebinth tree, under which Abraham is said to have entertained the angels at Mamre, became an object of extreme veneration to his descendants, and, if we may trust Eusebius, was worshipped down to the time of Constantine.† The pious zeal of that emperor led him to desecrate its altars, and apparently to cut down the sacred tree to make way for a Christian church which he erected on the spot, and which was then or afterwards dedicated to St. George.‡

With the time of Moses the indications became more distinct and palpable. We gather from the context in the Bible,§ and still more from the narrative of Josephus,|| that the tree or bush on Horeb, from which the Lord appeared to Moses as a flame, had been considered sacred before that event. It was, indeed, apparently in consequence of its sanctity that it was chosen for the delivery of the oracle, while the conversion on that occasion of Moses' rod into a serpent brings these two names into the juxtaposition in which they are so frequently found. This miracle on Horeb would, however, be more impressive and more to the point were it not that it was repeated by Aaron before Pharaoh, and copied by the Egyptians;¶ but at the burning bush it stands alone, and without any apparent motive for its exhibition there, except the appropriateness of the combination.

With the Brazen Serpent in the Wilderness\*\* we tread on surer ground; it is the first record we have of actual worship being performed to the Serpent, and it is also remarkable, as the cause of this adoration is said to have been its healing powers. From the readiness with which this explanation was adopted by the Jews, it would seem as if that characteristic had been ascribed to the Serpent before that time. We now, however, learn it for the first time, though we afterwards become so familiar with it in Greek mythology, where the Serpent himself represents Æsculapius, and is the indispensable concomitant of Hygieia.

From this time we lose sight of the worship of the Serpent from the narrative of the Bible, till it somewhat unexpectedly reappears in the time of Hezekiah. We then learn that the brazen image that Moses had set up, had for more than five centuries

\* Genesis, xxi. 33.

† Eusebius, Vita Constantini, III. 53.

‡ The oak now pointed out at Hebron as Abraham's tree is in quite another locality.

§ Exodus, iii. 5.

|| Josephus, Antiq. Ju. II. 12. 1.

¶ Exodus, vii. 8.

\*\* Numbers, xxi. 9.



been preserved in the Temple, and that "unto those days the children of Israel did burn incense to it."\* It was only then, after six centuries of toleration, that it was resolved to put an end to this idolatry, together with the kindred worship of the Groves. In the intermediate period there is hardly any expression that countenances the belief that the worship of Serpents generally prevailed among the Jews, unless it be one in the Wisdom of Solomon, where it is said, "They worshipped serpents void of reason,"† in strange contrast with the New Testament expression, "Be ye wise as serpents."‡

Neither in the Bible, however, nor in the Talmud,§ is there anything that would justify the assertion that Serpent Worship, even in the most modified form, prevailed among the Jews after its abolition by Hezekiah. It cropped up again, as we shall presently see, in the Christian sect of Ophites, but probably in this instance the superstition was derived from Persia.

The case is different with the worship of Trees or Groves. The first form of this appears to have arisen from the veneration paid to natural groves, and the worship offered therein to Baal|| and other foreign gods, but the Grove or Asherah is also frequently an image, no doubt like that emblem so often represented on the Assyrian sculptures.¶ This is an artificial tree, such as might have been placed alongside of the Brazen Serpent within the Temple at Jerusalem.\*\*

It hardly admits of doubt but that this worship of the Asherah or of Groves was a true and essential form of Tree Worship, but it seems to have been local, and entirely opposed to the spirit of the Jewish religion. As a rule it is reprobated by their chroniclers and prophets, and eventually disappears. Had it ever been really adopted by the Jewish legislators, we might perhaps be able to ascertain more correctly its origin and affiliations. Possibly we may do so when the Assyrian antiquities are more completely investigated than they now are. For the present we must rest content with the knowledge that both Trees and Serpents were worshipped in Judea, and hope that some new light may some day be thrown on the subject.

Even, however, if in abeyance, we can hardly suppose that Serpent Worship was extinguished in Judea, inasmuch as immediately after the Christian era we found it bursting forth again with wonderful exuberance in the sects of the Nicolaitans, the Gnostics, and more especially that called the Ophites (Οφίται). Of the latter, Tertullian tells us, "they even prefer the Serpent to Christ, because the former brought the knowledge of good and evil into the world. They point also to his majesty and power, inasmuch as when Moses raised the Brazen Serpent in the Wilderness, whoever looked on it was healed; and they even quote the Gospels to prove that Christ was an imitation of the serpent, because it is said, 'As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up'" (John, iii. 14).††

\* 2 Kings, xviii. 4.

† Wisdom, xi. 15.

‡ Matthew, x. 16.

§ I make the assertion on the authority of Mr. Deutsch, of the British Museum, who has kindly looked through the Talmud for me with reference to the question.

|| 2 Kings, xvii. 16.

¶ Lord Aberdeen's black stone, History of Architecture, W.C. 75; see also British Museum Sculptures, and Layard's and Botta's plates, *passim*.

\*\* 1 Kings, xvi. 33; 2 Kings, xxi. 3, xxiii. 4 & 6; Isaiah, xvii. 8, xxvii. 9, &c.

†† Tertullian, de Prescript. Hereticorum, c. xlvi.

Epiphanius describes these ceremonies in the following terms: "They keep a living serpent in a chest, and at the time of the mysteries entice him out by placing bread before him. The door being opened he issues forth, and having ascended the table folds himself above the bread.\* This they call a perfect sacrifice. They not only break and distribute this among the votaries, but whosoever wishes it may kiss the serpent. This the wretched people call the Eucharist. They conclude the ceremonies by singing a hymn through him to the Supreme Father."†



CISTA, FROM A ROMAN COIN OF ADRAMYTUM.

There are other paragraphs to the same effect, and the representations of serpents and Serpent Worship in the so-called Gnostic form are too numerous and too familiar to require further notice here.‡

We have no means of knowing how long this worship of the Serpent continued to prevail in Syria—most probably down to the seventh century, when the Mahomedan invasion swept away a large mass of the parasitic superstitions which had fastened themselves on Christianity; but the literature of that age is so mixed up with fables and misrepresentations, that it is very difficult to write confidently about anything it describes.

Except the instance above alluded to, of the Terebinth at Mamre, I am not aware of any authentic instance of direct Tree Worship in Syria after the Christian era, but there may be, though, as they have not hitherto been looked for, they may still remain unknown.

\* *Pigraque labetur circa do aria serpens.*—Ovid, *Amor. Eleg. lib. ii.*

† Epiphanius, *lib. i. Hæres: XXXVII. p. 267, et seq.*

‡ Though not bearing directly on the subject, the "Legend of the True Cross" is a curious example of a cognate superstition. Like most Mediæval legends, it is so childish that it would be hardly worth while to allude to it, but it contains an earlier oriental element, which may be considered as throwing some light on the old form of worship.

The legend relates that when Adam was on his death-bed, he sent Seth to try and regain admission to Paradise. This, of course, was impossible, but he was allowed by the angel who guarded it to look in at the gate. He saw, among other things, the tree which had borne the fatal fruit, its roots then extending to hell, but its upper branches reaching to heaven. The angel gave him three seeds, recommending him to place them in Adam's mouth, when he died. He did so, and they produced three trees, a cedar, a cypress, and a pine. These afterwards united into one, and their branches performed many miracles. Solomon cut down the tree, and tried in vain to use its trunk to support the roof of his palace. It disdained such a use, and was consequently thrown across the Brook Cedron to be trodden upon. It was rescued from this ignominy by the Queen of Sheba, and buried below the Pool of Bethesda, which owed its healing properties to its virtues. It came to the surface when wanted for the Cross, and afterwards was buried in Calvary, where it was recognized by the Empress Helena in consequence of its miraculous healing powers. It was taken to Persia by Chosroes, and recovered by Heraclius, and afterwards, as is well known, throughout the middle ages a piece of the wood of the True Cross was prized by emperors and kings beyond all other earthly possessions. So great, indeed, was the demand that it was endowed with the property of self-multiplication, but even this did not suffice to bring it into contempt, and as late as 1248 Philip Augustus erected the Sainte Chapelle to enshrine a morsel of the wood of the tree of Paradise. The Sainte Chapelle may thus be considered as the last, as it probably is among the most beautiful, temples ever erected to Tree Worship.

All this is so silly that the only excuse for alluding to it is, that throughout the earlier past there runs a thread of oriental myth different from the clumsy inventions of ordinary mediæval miracle mongers, and this, if properly investigated, might perhaps throw some light on the feelings with which sacred trees were regarded in ancient times, and tell us something of the causes which led to their being so universally worshipped.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The following authorities for the legend are quoted by S. Baring Gould, in his "Myths of the Middle Ages," from which the above is abridged; *Vita Christi*, Troyes, 1517; *Legenda Aurea* de Jacques de Voragine; *Geschiedenis van het Heylighe Cruys*; *Speculum Historiale*, by Gottfried von Viterbo, &c.

## PHENICIA.

In addition to the Tyrian coins and other monuments which in themselves would suffice to prove the prevalence of Serpent Worship on the seaboard of Syria, we have a direct testimony in a quotation from Sanchoniathon, an author who is supposed to have lived before the Trojan war.\* This passage is in itself so curious as throwing light on the feelings of the ancients on this subject, that it may be worth while to quote it nearly entire. "Taautus attributed a certain divine nature to dragons and serpents, an opinion which was afterwards adopted both by the Phœnicians and Egyptians. He teaches that this genus of animals abounds in force and spirit more than any other reptiles; that there is something fiery in their nature; and though possessing neither feet nor any external members for motion common to other animals, they are yet more rapid in their motion than any others. Not only has it the power of renewing its youth, but in doing so receives an increase of size and strength, so that after having run through a certain term of years it is again absorbed within itself. For these reasons this class of animals were admitted into temples, and used in sacred mysteries. By the Phœnicians they were called the good *dæmon*, which was the term also applied by the Egyptians to Cneph, who added to him the head of a hawk to symbolize the vivacity of that bird."

After this, Eusebius or Philo go on to quote several other authors to the same effect, among others the Magian Zoroaster, who describes the hawk-headed deity as "the chief, the best, and most learned of the gods"; but from the context it appears that there is here some confusion between the Serpent god and the eagle-headed deity of the Assyrians, who is generally supposed to represent Nisroch,† and whose image so frequently occurs in the Sculptures. It scarcely admits of a doubt but that this eagle-headed deity of the Assyrians became the Garuḍa of the Hindu mythology, who, before the time when Eusebius wrote, had taken so important a position in the Serpent Worship of the Hindus, as we shall afterwards see, but it is still not clear how the confusion between the two objects crept into the passage as we now find it. Eusebius certainly understood the quotation as applying to the serpent, but the ascription to the serpent of these qualities cannot, I fear, be relied upon. It suffices to show, however, what importance the Christian writers of the fourth century were inclined to attribute to the Serpent Worship of the Gentiles.

The coins of Tyre represent in some instances a tree with a serpent coiled round its trunk, and on either hand two rude stone pillars (*Petræ Ambrosiæ*?) or an altar with two serpents rising from the angles of its base. Others represent the serpent coiled around a rude stone obelisk, with the Tyrian Hercules contending with a serpent.‡

Taken in conjunction with the above quotation, these, with others that might be quoted, suffice to show that the serpent was honoured, perhaps worshipped, in Tyre from an early period down to the time of Alexander. More, probably, might be found if looked for, but they are not necessary for our present purpose.

\* Eusebius, *Præ. Evan.* I. 9. (p. 66, Gaisford). See also Müller's *Fragmenta*, III. 572.

† Layard, *Nineveh and its remains*, abridged edition, p. 46.

‡ Maurice, vol. VI. pl. 5. p. 273.

## MESOPOTAMIA.

As hinted above, the Garden of Eden was supposed to have been situated somewhere on the Lower Euphrates, and the story of the earlier patriarchs down to Noah (Xisuthrus) being common to the narratives of Berosus and Moses, we naturally turn to Babylonia in the hope of being able to point out the mythical relations of that strange faith which is first mentioned as existing in that country. Unfortunately, long before the Greeks or any foreign travellers visited Babylonia, the great wave of the dominion of the Semitic Assyrian had passed over it, and nearly obliterated all traces of the earlier Chaldean forms, and as strangers ignorant of the language, it is hardly to be expected that they would have dug up the fossil remains of an extinct religion. The earliest native historian (Berosus) lived after the time of Alexander (B.C. 270 ?), so that he too was likely to pass over what had been so long forgotten. The one chance that now remains to us for recovering it is from the cuneiform inscriptions. Serpent Worship, so far as I know, has not yet been looked for among them, and till they are examined with special reference to the inquiry, it is impossible to say where it may or may not be found. In the meanwhile, Sir Henry Rawlinson informs us, that Hea, or Hoa, the third person in the Babylonian trinity of great gods, may be considered as the serpent deity, "since there are very strong grounds for connecting him with the serpent of Scripture, and the paradisaical traditions of the tree of knowledge and the tree of life."\*

The only direct testimony we have of Serpent Worship in Babylon is in that part of the Book of Daniel which is now printed separately in the Apocrypha,† though it is difficult to understand why this should be so. The story told there of the fraud of the priests and the indignation of the people at the destruction of their god all bear so strong an impress of probability that it is difficult to doubt their truth.

The story as it stands, except in its catastrophe, is not unlike one related by Ælian,‡ as occurring in Egypt, in the days of Ptolemy Euergetes. The description of the serpents of Metele is nearly identical with this of Babylon, but there the only result was that the prying priest went mad, and for all we know the serpent continued to receive his daily dole for long afterwards.

Herodotus, strange to say, deserts us in this difficulty, and the only indication in Diodorus is in his description of the three statues that adorned the great Temple of Belus; that of Rhea being accompanied by two very large silver images of serpents, each weighing 30 talents; and that of Juno, standing with her right hand resting on a serpent's head.§

No mention of Tree Worship has, so far as known, been brought to light in Babylonia, but in Assyria it is among the most common forms of idolatrous veneration. The representations of this on Lord Aberdeen's black stone has already been alluded to, and it occurs at least twenty times as a principal object in Layard's plates, and very frequently also in Botta.||

\* Herodotus translated, &c., by Geo. Rawlinson, vol. I., p. 600.

† Story of Bel and the Dragon, v. 23, et seq.

‡ Ælian, de Animal. XVI. 39.

§ Diodorus, II. 9. 5.

|| Monument de Ninive, 5 vols. folio. Paris, 1846-50.

It can hardly be doubted but that this is the Asherah or Grove so frequently mentioned in the Bible, and is a true form of Tree Worship; but no thorough investigation has yet been made by any one competent to the task, in order to ascertain how and where it arose, or what the exact ideas were which it represented. Judging *à priori*, I would feel inclined to suggest that the Serpent Worship was a peculiarity of the Turanian Babylonians of the old Chaldean Empire—Tree Worship that of the Semitic Assyrians; but a great deal has yet to be done before this can be either positively affirmed or rejected, and the reasons for even suggesting it will be more easily understood when our present task is further advanced.

## GREECE.

In attempting to explain the phenomena presented by the architectural history of Greece, it seems necessary, as a basis for any reasoning on the subject, to assume the existence in that country of two distinct and antagonistic races at one period of the story. The one race is represented by the tombs, or so-called treasuries, of Mycenæ and Orchomenos, and the megalithic polygonal masonry of the walls of the most ancient cities. To the other belongs the chaste intellectual refinement of the Doric order, while between the two intervenes the elegant and ornate Ionic as a compromise combining the peculiarities of each.

The first class of buildings have been ascribed to the Pelasgi; and though considerable difference of opinion exists as to the exact ethnological position of those people, and whence they came, there seems no valid objection to assuming that they were a people of a race entirely different to the Hellenes, who afterwards superseded them. If not of purely Turanian race, they must have been so closely allied to that family that, till the contrary is shown, they may be considered as belonging to it.

The same distinction seems indispensable in treating of the mythology of ancient Greece. Assuming the Veda and the Zend Avesta to be exponents of the religious feelings of the Aryans, it is impossible to understand—if language is any test in such a matter—how a people speaking a tongue so purely Aryan as the Greek, could so completely have relapsed into a Turanian ancestral worship as we find that of Greece in its great age. Unless a great substratum of the inhabitants of Greece belonged to the Turanian family, their religion, like their language, ought to have presented a much closer affinity to the earlier scriptures of the Aryan race than we find to be the case. The curious anthropic mythology of the Grecian Pantheon seems only explicable on the assumption of a potential Turanian element in the population, though the study of the language fails to reveal to us its existence.

Such an hypothesis is still more indispensable when we refer to the Tree and Serpent Worship that certainly prevailed to a greater or less extent during the whole period of Grecian history, though of course more prominently during the earlier part. Here again it is necessary to make a further distinction. All the earlier myths refer to the destruction of serpents or of serpent races. This continues down to the return of the Heraclidæ; after that time, when Hellenic supremacy was assured, we meet with a kindlier feeling. The serpent then became the oracle—the guardian of the city, or the healing god,—the Agathodæmon in short. In Greece, as everywhere else, when a new faith once feels secure in its position, it no longer objects to the forms which it

superseded, and these by degrees crop up again, and eventually become part at least of the outward faith of people whose real sentiments may, nevertheless, be most diametrically opposed to such superstition.

One of the oldest and most celebrated myths of Greece relates the destruction of the dragon\* Python by Apollo, and his taking possession of the oracle which the serpent guarded.† Cadmus fought and killed the dragon that devoured his men, and sowing its teeth raised soldiers for his own purposes. In Indian language, he killed the Naga Raja of Thebes, and made sepoys of his subjects. The tradition of the close of the career of Cadmus and his wife is even more suggestive of Serpent Worship than the events of their life. Their conversion into serpents as a cure for ills that had become unbearable, and the respect with which it is represented they were afterwards regarded, point to a form of faith that must have been at that time familiar to the inhabitants of Greece.‡

The Argonautic Expedition was undertaken to recover a fleece that hung on a sacred tree, guarded by a dragon that Jason and his companions would have been unable to cope with, unless they had been aided by the enchantments of Medea. But the great destroyer of serpents in those days was Hercules. Most appropriately was he represented as strangling two serpents sent by Juno to destroy him while he was yet in his cradle. His adventures in the Garden of the Hesperides is the pagan form of the myth that most resembles the precious serpent-guarded fruit of the Garden of Eden, though the moral of the fable is so widely different. His fight with the many-headed Lernean Hydra, on the other hand, suggests the origin in the West of many-headed serpents with which we are becoming so familiar in the East. In the earlier representations, apparently, he had only seven heads, but afterwards, as was also the case in India, they were indefinitely multiplied. A still earlier, perhaps the earliest, mention of this mythological animal is in Homer, who speaks of a three-headed snake as adorning the baldrick of the buckler of Agamemnon.§ As a Grecian peculiarity, this many-headedness might be passed over, but it is interesting as bearing on the subject we have specially in hand.

Though generally represented as the destroyer of Serpents, Hercules, on the other hand, is said to have been the progenitor of the whole race of Serpent-worshipping Scythians, through his intercourse with the Serpent Echidna.|| There is nothing, however, inconsistent in this. The age in which he is said to have lived was one of transition between two civilizations. An old Turanian Serpent-worshipping race were, in Greece, passing away, to make place for one of Aryan form. Hercules was the popular embodiment of all the favourite myths of the age; and to him consequently was ascribed the destruction of the old faith wherever it was destroyed, as well as its perpetuation wherever it was known to have been preserved.

\* There seems to be no real or scientific difference in Greek between the word *Δράκων* and *ὄφις*. Generally, however, *Draco* is applied to the larger, and serpent to the smaller kinds of snakes. *Draco* would hardly be applied to an asp or cobra; nor *Ophis* to one of the great guardian serpents so frequently alluded to. I can hardly admit, however, the popular definition:—*Anguis aquarum, Serpens terrarum, Draco templorum*.

† *Python terræ filius draco ingens. Hic ante Apollinem ex oraculo in Monte Parnasso responsa dare solitus erat.*—Hyginus, fab. 140. If we may trust Lucian, de *Astrologia*, p. 544, at Delphi a virgin delivers the oracle, (hence, the symbol of the constellation *Virgo*), and a dragon speaks from under the tripod, because the constellation *Draco* appears among the stars.

‡ Ovid's *Metamorph.* III. 1. and IV. 9.

§ *Iliad*, XI. 38.

|| Herodotus, IV. 9.

After the return of the Heraclidæ, serpents—as hinted above—seem to have been kept at Delphi and in the caves of Trophonius;\* in both instances, apparently, for oracular purposes. But the great centre of Serpent Worship was Epidaurus, where stood the famous temple of Æsculapius and the grove attached to it, in which serpents were kept and fed down to the time of Pausanias. Some of these, according to him, were of great size, measuring, he says, 30 cubits in length.† It is not, however, clear whence the myth of Æsculapius came, and when it was introduced into Greece. There was a temple dedicated to this god in Alexandria,‡ in which a huge serpent was kept; but this worship is as likely to have been taken there by the Greeks as brought thence, though the name and many features may be thought to betray an Egyptian origin.

Perhaps the most remarkable event connected with the Epidaurian serpent was the embassy sent from Rome in the year 462 A.U.C. under Quintus Ogulinus. The description of the advent of the divine serpent is one of the most animated passages in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*,§ and which, so far as the main facts go, is confirmed by Livy,|| Valerius Maximus,¶ and Aurelius Victor.\*\* That such an embassy was sent, and brought back a serpent, seems undoubted, as also that it was received with divine honours by the populace of Rome, and it may also be admitted that the plague was stayed after its arrival, but whether in consequence of it or not, is another question. The Romans thought it was, and Serpent Worship was established in Rome from that time forward. On the other hand, we learn from Pausanias'†† mention of it, that the Æsculapian serpent continued to be venerated in Greece till after the Christian era.

Another, and almost as interesting an example for our present purposes, occurred in Athens. When Minerva contended with Neptune for the city, she created the olive, which became sacred to her, and planted it on the Akropolis and handed over the care of it to the Serpent God Erechthonios. He is sometimes represented like the giants, as only half a serpent, the body of a man, the lower extremities as serpentine. Such, however, was not the usual or popular belief, inasmuch as we learn from Herodotus,‡‡ that when the Persians were approaching Athens the inhabitants, though warned by the oracle, refused to leave their homes till they learned that the great serpent, the guardian of the citadel, had refused its food, and left the place. When their Serpent God had deserted them, there was no longer any hope, and they fled.

There can be no doubt but that the ancient Tree and Serpent Temple stood where the Erechtheum now stands, and, being destroyed by the Persians, was rebuilt afterwards in its present form. The tree, I believe, occupied the Caryatid Portico, the serpent the lower cell adjoining, where also the well of Neptune seems to have been situated. The fane of the goddess occupied the higher level, and was approached by a different entrance.§§ Be all this as it may, the real point is that here we have in

\* Pausanias, II. p. 137.

† Loc. cit. 175.

‡ Ælian, de Animal. XVI. 39.

§ Metamorph. XV. 5.

|| Liv. X. 47.

¶ Val. Max. I, 8, 2.

\*\* Au. Victor, XXII. 1.

†† Loc. supra cit.

‡‡ Herod. VIII. 41.

§§ I am aware that in this distribution of the parts I differ from Beulé, who excavated this temple, and published the result of his researches. It would be out of place to attempt to give my reasons here, but my objections to his plan are not given without due consideration.

Athens a temple dedicated to Tree and Serpent Worship, and perhaps the only one specially so devoted which is now standing in Greece.

Besides, however, the prominent instances in which the snake figures in Greek mythology as the representative of the gods, or as delivering its oracles, or guarding sacred places or things, its influence occasionally crops up in places where we should least suspect it. Nothing, for example, can well be more curious than the story of Alexander's birth, as told by Plutarch.\* That Olympias his mother should have kept tame snakes in the house is scarcely to be wondered at, as Illyria is a country where they abound, and where also their worship was prevalent. It is curious, however, that it should be thought worthy of record that one was found in her bed, and that Philip should have believed in the possibility of the serpent being the real father of Alexander the Great. The same view is taken by Lucian,† who seems to adopt without hesitation the idea that Alexander was born of a serpent. Even Cicero ‡ does not discountenance the story when he tells us that on the occasion of the illness of Ptolemy, one of Alexander's generals, from a poisoned wound, the serpent of Olympias appeared to him in a dream, having a root in his mouth. This Serpent, who, from the context we are led to infer, was the father of Alexander, then pointed out the place where the herb grew, and the wound cured by its application.

It is possible that the story may have arisen from some connexion with the Bacchic mysteries, into which Olympias was initiated, and in which serpents always played a prominent and important part, and we know that Alexander wished to connect his eastern conquest with that of the Indian Bacchus,§ but explain it as we will, the myth is curious as arising in so advanced a stage of Grecian enlightenment.

The traces of Tree Worship in Greece are even fuller and more defined than those of the Serpent *Cultus* just alluded to. In this instance we have fortunately an elaborate treatise on the subject by a thoroughly competent scholar,|| to which the reader is referred, and the slightest possible notice will consequently suffice for our present purpose.

As each succeeding Buddha in the Indian mythology had a separate and different Bo Tree assigned to him, so each god of the classical Pantheon seems to have had some tree appropriated as his emblem or representative. Among the most familiar are the oak or beech of Jupiter,¶ the laurel of Apollo, the vine of Bacchus. The olive is the well-known tree of Minerva. The myrtle was sacred to Aphrodite. The apple or orange of the Hesperides belonged to Juno. The populus was the tree of Hercules,\*\* and the plane tree was the "numen" of the Atridæ.

Of all these the oldest and most celebrated was the oak, or rather grove at Dodona, originally founded by the Pelasgi,†† it may be some sixteen centuries before the Christian era: it remained an oracle till the time of Constantine.‡‡ It thus certainly survived, even if its foundation did not precede, that of its great rival, the

\* Plutarch, Vita Alex. II.

† Lucian, dial. Mort. XIII. 1. Pseudo Kallisthenes, I. 10.

‡ Cicero de Divinat., II. 66.

§ Arrian, V. 2 and 3. Quintus Curtius, VIII. 10. 12.

|| Bötticher, Baumcultus der Hellenen, 8vo. 1856, p. 554, pl. 63.

¶ Pausanias, I. p. 40, VII. 643.

\*\* Pliny, 12. 2.

†† Strabo, VII. p. 327.

‡‡ Aristides, I. p. 84, II. p. 12. Max. Tyr. 14. 1.



serpent oracle of the neighbouring Temple of Delphi. It was from the branches of this time-honoured tree that the sacred pigeons, combining the rustling of their wings with that of the leaves, made up those sounds which were interpreted as oracles throughout the whole period of Grecian history. It was not, however, only as a shelter for the sacred pigeons, or that the wind might rustle through their leaves and agitate the bells that hung among their branches, that the trees of the Dodonian grove were held to be sacred. Tradition ascribed to them the power of speaking for themselves, and even when cut down, as in the case of the ship *Argo*, a piece of the sacred oak inserted either in prow or keel, had the power of communicating to these adventurous navigators the will of Jove.\*

It is not quite clear whether or not any structural temple, properly so called, ever was erected in the grove at Dodona. None certainly is described by Pausanias or any one else, and on the whole the context seems to bear out the conclusion that the grove was the *ιερόν*, and that except altars and minor adjuncts it was not profaned by any works of human hands.

The laurel at Delphi was as celebrated as Dodona's oak. It was under its shade that Python the son of Earth sought refuge when wounded by the arrows of Apollo, and where his oracle existed before the Sun god conquered it.† The earliest temple here was constructed of laurel wood, afterwards of bronze, and only in later days of stone, when apparently the oracle and with it the site of the tree was included in the sanctuary.

The story of Daphne need hardly be alluded to.‡ It is so well known, and so is the continual use of the laurel throughout classical antiquity as a sacred emblem of Apollo, as a sign of victory, the indispensable accompaniment of every triumph, and also as a healing power almost as important as the serpent of Æsculapius.§

In the opening cantos of the *Iliad* there is a scene which may serve as well as any other to illustrate the feelings of the Greeks on this subject.|| When the host was detained in Aulis, and Agamemnon was sacrificing under the shade of a sacred plane tree, a serpent creeps from under the altar, and, climbing the tree, devours deliberately, one after the other, the eight nestlings of a sparrow. The ninth one was the mother bird herself, thus prophesying the nine years they were to tarry before they conquered the wide-streeted Troy. To authenticate the wonder, the serpent was then metamorphosed by Jupiter into stone, and we learn afterwards, that the tree was considered as sacred, inasmuch as Pausanias saw the wood of it preserved in the Temple of Diana in the second century.¶ That nothing may be wanting to complete this as an illustration of their worship, it was while the Greeks were detained at Aulis that Agamemnon was—like Abraham—constrained to sacrifice his child, but as a goat was accepted for the one, so the Grecian hero was saved from a similar sorrow by the substitution of a deer by the goddess Diana. This looks like a period of transition, when at least the most objectionable features of the old faith were becoming obsolete, and might practically be set aside.

It would be easy to multiply these instances of Tree and Serpent Worship among the Greeks to almost any extent; but enough has probably been adduced to show how

\* See Bötticher, *Baumcultus*, pp. 113, 164.

† Euripides, *Iph. in Taur.* 1245.

‡ At conjux quoniam mea non potes esse.

Arbor eris certe, dixit, mea.—Ovid, *Meta.* I. 558.

§ See Bötticher, pp. 338–393.

|| Pausanias, IX. 748.

¶ Homer, *Iliad* II. 304, et seq.

important a part it played in the mythology of Greece during the whole period of her independent history. When to this we add the knowledge of the purely anthropic and ancestral character of her popular Pantheon, we cannot but feel how little title Greece has to that purely Aryan rank which her language would seem to assign to her. There must always have been a very large admixture of Turanian blood in the veins of the inhabitants of that country, varying, of course, in extent in the different states, but except, perhaps, in Sparta, nowhere entirely evanescent.

## ITALY.

It does not appear, from anything that has yet been brought to light, that the Etruscans were either worshippers of Serpents or of Trees. It is true the evidence is not conclusive, and is at best merely negative. We have none of the scriptures of the people. We cannot read their inscriptions, and such temples and religious edifices as remain are all of late date, contemporary with the advanced Roman civilization, and when consequently they may have been weaned from their earlier superstitions. It may also be observed that Serpent and Tree Worship are exactly those forms which are least likely to leave permanent traces of their existence except through the traditions of the people in some form of writing. When the Tree or Grove is cut down all traces of it are soon obliterated, and natural decay alone is quite sufficient to cause its complete disappearance, and when the Serpent dies there is no longer a god or an image of one in the sanctuary.

These considerations must make us pause before giving any very decided opinion on the subject; for, reasoning *à priori*, the Etruscans were just such a people as one would suspect of being likely to indulge in such a form of faith.

Their *quasi* Turanian origin, their ancestral worship, the importance they attached to sepulchral rites, the very absence of temples of a permanent character, and many other circumstances, would lead us to expect to find this worship among them, but till it is found it is needless to insist on what at best are mere probabilities.

One, however, of the first religious acts of the Romans brings us back to an old line of memories. When Romulus, so says the tradition, had slain Acron king of Cenina in single combat, he hung the "Spolia Opima" on an ancient oak on the Capitoline Hill, which the shepherds before that time had considered as sacred, and there marked out the boundaries of the Temple of Jupiter, which was the first and became afterwards the most sacred of Roman temples.\*

On the other hand, almost the only tradition that seems to give a local and indigenous form to Serpent Worship is that connected with Lanuvium, a place sixteen miles south of Rome. Here we learn from Ælian there existed a large and dark grove, and near it a temple of the Argive Juno. In this place was a vast and deep cave, the abode of a great serpent. To this grove the virgins of Latium were taken annually to ascertain their chastity, which was indicated by the dragon.† If the serpent accepted the offering, not only was their purity considered as established, but a good and fertile season was sure to result from the success of the ordeal.‡ A similar oracle seems to have existed in Epirus, where a circular grove once stood surrounded by

\* Livy, I. 10.  
(4799.)

† Ælian, Var. Hist. IX. 16.

‡ Propertius, Eleg. VIII. 4.

a wall in which the sacred serpents were kept, descended it is said from the great Python of Delphi, and here dedicated to Apollo. On the great festival of the year a virgin priestess entered the grove naked, holding in her hand the sacred food. If they took it readily, a fruitful harvest and a plentiful year were sure to follow. If they refused, it was considered as the gloomiest of auguries.\* The one difference between the two oracles being that in the Eastern oracle the serpents were not called upon to decide as to the chastity of the priestess, but merely to prophesy as to the prospects of the year.

Except in the instance of Lanuvium the traces of this primitive religion became infinitely more scarce in Italy than they were found to be in Greece, but whether this arises from their non-existence, or merely because they were not recorded, is by no means clear. As mentioned on a previous page,† the actual worship of the serpent was introduced from Epidaurus to Rome 462 A.U.C., but the fact of such an embassy being sent on this occasion indicates a degree of faith on the part of the people, which could only have arisen from previous familiarity.

In the Augustan age, enlightenment was too far advanced for such a primitive form of faith to have any real hold on the public mind. Indeed, when such a treatise as that of Cicero *De Natura Deorum* became popular many much more advanced beliefs than that in serpents were trembling in the balance, but the poets still delighted in referring to those forms which time and mystery had long rendered venerable. Ovid's *Metamorphoses* are full of passages referring to the important part which the Serpent performed in all the traditions of Classic Mythology.

Every one is familiar with the circumstances of the two snakes sent by Minerva to destroy Laocoon‡ for his attempt to undeceive the fated Trojans. Their task accomplished, they sought refuge behind the shield of Pallas in her temple in the town. Still more characteristic was the appearance of a serpent from the tomb, when Æneas was sacrificing to the manes of his father Anchises,§ and his hesitation as to whether the unexpected apparition should be considered as the *genius loci*, or an attendant on his deceased parent.

In the other poets there are numerous allusions to Serpents and Serpent Worship, which in themselves, taken separately, would not be of much importance, and which consequently it would be tedious to quote, though taken altogether, with the other information we possess, they do indicate a prevalence of reverence for the serpent in Rome greater than might be expected from so enlightened and so freethinking a community. There is one passage, however, in *Perseus* || which it is impossible to pass over. It is that in which the satirist orders "two serpents to be painted "on the wall to indicate that the place is sacred." The form of this painting we learn from several examples at Pompeii and Herculaneum,¶ where two of somewhat conventional form, and in very conventional attitudes, approach an altar or some object which their presence seems intended to sanctify. There is every reason to suppose that such representations were much more common than the few remains we possess might at first sight lead us to suppose, and that the serpents were also

\* Ælian, de Animal. XI. 2.

† *Vide ante*, p. 14.

‡ Virgil, Æneid, II. 200 and 227.

§ *Ibid.*, V. 84, et seq.

|| *Pinge duos angues :*

*Pueri, sacer est locus.*—Sat. I. 112.

¶ *Antichità d'Ercolano*, IV., p. 65. pl. xii.; *Mazois*, II. pl. 24, &c.

frequently represented as the *genii loci*,\* and as mixed up with Mithraic or Tree Worship. The instances in which this occurs are so numerous that if collected together they would appear at first sight to make out a strong case, but notwithstanding all this the inhabitants of Imperial Rome cannot fairly be said to have been either a Tree or Serpent worshipping race. It is curious to observe, however, how some of the great men among the Romans still cherished the remnants of this superstition. Scipio Africanus † is reported to have believed that he had been nursed by a serpent, and Augustus allowed it to be understood that his mother Atia had received him from a serpent, remembering probably the story of Olympias, the mother of Alexander the Great. ‡ The people of Rome, it is said, on one occasion showed more sympathy with the young Domitius (afterwards Nero) than with his half-brother Britannicus, because "serpents had once watched over his childhood." §

The Emperor Tiberius || kept a tame serpent for his amusement, but when he found it one morning eaten by ants he drew the augury that he must henceforward guard himself against an attack from the many-headed multitude. Hadrian, it is said, procured a large serpent from India, which he placed in the Temple of Jupiter Olympius at Athens, ¶ which he had just rebuilt.

It is a difficult question to determine how far the representation of serpents on coins may be taken as indicating the existence of Serpent Worship in the cities to which they belong, or to what extent they should be considered as merely heraldic, like other animals or plants which were emblematic of other cities. If they might be enlisted, the coins of Tyre\*\* would go far to confirm what we gather from other sources (*ante*, p. 10) of the prevalence of Serpent Worship there. The most remarkable series, however, of coins of this class are those known as Cistophoroi, belonging to certain cities of Asia

No. 2.



ROMAN PROCONSULAR  
COIN OF TRALLIS.

Minor. On the obverse of these there is generally in the centre a bow case supported by two serpents standing erect, the one apparently male, the other female, and accompanied by emblems, the meaning of which is not easily determined. On the reverse they generally have a cista mistica, half open, and from it a serpent is issuing (Woodcut No. 1). Around this there is a wreath of vine leaves and grapes, indicating clearly a connexion with the Bacchic mysteries, in which such a cist was employed, and in which serpents always performed an important part.

All these serpent coins belong to the Roman period, the earliest apparently being struck during the pro-consulship of Q. Tullius Cicero (brother of the orator) B.C. 91, and after being the coinage of Asia Minor for more than a century they fade into the imperial coinage of the Empire. †† Those which have been found up to the present time belong to the following ten cities (Pinder says eleven, but Parium is doubtful),

\* Antichità d'Ercolano, vol. I. pl. xxxix.

† Gellius, Noct. Att. VI. 1.

‡ Suetonius in Aug. c. 94.

§ Tacitus, XI. 11.

†† The best account, so far as I know, of these coins is in a paper by M. Pinder, in the Transactions of the Akad. der Wissenschaften. Berlin, 1855. As what is said in the text is mainly based on this, it will not be necessary to refer to it again.

|| Suetonius, Vit. Tib. 72.

¶ Xiphilin, Rom. Hist. Script. III. 358.

\*\* Maurice, Indian Ant. VI. p. 273.

Pergamos, Thyatira, Smyrna, Ephesus, Sardes, Laodicea, Adramyttium, Tralles,\* Apamea, and Nysa. As will be observed, this list comprises all the Seven Churches of Asia, with the exception of Philadelphia, and it is by no means clear that it, too, may not be eventually included. Is this coincidence accidental? If not absolutely, it certainly is nearly correct to assert, that no people adopted Buddhism except those among whom Serpent Worship can certainly be traced as pre-existing, and it appears probable that the worshippers of the serpent should in like manner be more open to the influence of Christianity than the refined and sceptical Greek or Roman.

This is not the place to attempt the investigation of such a subject, even if the materials existed for the purpose, but I may state, that my impression is, that these coins and other evidence† do prove the existence of a form of Serpent Worship in the cities of Asia Minor till after the Christian era. And, if I am not mistaken, the presence of such a form of faith may have influenced the early spread of Christianity in these cities to an extent not hitherto suspected.

#### GERMANY.

We look in vain through the classical authors for any trace of Serpent Worship among the Germans, nor indeed ought we to expect to find any among a people so essentially Aryan as they are, and always were; while, on the other hand, we have not in Germany, as we find in Greece, any traces of that underlying race of less intellectual Turanians who seem everywhere to have been the Serpent worshippers all the world over.

By whatever name they may have been known, these Ophite races seem, in Europe at least, never to have penetrated far inland from the shore of the sea. The deeply-indented coasts of Greece thus presented a singularly favourable locality for their settlement. They swarmed up the rivers of France, and the shores of such an inland sea as the Baltic was also well suited to their habits. They were adepts at draining lakes or embanking the estuaries of the rivers on which they settled. Fish seems to have been their principal food, and fishing consequently their chief occupation. What domestic animals they possessed they pastured on the alluvial plains which were kept clear of forests and fertilized by the floods. Such a people were, however, utterly incompetent to deal with the forests that covered the soil of Germany, and incapable of that steady organization of labour without which success in agriculture is impossible; especially under so rigorous a climate, and conditions so unfavourable as those which the surface of Germany must have presented to the earliest settlers there.

If, however, we find no traces of Serpent Worship among the purely Teutonic races, the evidences of Tree Worship are numerous and complete. Tacitus, in his *Germania*, alludes to it frequently. In one place he distinctly states that the Germans have no images, and decline to enclose their gods within walls, but consecrate groves and woods, within which they call on the name of God.‡ They called together the people of their own race in woods sanctified by the auguries of their forefathers or pristine awe,§

\* Those of Tralles have also the Indian humped bull on the obverse (pl. 1, figs. 18 and 20), though what this may mean it is impossible at present to say.

† Herodotus, I. 78.

‡ Tacitus, *Germ.* 9.

§ *Prisca formidine*, *Loc. cit.* 39.

and sacred groves and trees are mentioned by name both by him and Cæsar.\* The most frequent mention, however, of the sacred groves and trees of the Germans is to be found in the earlier Christian writers, who, when narrating the events that accompanied the conversion of the nation to Christianity, relate how these were cut down and destroyed, in order that the old superstitions might be eradicated. These have been collected and arranged by Grimm † with his usual industry and intelligence, so that it is hardly necessary here to go over the same ground again. The conclusion he arrives at (p. 60) is that "individual gods might have dwelt on hill-tops, or in "caves, or rivers, but the festal universal religion of the people had its abode in "woods, and nowhere has another temple yet been found."

The first care of the Christian missionaries, wherever they went, was to cut down the groves of the Pagans, and to desecrate their ancient places of worship, or to speak more correctly, to consecrate them by the erection of a chapel or church within their sacred precincts. They soon discovered that by the first course they only excited the wrath and enmity of the natives, by the latter they conciliated them, and drew them insensibly towards the purer faith; but they fail to tell us how long these quasi converts persisted in venerating in their hearts the god-like grove rather than the miserable stone and mortar house in which the priests told them their new god alone consented to dwell.

It would be well worth while, if anyone would take the trouble, to trace how long trees and groves continued to be objects of veneration after the Germans were converted to Christianity. One of the last and best known examples is that of the "Stock am Eisen" in Vienna, the sacred tree into which every apprentice, before setting out on his "Wanderjahre," drove a nail for luck. It now stands in the centre of that great capital, the last remaining vestige of the sacred grove round which the city has grown up, and in sight of the proud cathedral of the Christian, which has superseded and replaced its more venerable shade.‡

## SARMATIA.

If a line were drawn from the shores of the Caspian Sea north of the Caucasus to the mouth of the Vistula or Dwina in the Baltic, it would be coincident with one of the oldest routes of communication between the east and the west, and one that probably was the road by which Serpent and Tree Worship were introduced into the north of Europe. It was the route by which Woden is said to have migrated westward in the first century before Christ, taking with him all that strange mythology which is connected with his name. It was on this route that Hercules met the serpent-maiden Echidna, and where she gave birth to the Eponymous hero of the Seythian nation.§ Here, too, resided the Amazons, the female warriors, whose institutions seem so mysteriously connected with Serpent Worship. At the far end of this route Procopius tells

\* Loc. cit. 40. 43. Cæsar, Ann. 2. 12; 4. 73.

† The Khonds use neither temples nor images in their worship. They cannot comprehend, and regard as absurd the idea of building a house in honour of the deity, or the expectation that he will be peculiarly present in any place resembling a human habitation. Groves kept sacred from the axe, hoar rocks and hill tops, fountains and the banks of streams, are in their eyes the fittest places for worship."—Major Charteris MacPherson, Journal Royal Asiatic Society, vol. XIII. p. 235.

‡ Deutsche Mythologie, c. IV. pp. 57 to 77.

§ The festival of the Christmas tree at the present day, so common throughout the whole of Germany, is almost undoubtedly a remnant of the Tree Worship of their ancestors.

§ Herodotus, IV. 9.

us that "in his day the barbarians worshipped forests and groves, and in their barbarous simplicity placed trees among their gods."\*

In Sarmatia, according to Erasmus Stella, "for some time they had no sacred rites; at length they arrived at such a pitch of wickedness that they worshipped serpents and trees." The Samogitæ, we are told, worshipped the serpent as a god, and if any adversity befell them, concluded that their domestic serpents had been negligently served. In Lithuania the people "believed vipers and serpents to be gods, and worshipped them with great veneration." Jerome of Prague, in the fifteenth century, according to Silvius, saw these wretched idolaters offer sacrifices to serpents. Every householder had a snake in the corner of his house, to which he gave food and offered sacrifice. Cromer † charges the Prussians with the same idolatry, and Masius ‡ mentions a royal town near Wilna where in his day (*adhuc*) serpents were worshipped by many of the inhabitants, and in Livonia it is characteristically added that the inhabitants were accustomed to sacrifice their most beautiful captives to their serpent gods.§

None of these indications are worth much in themselves, and the authorities on which they rest are not such as will bear the test of critical examination, but the general impression they leave is, that Serpent Worship must have prevailed in Eastern Europe to a great extent during the middle ages. It seems incredible that the authors named, and especially such a work as that of Olaus Magnus, should be so full of anecdotes of serpents and Serpent Worship in a country where nothing larger than a viper or adder naturally is found, if there were not some foundation for their belief.

Olaus Magnus,|| quoting from Crantzius and Mechavita, states that the Poles worshipped their gods, Fire, Serpents, and Trees, in woods. This state of things, he says, lasted in Poland down to the year 1386, when the prince and his brethren were converted to Christianity; but he adds, that though nearly extinguished, these superstitions still linger (1555) in remote parts of Norway and Wermelandia. In addition to this, however, we have evidence which it seems impossible to doubt, that both Trees and Serpents were worshipped by the peasantry in Esthonia and Finland within the limits of the present century (see Appendix A), and even then with all the characteristics possessed by the old faith when we first become acquainted with it.¶

#### SCANDINAVIA.

Among the problems that perplex the investigator of northern antiquities there are few that present so many difficulties as those which concern the advent of Woden, and the origin of the religion of which he was the chief. At the first glance he appears to have many affinities with the Buddha of the east. The name (Boden) is not dissimilar, the name of the fourth day of the week being Wodensday in the north, Budhbár in the east, and dies Mercurii in Latin, and the confusion that existed in the mind of the Romans between Mercury as the chief god of the Germans, and this Woden, shadow out a thread of tradition which might point to a solution. Woden,

\* De Bello Gotico, II. 471, Bonn, 1833. † De Rebus Polon. III. 43. ‡ De Diis German. c. 29.

§ This paragraph is abridged from Deane's Serpent Worship, p. 245, et seq. I have not been able to verify the references.

|| Lib. III. ch. 1.

¶ Der Ehsten abergläubische gebraüche, &c., von J. W. Boecler, beleuchtet von F. R. Kreutzwald. St. Petersburg, 1854.

too, came from the east just at the time when we know that active missionaries were spreading the doctrines of Buddhism on all sides external to the central kingdom of India, within whose limits it had been previously confined. There certainly also was at that time an amount of Buddhism current among the western nations whose presence it is difficult to account for except on the assumption of some such migration. The more closely, however, the question is examined the less hope does there appear to be that a solution may be reached in this direction.

There are not, perhaps, in the whole world two religions so diametrically and so essentially opposed to one another as Buddhism and Wodenism, nor two persons so different as the gentle Śákya Muni, who left a kingdom, family, and friends to devote fifty years of his blameless life to the attempt to alleviate the sufferings of mankind, and Odin, "the terrible and severe God, the Father of slaughter: he who giveth victory and reviveth courage in the conflict: who nameth those that are to be slain."\*

The leading doctrinal characteristic of Buddhism in its early form is its atheism; the Scandinavian, on the other hand, had Woden, Thor, Freya, and a host of minor gods, rulers of men during their lifetime, and continuing the active personal interference with the affairs of men after their elevation. Among the practical characteristics of Buddhism there was, first, the remarkable extension of the Jewish Commandment, "Thou shalt do no murder" into "Thou shalt not kill," including in the prohibition everything that had life; while the greatest glory of the northern hero was the number of his enemies he had slain, and nothing escaped from his joyous bloodthirstiness. Another peculiarity of Buddhism was the negation of all worldly pleasures and enjoyments. It is hardly possible to conceive anything more incongruous than would have been the presence among the roistering mead-drinking warriors of the north, of a yellow-robed ascetic, sworn to celibacy, living on alms, and devoting his life to pious contemplation; his one hope and highest aspiration being, that after infinite transmigrations he might be so purified by suffering that he might eventually obtain absolute rest by annihilation and absorption into the original essence of all things. How different this from the northern Walhalla. "The heroes," says the Edda,† "who are received into the palace of Odin have every day the pleasure of arming themselves, of passing in review, of ranging themselves in order of battle, and of cutting one another to pieces; but so soon as the time of repast approaches they return on horseback all safe and sound to the hall of Odin, and fall to eating and drinking. Though the number of them cannot be counted, the flesh of the boar, Sæhrimnir,‡ is sufficient for them all; every day it is served up at table, and every day renewed entire. Their beverage is ale and mead. One single goat, whose milk is mead, furnishes enough of that liquor to intoxicate all the heroes. Odin alone drinks wine; wine is for him both meat and drink. A crowd of virgins wait on the heroes at table, and fill their cups as fast as they empty them."

This, certainly, is not Buddhism, at least as that religion is known to us by anything that has hitherto been published on the subject. How far the revelations

\* Mallet, Northern Antiq. (Bohn's edition), p. 21.

† Mallet, Northern Antiq., p. 104.

‡ Mallet, Prose Edda, 429.



of the sculptures of the Sanchi Tope may induce us to change our opinions of the earlier form of that faith remains to be seen. There is, certainly, a much greater similarity between the Buddhism of the Topes and the Scandinavian mythology than between it and the Buddhism of the books; but still the gulf between the two is immense, and if any traces of the doctrines of the gentle ascetic ever existed in the bosoms of Odin or his followers, while dwelling near the roots of the Caucasus, all that can be said is, that they suffered fearful shipwreck among the rocks of the savage superstitions of the north, and sank, never again to appear on the surface of Scandinavian mythology. If the two religions came anywhere in contact it is at their base, for underlying both there existed a strange substratum of Tree and Serpent Worship; on this the two structures seem to have been raised, though they afterwards diverged into forms so strangely dissimilar.

As will be seen in a subsequent part of this work, recent discoveries have narrowed, to a certain extent, the gulf which separated them at the time of their greatest development, and it is by no means impossible that if we are able to go further back they may be found to approximate still more closely. We do not yet, however, see much prospect of reaching a point where the two may come in contact, except at the point where they both start from their foundations; but the inquiry is too new, and the facts yet gathered are far from being sufficient to enable us to speak with anything like certainty, except regarding the later forms of either of these faiths.

The myth of the Yggdrasil ash is told in considerable detail in the Prose Edda, though its meaning will hardly be understood till we are more familiar with the corresponding features in Indian mythology.

“ It was under the ash, the chiefest and holiest seat of the gods, that they “ assembled every day in council. The branches spread over the whole world, and “ even reach to heaven above. It has three roots, one stood over Mimir’s well, in “ which wisdom and wit lie hidden; and one over Niflheim, a place where those “ wicked people are sent who die from natural causes, and this root it is, that is “ continually gnawed by the serpent Nidhogg, with whom in Hwergelmir there are so “ many snakes that no tongue can recount them.\* The third root of the ash is in “ heaven, under it is the holy Urdar-fount; it is here the gods sit in judgment. Near “ this sit the three Norns or fates, who fix the lifetime of all men. In its branches “ sits an eagle who knows many things, and a squirrel, Ratatösk, runs up and down, “ and seeks to cause strife between the Eagle and Nidhogg. Four harts run across “ the branches of the tree and bite the buds.” In addition to this is the great Midgard serpent Jörmungand, “ who being of parentage of bad augury, was thrown “ by All-Father (Odin) into the ocean, but the monster grew to such an enormous “ size, that holding his tail in his mouth, he encircles the whole earth.”†

Without continuing these quotations further at present, enough has perhaps been brought forward to show that Yggdrasil is in the first place a reminiscence of the trees

\* Pliny refers to the connexion of the serpent with the ash, but in a different sense (XVI. 13). He says snakes will not rest in its shadow, but shun it at a distance, and adds, from “personal experience,” that, “if a “ serpent is so surrounded by a fence of ash leaves that he cannot escape except by passing through fire, he will “ prefer the fire rather than pass through the leaves.”

† Translation of Prose Edda, 410 et seq.

of fate and knowledge of the Garden of Eden, though wisdom lay in a well of water at the root of the northern tree, of which Odin drank and gained knowledge,\* instead of eating its fruit, which, with an ash, was not a probable form of the myth. It is also probably enough to enable us to recognize in the eagle, the Garuda, and in the Nidhögg, the Nagas of eastern fable, though the squirrel does not there appear to have been necessary to keep alive the enmity that always existed between them. And in Thor fishing for the Midgard serpent, and the part he is to play at the end of all things, we may without difficulty recognize a reflex of the churning of the ocean and the renewal of all things by Vishnu through the instrumentality of the great serpent. As might be expected from the nature of the country and style of its historians, we have fewer accounts of the actual form of the worship than of its doctrinal importance. Still we are told† that in front of the great Temple at Upsala "there grew a huge tree of unknown kind, that spread with large boughs, and was "green both summer and winter," and near the same temple a sacred grove, every tree and every leaf of which was considered the most sacred thing in the world.‡ It was called Odin's Grove, and in it the most solemn sacrifices were performed, especially every ninth year, when nine human victims were sacrificed from among the captives if in time of war, or nine slaves if in time of peace.

The serpent is not mentioned as an actual object of worship in any written history; though no doubt the superstition prevailed with the others down to the time when the whole was abolished in the ninth century on the introduction of Christianity. Yet we are told that in the sixteenth century, "There are house serpents "which are accounted in the northern parts of Sweden as household gods; they are "fed with sheep and cows' milk, and to hurt them is a deadly sin." The same author tells us that "serpents rest deep under the roots of birch trees, the multitude "of them cause heat with their breath, and so keep the leaves green in winter."§ All this is foolish enough, but the thousand and one stories about serpents which crowd the pages of the good Archbishop of Upsala suffice to show that even in his day the superstition had not died out among the common people, and though serpents were no longer worshipped, the time when they were so was not yet forgotten.|| At the same time it seems tolerably clear that such a serpent mythology as existed in Sweden could never have sprung up naturally in so northern a climate, where all the snake tribe are so insignificant. It must have been imported from the East, though we have yet to learn by whom this was done, and at what exact time it was effected.

\* Page 411.

† Olaus Magnus, III. 5.

‡ Mallet, p. 113.

§ Olaus Magnus, XXI. 47 and 48.

|| Castren, in his *Travels in Lapland*, gives some very curious details about the feelings of the Lapps with regard to Serpent and Tree Worship at the present day. According to their traditions, Snakes, like men, live in societies, each with a captain and subordinate officers; once a year each community meets in general assembly, and not only has each serpent the right to bring his own grievances forward, but the jurisdiction of the chief extends to men who have slain or 'offended' any of his subjects.—*Reise Erinnerungen aus den Jahren 1838-44*, pp. 66-77. A good deal of information on this subject will be found in a Swedish work by Hylten-Cavallius, entitled *Wärend och Wirdarne*, p. 142, for the worship of Trees as at present existing, and pp. 329 to 332 for that of Serpents.

## FRANCE.

We seem to know less of the primitive worship of the early inhabitants of Gaul than of that of almost any other country of Europe. This may arise partly because the Gauls were so far civilized before the classical authors became acquainted with them, that their old beliefs had lost much of their individuality and freshness, while they were not so far advanced or civilized at the time when Christianity blotted out the old religions, as to feel sufficient interest in them to care to record their forms. A good deal also is no doubt due to the fact that the subject has not been carefully investigated by any competent authority since the new school of criticism was introduced. The French antiquarians do not yet seem to have discovered the safe channel between the whirlpools of credulity and the dry sand banks of frigid scepticism.

Nearly all that we know of the religion of the ancient Gauls is gathered from the celebrated passage in Cæsar's Commentaries,\* when he pauses from the narrative of his exploits to describe the civil and religious institutions of the people he had conquered. In this account there is absolutely no mention of either Tree or Serpent Worship; on the contrary, he tells us that their principal deity was Mercury, not probably the god known by that name in the Roman Pantheon, but it may be Woden or some such synonym. After him came Apollo, Mars, Jupiter, and Minerva. Rather a strange selection, and stranger classification if we are to accept them as the Roman gods whose names they bear; but most probably they were local deities who, to his apprehension, more closely resembled these gods than any other his readers might be acquainted with.

Cæsar's assertion that the Druids were the priests, and by inference the only priests of the Gauls, is considerably modified by the subsequent testimony of both Strabo† and Diodorus,‡ who divide the priests into three classes, the Bards, the Druids, and the Soothsayers. All these authors agree in describing the principal rite to consist in sacrifices, performed apparently in the open air, and by inference in groves. They also agree in stating that human victims were frequently immolated in what appears to have been considered the most solemn and acceptable of their sacred rites.

Notwithstanding the silence of the principal authorities, we are not without evidence as to Tree Worship having prevailed. Maximus Tyrius,§ for instance, distinctly asserts that the "Celts worship Jupiter, but under the form of a tall oak tree;" and Pliny|| describes in detail the veneration of the Druids for the oak, especially the mistletoe, which grew on the oak, the ceremony accompanying its removal being apparently in Pliny's eyes the most important of those connected with the worship. It is, however, more from Christian writers that we acquire a conviction that Tree Worship prevailed extensively among the Celts.

There is, for instance, the famous pear tree, that grew at Auxerre in the fourth century, which was hung with trophies of the chase, and venerated as god by the people to such an extent that its destruction by the Holy Amator was considered

\* De Bello Gall. VI. 13, 20.

† Geographica, IV. 275.

‡ Hist. V. 31.

§ Diss. 8. ed. Reiske, I. 142.: Κέλται σεβούσι μὲν Δία, ἄγαλμα δὲ Διὸς Κελτικὸν ἐφ' ἡλὴ θύας.

|| Hist. Nat. XVI. 95.

a triumph, not only worthy to be related at length in the life of Genarius,\* but sung in indifferent Latin verse some centuries afterwards by Herricus.† From the Life of St. Amandus‡ we learn that groves and trees (*arbores et ligna pro diis colerent*) were worshipped in the north of France, near Beauvais (Belvacence), and the destruction of the tree, which was dedicated to the devil (*arborem quæ erat dæmoni dedicata*), is recorded as a most meritorious act.

The second Council of Arles§ denounced those who venerated trees, or fountains, or stones, and declared those guilty of sacrilege who neglected to destroy them. That of Tours|| issued a similar decree, almost in the same words; and even as late as 1262 the Council of Nantes condemned those who worshipped stones in desert and woody places (*locis sylvestribus*). These instances might no doubt be multiplied to almost any extent if anyone would take the trouble to look for them, but, as before mentioned, the French archæologists have hardly turned their attention to the subject.¶

The traces of Serpent Worship in Gaul are so few and so evanescent that, in ordinary circumstances, an author would be justified in asserting that it did not exist among the Celts any more than it did among the Germans, and in passing by the subject altogether. Such a superstructure, however, has been raised on a passage in Pliny\*\* that it is impossible to treat it thus. Among the many marvels and puerilities of his Natural History, there is none more absurd than that of the egg (*anguinum*) produced by the breath of a number of serpents, who meet together for the purpose of producing it, apparently on midsummer eve. It is projected by them into the air, and must be caught in a blanket before it falls, and the fortunate possessor must be on horseback, and gallop off with it; for if the snakes catch him before he crosses running water, a worse fate than Tam o' Shanter's will befall him! This fable is reported on the authority of the Druids, and it is added that this *anguinum* is considered a charm by them. It is, I believe, the only passage in any classical author that connects the Druids with serpents, or by implication would lead us to suspect that some superstition regarding serpents may have existed in Gaul.

If the records of the early provincial Christian councils in France were examined, it is possible that some denunciation of Serpent Worship may be found. If General Penhouët†† is to be trusted, there are frequent traditions of the destruction of serpents by the early Christian missionaries, and these may fairly be construed as meaning Serpent Worshipers, if such passages exist; but till they are abstracted and published, no argument can be based on them.

There is still one argument which has occasionally been hinted at in the previous pages, which may be considered as tending to show that Serpent Worship may have prevailed among the Celts. They certainly indulged in human sacrifices, and where this custom prevails, we generally find Serpent Worship accompanying it. The converse also is generally true. The worshippers of the serpent were those who, so far as we know, were most addicted to the sacrifice of men. If this proposition could be

\* Act. Sanctor. Bolland, 31 Julii, p. 203.

† Quoted by Grimm, Deutsche Myth. (2d ed.), p. 69.

‡ Acta Benedict. sec. 2, p. 714.

§ Arles Concil. II. can. 23.

|| Concil. Tur. II. can. 16.

¶ On Tree Worship in Gaul, see D. Monnier, Traditions Populaires comparées. Paris, 1854. p. 716 ff.

\*\* Hist. Nat. XXIX. 3.

†† The Rev. Bathurst Deane, Worship of the Serpent, p. 283, et seq.

established absolutely, it would be a sufficient proof of the prevalence of Serpent Worship in Gaul, but the premises are as yet much too far from being established to enable us to draw any such definite conclusion from them. They may eventually be brought to do so. At present it must suffice to indicate the form of the argument without attempting to base any theory on so slender a foundation.

On the whole, therefore, we are probably justified in assuming that Tree Worship did exist among the Celts as among the Germans till their conversion to Christianity; but, on the other hand, there seems to be no sufficient evidence to show that they were worshippers of the serpent, and if the Druids were priests of the Celts, which there seems no reason for denying, there is nothing to connect them with that faith, though no doubt they may not only have tolerated but indulged in local superstitions, as many Christians do at the present day.

At the same time recent researches have brought to light circumstances which would lead us to believe, that there existed in France an earlier pre-Celtic race allied to the Esthonians and Finns. They may have been Serpent Worshippers, but they seem to have been obliterated by the Celts in very early pre-Christian times, and their fossil remains have not yet been examined to a sufficient extent to enable any positive opinion to be formed on the subject.

#### GREAT BRITAIN.

If we have reason to complain that the French archaeologists have not turned sufficient attention to their pre-historic antiquities, the same reproach cannot certainly be applied to those of this country. From the days of Aubrey and Stukeley to the present day volume after volume has issued from the press, and the transactions of learned societies are full of papers on the subject. Every barrow has been explored, every antiquity measured and described, and it must be added every etymology has been enlisted, and every scrap of evidence gathered together and amplified, till a fabric has been raised of such marvellous magnitude that it is startling to find on what slight foundation it rests, and how soon it would topple over if the breath of reason could only be brought to bear upon it. In the meanwhile, however, every upright stone has become a Druidical remain, and every circle or line of stones an Ophite temple. There was a time, according to our antiquaries, when the Druids ruled absolutely in this land, and when, under their auspices, Serpent Worship was as essentially the religion of the people as Christianity is now. The belief that this is so has become from reiteration so engrained, that modern science will probably have a harder task to extirpate it, than the Romans had to abolish the real Druids, or the early Christian missionaries had to induce the people to forsake the worship of the serpent in countries where it prevailed in reality.

Fortunately the controversy lies in a very narrow compass. There are, I believe, only two very short paragraphs in any classical authors which mention Druids in connexion with Britain, and not one that mentions Serpent Worship, and no English author prior, at all events, to the 13th century alludes to either the one or the other.\*

\* I make this absolute statement with considerable confidence, not only because no paragraph of the sort has been quoted by any of the advocates of this faith, but because there is a very full and careful index to the "Monumenta Historica Britannica," and the word Druid does not occur in it.

Of the two classical passages, that in Tacitus applies strictly to the Isle of Mona (Anglesea), and will be referred to hereafter. The other is that in Cæsar's Commentaries,\* and is so important that it must be quoted at length, and in its own language. After describing the Institution of the Druids in Gaul, he goes on to say: "Disciplina (Druidum) in Britannia reperta, et inde in Galliam translata esse existimatur, et nunc qui diligentius eam rem cognoscere volunt, plerumque illo discendi causa proficiscuntur." Had this slight allusion not slipped from Cæsar's pen, there would have been absolutely no evidence of the existence of Druids in England; and after all it hangs on the value to be assigned to the word "existimatur," it is thought or believed! Neither Cæsar or any other Roman ever said he saw a Druid in this country; they never mention their temples or sacred places, and no one ever assisted at their rites. Still, with this paragraph before us, and with the knowledge that the majority of the inhabitants were Celts, it cannot be denied but that Druids may have existed in England, but even then their connexion with Serpent Worship rests wholly on that very apocryphal passage in Pliny (vide *ante*), in which he asserts that the Druids used the *anguinum* as a charm.

The other paragraph is more to the point.† In the year 61 A.D., Paulinus Suetonius was called away to suppress a revolt in the Island of Mona. He there met the army of the natives on the shore, and saw that the women and Druidesses were rushing about with dishevelled locks, and torches in their hands, urging the men to the contest.‡ When the rebellion was suppressed, the sacred groves in which their human sacrifices had been performed were cut down, and we are led to infer Druidism suppressed. Tacitus then goes on to narrate with infinitely more detail the far more important revolt of Boadicea, but, strange to say, in that great national uprising there is absolutely no mention of Druids, either in his narrative or in that of Dion Cassius.§ No groves were cut down, no rites abolished, when it was suppressed; and if any legitimate inference can be drawn from such silence, no Druids existed in the more civilized parts of England.

From whatever point of view the subject is looked at, it seems almost impossible to avoid the conclusion that there were two races in England,—an older and less civilized people, who,|| in the time of the Romans, had already been driven by the Celts into the fastnesses of the Welsh hills, and who may have been Serpent Worshipers and sacrificers of human victims, and that the uncritical Romans confounded the two. They seem rather to have dwelt on the picturesqueness of the naked blue-painted savage as a contrast with those races they were familiar with, as a Catlin revels in the manners and virtues of the Red Indian in contrast to the vices and effeminacy of his more civilized oppressor.

Be this as it may, it is principally from Welsh Triads, so-called, and the Welsh bards, that we depend for our knowledge of the Druids and their doings, and Serpent Worship in this country. If we knew when the works of the Welsh bards were

\* De Bello Gall. VI. 13.

† Tacitus, Ann. XIV. 29.

‡ If I wanted an illustration of this scene, I do not know where I could find a better than on the walls of the Caves at Ajanta. The original copy of the picture was unfortunately burnt in the fire at the Crystal Palace in 1866; but it is engraved in Mrs. Spier's *Life in India*, p. 302.

§ Dion Cassius in Xiphilinus' Abridgment, LXII. 1 & 4.

|| Norris's *Cornish Drama*, II. 401.

reduced to the form in which we now find them, and if we could depend on the translations we have, some light might no doubt be thrown on our subject.\* It is, however, an unfortunate peculiarity of the Celtic mind that when they attempt to elucidate the history of their country from their annals, they adopt a species of logic totally distinct from that followed by the Saxon, so that it becomes impossible to use the information they offer. Still it does not seem reasonable to doubt but that remnants of the Druidical religion, and perhaps also of Serpent Worship, may have lingered in the Welsh hills long after they had disappeared from the plains. Where we do find tradition attaching them to any of the monuments of the plain, it is through Welsh agency and almost within sight of the hills, as at Stanton Drew in Somersetshire,† that the serpent is introduced.

Beyond this, though we do occasionally find traditions of the serpent, they are few and far between, and of uncertain origin; one, for instance, is related by Mathew Paris, of St. Albans.‡ Writing in 1260 (?) he relates that the Saxon Abbot Aldred filled up a great hole which once was the abode of an immense dragon, in a place which was still called the Wurmenhert. This appears to have been surrounded by a circular vallum, which we infer still existed in the 13th century, though no trace of it now remains. The circular enclosure and the crypt may be considered as certain, they so exactly resemble the Irish Rath; but the dragon is, I fear, too far off to be depended upon, though it is one of the most authentic traditions we possess.

If this is so, it may be asked, what is the evidence on which the Druidical origin of such monuments as Stonehenge and Avebury have been assumed? The answer fortunately is simple—absolutely none. It never was pretended that any direct testimony existed, and the negative evidence is perfectly complete. No ancient author, no one, in fact, anterior to the invention of printing, ever refers to any stones or stone temples, circular or in any other form, as connected with the worship of the Druids or the Celts. On the other hand, every tradition that exists, whatever their value may be, points to the Arthurian age as that to which they owe their origin.

If it is further asked, what evidence there is to connect these temples with Serpent Worship, exactly the same answer must be given—not one tittle has yet been adduced. The one direction in which it seems probable some such connexion may be established, is from their similarity to the Indian examples, which it is the object of this volume to describe; but whether these will be sufficient for this purpose can only be decided when the argument is fully elaborated. Meanwhile are we correct in calling them temples at all? The one peculiarity of Celtic worship that seems best established, is the love of trees—their fondness of groves for their sacred rites. Is it probable that they would chose the downs of Wiltshire, especially such a spot as that where Stonehenge stands, for the site of their greatest temple—a spot where no tree ever grew or could grow? That they might erect a tomb or cenotaph among the graves of their forefathers seems probable enough; and if Avebury was a battle

\* Skene's translation of the four most ancient Welsh poems, which has just been published, has gone far to set this question at rest. It cannot be said that the word Druid does not occur in them, but if we were not looking for it, it is hardly in such a manner as would attract attention, and the part they play is most insignificant, besides it is by no means clear to what age or authority such references really belong.

† *Archæologia*, XXV. p. 198.

‡ *Vitæ Abbatum*, p. 40.

field, that would account for the locality where it is found, but it seems difficult to suggest a reason for their being where they are on any other hypothesis.

This, however, is not the place to examine the evidence on which the age or purposes of these monuments is to be determined. It is, however, impossible to pass over the subject entirely in silence, as reference will occasionally have to be made to them in the following pages; while unfortunately nine people out of ten in this country at the present day believe that Stonehenge and Avebury were built by the Druids; that they were Dracontia or Serpent Temples; and every one can point out the altar stones on which the human victims were sacrificed, and in fact knows all about their religion and rites, and it may be added believes in their primæval antiquity. Till these erroneous impressions are dispelled, the subject we have in hand can hardly be rendered intelligible.

A far more promising field for the investigation of Serpent Worship in Britain occurs in Scotland, on the east coast, north of the Forth. In that country, now known as Pictland, there exists even at the present day a great number of Megalithic monuments, many of which are covered with sculptures of a class totally distinct from those found anywhere else, and which have hitherto baffled the ingenuity of antiquaries. Among them the serpent appears frequently and so prominently that it is impossible to doubt that he was considered as an object of veneration by those who erected those monuments, while on the other hand Serpent Worship could hardly have originated in the north of Scotland, where the snakes are so few and contemptible. Mr. Stuart\* enumerates twenty-three representations of the serpent on these stones, thirteen times accompanied by emblems, ten times without them. In some instances, such as the Newton stone, the serpent is evidently the object for which the stone was set up, and he is accompanied by the broken sceptre, which may either be a hieroglyphic for God or King, or may only mean holy or great, or some such adjective, but it certainly implies distinction, if not consecration.

The age of these sculptured stones is known with tolerable certainty, inasmuch as the greater number of them have either the Cross itself or Christian emblems engraved upon them, and these must therefore be subsequent to the age of St. Columba, who arrived in Scotland apparently in 563, and died in 597. Many of those also which have only Pagan emblems are so nearly identical with the Christian stones that they must be about the same age. Some, however, are ruder and simpler, and the series fades back into the plain unsculptured Menhir, of which many exist in the same district. There seems, indeed, to be no essential break either, so far as design or purpose† is concerned, between the rude unchiselled blocks of Carnac and Avebury

\* Sculptured Stones of Scotland, vol. II. p. lxxiv.

† From his position as Archbishop of Upsala—in one of the last countries in Europe converted to Christianity—and writing in 1555, no one was in a better position to know the truth about these stone monuments than Olaus Magnus, and his testimony is clear and distinct. "Habent hæc saxa in plerisque locis erecta, longitudine x., vel xv., xx., xxx., et amplius, et latitudine iv. vel vi. pedum mirabili situ. Sed mirabiliori ordine ac mirabilissimo charactere ob plurimas rationes collocata sunt. Literato rectoque et longo ordine videlicet pugilorum certamina—quadrato turmas bellantium et spherico familiarum designantia sepulturas. ch. xxix.—Or again, Quos humi recondere placuit honorabiles statuas lapidum excelsorum, prout hodie cernuntur mira compagine immensa saxa, in modum altissimæ latissimæ januæ sursum transversumque viribus gigantum erecta, &c. ch. xxx." There are other passages in the same author bearing directly on the subject, but too long to quote. They, however, all seem to describe so correctly, not only the form, but the uses of such monuments as



and such elaborate Christian obelisks or Swenos stone at Forres, or the group that once surmounted the mound at St. Vigean.\*

We shall probably not err far if we regard these traces of Serpent Worship as indicating the presence in the north-east of Scotland of the head of that column of migration, or of propagandism, which, under the myth of Wodenism, we endeavoured in a previous chapter to trace from the Caucasus to Scandinavia. The Edda seems sufficient to prove that a form of Serpent Worship did certainly prevail in the latter country in the early centuries of the Christian era; and nothing seems more probable or more in accordance with Pictish traditions,† than that it should have passed thence into Scotland, and should have left its traces everywhere between the Orkneys and the Firths.‡ There is no evidence, however, of Serpent Worship, in this form at least, having passed south of the Forth. The traces of it that may exist in England or Ireland—if any—most probably belong to an earlier pre-historic people, and may have been introduced by another and more southern route.

#### AFRICA.

We tread on surer ground, when leaving Serpent Worship in its most attenuated form, and in the uncongenial climate of its furthest extension to the north and west, and turn to Africa, where it always was at home, and where it now flourishes in all its pristine vigour. Serpents are, and always must have been, so numerous and important in Africa, that it is there, if not in Mesopotamia, that we should, *à priori*, expect their worship to flourish, and it is by no means impossible that it was so. We know so little, however, of what happened in Africa in ancient times—except in Egypt—that it is difficult to speak with any confidence on the subject, and the institutions of Egypt were so abnormal and so exclusively their own, that we cannot reason from them to any general conclusions. Perhaps when the subject is carefully looked into, more may be ascertained than is now known, but our present purpose is with the worship as it exists at the present day, or did in recent times.

One of the best known examples of modern Serpent Worship exists in Upper Egypt, at a place called Sheikh Haredi, from a tomb of a Mahomedan saint of that name, which exists on the spot. The account given of the place by Norden,§ who visited it in 1738, with a mere change of names, is an exact counterpart of what might have been found in Pausanias or any ancient author describing the grove of Esculapius,

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Avebury and Stonehenge, that in so far as the testimony of this author is concerned, it may be considered as conclusive. Perhaps I may be allowed to add that though I only became aware of the existence of these passages a few months ago, they are entirely in accordance with the conclusions I had long ago arrived at from an examination of the monuments themselves.

\* All these will be found described in Stuart's "Sculptured Stones," above referred to, and also in Colonel Forbes Leslie's "Early Races of Scotland." Edin. 1866.

† Skene's *Chronicles of the Picts and Scots*, p. xc. et seq.

‡ There are some traditions in Northumberland, such as that of the Laidley Wurm of Spindleston Heugh; and there was a Wurm hill at Lambton, and at other places in the neighbourhood (Walter White, "Northumberland and the Border," p. 249, et seq.). All this would perfectly accord with the theory that it was the result of a Scandinavian course of immigration which reached these two points on the coast.

§ *Travels in the East*, ii. 40.

at Epidaurus. When any one was so unwell as to require his services, an ambassadress was sent in the person of a spotless virgin—as at Lanuvium—and if his godship pleased he came out of his cave, hung himself around her neck, and allowed himself to be carried in procession to the sick man's bedside. Here he stayed, as Norden irreverently suggests, a length of time proportionate to the gifts offered to his priests, and then returned alone to his dwelling. Dr. Pococke's episcopal dignity seems to have been so offended by the monstrosity of the superstition, that he abuses the serpent and his attendants, but he confirms in every particular Norden's account. He was told it had been there since the time of Mahomet; that they sacrificed to it sheep and lambs. They added that when a number of women visit him, which they do once a year, he comes out and twines himself about the neck of the most beautiful.\*

From Wilkinson† we learn that the worship still continues, but has fallen somewhat into disrepute of late.

It does not seem to be a matter of much doubt but that the Serpent was extensively worshipped in Abyssinia before the introduction of Christianity in the fourth century. All the lists of their kings which have been brought home by Bruce, Rüppell, and others, commence with "the Serpent" and his progeny, though we are not told when he reigned nor where. We are further told that when Ábreha and Átzbeha founded Axum 340 A.D., "that one portion of the people of Ethiopia then worshipped the Serpent, the rest followed the Law of Moses. Abuna Abba Salâmâ then introduced Christianity, and the inhabitants were baptized," &c.‡

It is by no means clear whether the great dragon who is said to have lived at Axum § was a god or merely a serpent, more probably the former, as he was burst asunder by the prayers of nine Christian saints. Be all this as it may, we have the direct testimony of Bruce || that the Shangalla, in that neighbourhood, "worship " various trees, serpents, the moon, planets, and stars in certain positions;" and more instances might no doubt be found if looked for. It is, however, on the west coast that the worship flourishes in all its pristine vigour.

Although no one has resided long enough on the Guinea coast with learning and leisure sufficient to write anything like an exhaustive treatise on the religions of that country, we have what is nearly of equal value for our purposes in a series of narratives of Portuguese, Dutch, French, and English travellers, extending over more than two hundred years. Those anterior to 1746 have been digested by Astley ¶ into a continuous narrative and description; and in 1760 President de Brosses,\*\* of the French Academy, wrote a lucid account of what was then known on the subject, and from that time various travellers have added to our knowledge; but the best and fullest are the narratives of M. Répin,†† a surgeon in the French navy; but

\* Pococke in Pinkerton's Voyages, xv. p. 269, et seq.

† Handbook of Egypt, 301.

‡ Dillmann in Zeitschrift der Morgenländischen Gesellschaft, vol. VII. p. 338, et seq.

§ Ludolf. Comment. iii. 284?

(4799.)

|| Travels, ii. 554.

¶ Astley's Collection of Voyages, 4 vols. quarto, London, 1846.

\*\* De Brosses, du Culte des Dieux Fetiches, &c. 12mo. Paris, 1760.

†† Le Tour du Monde, 1863, p. 9, et seq.

we have also that of Capt. Burton and Commodore Wilmot,\* who went on an official mission to Dahomey in 1863. The one point on which we desire more information is as to the extent of this form of faith, and as to the ethnological relations of the people who practise it. We are told, for instance, that when the Dahomans invaded Whidah in 1726, they killed the sacred snakes, and otherwise outraged the religious feelings of the Whidans.† Both countries are now united under one rule, and apparently with one religion. Was it otherwise 140 years ago? and can the distinction now be traced? These and such like questions are well worthy of more attention than they have hitherto received, for if we are ever to understand the ancient peculiarities of this faith, it must be by a thorough study of the best living examples.

Hitherto we have been only gathering together, as it were, the fossil remains of an extinct religion, whereas in Africa not only does Serpent Worship flourish at the present day, but it exists in conjunction with all those peculiarities of which only traces can be found elsewhere. Ancestral worship, accompanied by human sacrifices on the most lavish scale, is the leading characteristic of the Dahoman religion, and with it we have the institution of a female warrior class, which we have hitherto only known through the beautiful Amazonian fictions of the Greeks or the legends of the Hindoos, as to the *Strī-rājya*, but in Dahomey the institution exists to this day in all its hideous savagery.

The three gods worshipped in Whidah, or to speak more correctly, the three classes of gods, are Serpents, Trees, and the Ocean;‡ the same trinity as was established in the Erechtheum, in the Akropolis of Athens, more than three thousand years ago. Of these, the serpent called *Danh gbwe*, or the earthly serpent, is the first. "It is esteemed the supreme bliss and general good. It has 1,000 *Danh-si*, or "snake wives, married and single votaries, and its influence cannot be meddled with "by the two others, which are subject to it."§

The ancestor of the present race of serpent gods is said to have deserted from the *Ardrah* people ages ago, in consequence of their wickedness, on the eve of a battle, and to have been received by the Whidah people with the highest honours.|| He is reported to be still alive, as all these gods are immortal, though it need hardly be added, no European has seen him, but his descendants seem to be among the most beautiful, and certainly are among the most harmless of their kind.

Des Marchais gives a full description of the worship addressed to this god, and a picture of a procession, in which the king, the king's wives, and all the nobles took part,¶ bearing presents and offerings to the serpent god. Prayers are addressed to him on every occasion, and answers are returned by the snakes in conversation with the high priest. The one thing we seem to miss is the Esculapian character. It may be that this is included in his characteristic of an omniscient and all-powerful god, but it does not seem to be especially mentioned.

\* Mission to the King of Dahomey, 2 vols. 8vo. Murray, 1864.

† Capt. Snellgrove's Narrative in Astley, iii. 489.

‡ Bosman in Astley.

§ Burton, vol. II. p. 139.

|| Des Marchais' (1725) Voyages, ii. p. 135, et seq.

¶ A copy of this plate is given in Astley, vol. III. plate 7.

Women, when touched by the serpent, are said to become "possessed." They are seized with hysteria, and often bereft of reason. When so affected they are secluded in hospitals prepared for their reception, and generally afterwards are considered as priestesses,—Fetish women,—though returned to civil life. The bulk of the priestesses are girls devoted either before their birth or at a very early age to the service of the god. They are brought up in the temple, taught singing, dancing, and various accomplishments, exactly as the nautch girls are in the temples of Southern India, and when of age are married to the god. On this occasion they are marked with the image of the god by pricking the skin with needles and rubbing in indigo, or some blue dye, which is indelible. This seal is said to be set upon them by the god himself,\* and, as in Greece, no one dare to divulge his mysteries.

Besides this earthly serpent, there is another, the heavenly one, commonly called *Danh*. It is the rainbow, and makes the *Popo* beads, and confers wealth on man. Its emblem is a coiled and horned snake of clay, in a pot or calabash.†

The second god in the Dahoman Pantheon is represented by lofty and beautiful trees. They are prayed to and presented with offerings in times of sickness, and especially of fever. The most revered of these is the cotton tree (*Bombax*), whose wives equal those of the snake, and the *Loco*, the well-known poison tree of the West African coast. The latter numbers few *Loco-si* or wives, but, on the other hand, has its own fetish pottery, which may be bought in every market.‡

The youngest brother of the triad is *Hu*, the ocean. The *Huno*, or ocean priest, is now considered the highest of all, a fetish king at *Whidah*, where he has 500 wives. The offerings to this god are rice, corn, oil, beans, and also cloth, cowries, and other valuables; but at times the king sends as an ocean sacrifice, from the capital, a man carried in a hammock, with the dress, the stool, and umbrella of a noble. A canoe takes him out to the sea, and he is thrown to the sharks.

The human sacrifices or "customs," as they are usually called, of Dahomey, are one of the most remarkable religious observances of the world. They have been frequently described, but by no one so fully or intelligently as by Captain Burton, in his volumes we have just been quoting from.§ They are divided into greater and lesser customs. At the former not less than 500 or 600 victims are sacrificed; at the latter, at which Captain Burton and his companions assisted, 30 or 40 seem to suffice. The idea seems to be that when the king leaves this world it is necessary his wife, his servants, and his domestic animals should accompany him, and they are all slaughtered accordingly. The lesser customs are an annual act of ancestral worship in honour of the departed king, and also to keep up his stock, though in the land of the immortal this seems unnecessary. Besides that, whenever a battle is fought or any great event happens, a messenger is despatched to propitiate the

\* From Suetonius we learn that when *Atia*, the mother of *Augustus*, was touched by the serpent in the temple of *Apollo*, she was marked with a stain (*macula*) like a painted serpent, so that she did not afterwards dare to appear in the public baths.—Sueton. in *Aug.* c. 94.

† Burton, ii. 148.

‡ Burton, ii. p. 140, l. 141.

§ Burton. As almost the whole work is devoted to this subject, it is needless to specify pages.

late king by keeping him "*au fait*" in the news of his late kingdom. It is said the present king would not be unwilling to do away with, or at least to modify, some of the most revolting features of this great slaughter, but that his subjects would regard such an act as a neglect of his most sacred duties, and he might lose his throne as a punishment for such impiety.\*

None of the works above referred to make it clear what the negro's ideas of immortality are, probably because none such exist. That they have an idea of a future state, and that they consider this world as merely one of transition, is evident. All pass on to the next and better world, but with the same wants, feelings, and desires that they possessed while sojourning here, and apparently with the same distinction of rank. The last king, however, is the one especially honoured, and the reigning monarch, when he dies, expects the chief worship to be paid to him, and no doubt he is the one who takes the greatest interest in sublunar affairs. They never rise apparently to the rank of gods, but if they do not die they are at least very soon forgotten.†

When contemplating this, to us, strange religious development, the question inevitably arises, How far are we to consider this Dahoman worship as a living fragment of the oldest religion of the world, or how far may it have grown up in more modern times?

The traditions of the country are, as might be expected, far too vague to be of any avail in such an enquiry, and we are left to draw our conclusions from such information as we can gather elsewhere. We know from the Egyptian monuments that neither the physical features nor the social status of the negro have altered in the slightest degree during the last 4,000 years. If the type was then fixed which has since remained unaltered, why not his religion also? There seems no *à priori* difficulty. No other people in the whole world seem so unchanged and unchangeable. Movements and mixtures of races have taken place everywhere else. Christianity has swept Serpent Worship out of what were the limits of the Roman world, and Mahomedanism has done the same over the greater part of Northern Africa. Neither influence has yet penetrated to the Gold Coast, and there apparently the negro holds "his old faith and his old feelings fast" in spite of the progress of the rest of the world. It may be very horrible, but so far as we at present know it is the oldest of human faiths, and is now practised with more completeness in Dahomey than anywhere else, at least at the present day.

#### AMERICA.

There are few things in connexion with the ancient mythology of America more certain than that there existed in that country before its discovery by Columbus extreme veneration for the serpent. Whether or not this should be designated "worship" is not so clear. The total absence of any native literature renders it extremely difficult to realise the exact interpretation to be put on any observed phenomena, and we

\* Burton, ii. 176.

† Among the Zulus the snake is held in great respect, and is not willingly killed; as their dead ancestors are supposed to reappear in the form of snakes.—Colenso, on the Pentateuch, p. VI. p. 142.

gather very little trustworthy information from the early Christian missionaries or historians. They were either too ignorant or too prejudiced to take a dispassionate view of what they saw, and were too much inclined to see the serpent of Eve, or the deluge of Noah, in the vague traditions of the natives; though, to account for these, they were obliged to make St. Thomas missionary to Mexico—before it was founded—as well as first Bishop of Madras. The consequence is, that we are dependent either on a very imperfect examination of the Sculptures, or on very vague oral traditions, for our knowledge of the subject; and it need hardly be added, that with only such data it is extremely difficult to arrive at any satisfactory conclusion. At the same time, however, it must be admitted that if a systematic examination of such data as exist were undertaken, with special reference to Tree and Serpent Worship, a great deal might yet be effected; but as no one has yet attempted the investigation, the subject must for the present be left in its original obscurity.

The principal deity of the Aztec Pantheon seems Tezcatlipoca, or Tonacatlecoatl, literally the Sun Serpent. According to Sahagun, in his character of God of Hosts, he was addressed by the Mexican high priest: "We entreat that those who die in war may be received by thee, our father the sun, and our brother the earth, for thou alone reignest."\*

The name of the primitive goddess, the wife of Tezcatlipoca, was Cihuacohuatl, or Tonacacihua, the female serpent or the female sun. She, according to the Mexicans, gave to the light at a single birth two children, one male the other female, to whom they refer the origin of mankind.†

A still more remarkable myth is that of Quetzal-coatl, literally the feathered serpent. He is by some represented as born of a pure virgin in the province of Tollan; by others as a stranger coming from a "far countrie," some time between the sixth and ninth century of our era. Be this as it may, he was the great lawgiver and civilizer of the inhabitants of Anahuac. He taught them religion, gave them laws, instructed them in agriculture and the use of metals, and the various arts of life. He is generally represented as an old man, with a white flowing beard and venerable aspect. He was, in fact, the Lycurgus and the Bacchus of Central America, and having finished his mission he withdrew, like the former, it is said, by sea, promising to return. So implicitly was this believed by his subjects, that when the Spaniards appeared on the coast they were joyfully hailed as the returning god and his companions. Alas! they came only to destroy them and their institutions.

If all the evidences bearing on this legend were thoroughly sifted by some one competent to the task, I feel confident they would result in an historical residuum; and if so, it would throw great light on one of the most perplexing problems connected with the civilization of the New World.

As we shall see presently, Serpent Worship was the faith of a great and prosperous kingdom in Cambodia at the time just indicated as the age of the Mexican prophet; and it is more than probable that the worship prevailed in China and the islands to the eastward at that time. Is it possible that it may have crossed the Pacific, and

\* Squier's Serpent Symbol in America, p. 162.

† Gama, Descripcion Historica y Cronologica de las pedras de Mexico, 1832, p. 39.

landed on the western coast of America, and, finally, bloomed in Anahuac? If such a solution were possible, it would explain many similarities between the religion and arts of the Old World and the New, which are now extremely puzzling, for want of some such evidence of intercommunication.

On the other hand, if we may trust the antiquaries of the United States, there are great serpent mounds formed of earth, 1,000 feet long and more,\* which would seem to prove that before the present race of Red Indians inhabited the states Ohio and Iowa, a race of Serpent Worshippers occupied their places, and they have been the ancestors of the Toltecs. When, however, we remember with what curious credulity Stukeley manufactured a Dracontium out of Avebury, and Bathurst Deane saw a serpent seven miles long in the groups of Menhirs at Carnac, we must pause before we feel sure that these American mounds do really represent serpents at all. This point cannot be settled without much more accurate surveys and more cautious observers than have yet turned their attention to the subject.

If it should turn out that these are really representations of the great serpent, and that this worship is indigenous in the New World, we are thrown back on the doctrine that human nature is alike everywhere, and that man in like circumstances and with a like degree of civilization does always the same things, and elaborates the same beliefs. It may be so, but I confess it appears to me that at present the evidence preponderates the other way. It should be mentioned, however, that in America the snake that is worshipped is always the indigenous rattlesnake. Whether as separate images or as adorning the walls of the temples of Yucatan, this characteristic seems invariable, and in so far would favour the local origin of the faith. The greatest difficulty of the investigation arises from almost absolute destruction of all the monuments of the capital by its barbarous conquerors, and the consequent paucity of real reliable data on which to found our conclusions.

It seems, however, impossible to read the numerous evidences which Müller† has collected together with so much industry not to feel convinced that Serpent Worship did prevail all over the continent. In Peru apparently with qualities similar to those of the Serpents in the Old World,‡ But in Mexico, and among the North American Indians, occasionally with attributes of terror which were never ascribed to him on this side of the Atlantic. Quetzalcoatl is always an exception to this inference; and on the whole it seems more reasonable to suppose that these characteristics are to be ascribed more to the horror of the Christian narrators than to the feelings of the worshippers. We have no native accounts, and depend consequently wholly on those who looked on the worship from an outside and antagonistic point of view.

If, however, we may trust Bernal Diaz, he tells us that living rattlesnakes were kept in the great temple at Mexico as sacred and petted objects. They were kept in a cabin of diversified form, in which a quantity of feathers had been strewed, and there they laid their eggs and nursed their snakelings. They were fed with the bodies of the sacrificed, and with dogs' meat.§ The same author tells us that on

\* Smithsonian Contributions to Knowledge, vol. 1.

See also Squier's Serpent Symbol, p. 137 to 141.

† Amerikanische Urreligionen. Basel, 1855.

‡ Müller, p. 366.

§ Bernal Diaz, translated by Lockhart, i, 233.

Cortes' march to Mexico they arrived at a place called Terraguca, which the Spaniards called the Town of Serpents, on account of the enormous figures of these reptiles which they found in the temples, and which the natives worshipped as gods.\* But though it is impossible to read any of the narratives of the conquerors without being struck with the frequency with which sacred Serpents and Serpent Worship are spoken of, it is always as a thing accursed, and to be avoided; never as an object worthy of attention, or to be inquired into, and their narratives consequently throw very little light on the subject. The Sculptures would do more; but it will require a long and patient investigation by some one competent person on the spot before their evidence can be considered as available; at present we know very little of what they may contain.

It need hardly be remarked that human sacrifices were found accompanying Serpent Worship in America almost to as great an extent as in Dahomey. Even here, however, it is probable we must make a distinction which may be of some importance. In Africa the sacrificial rites seem to be purely ancestral. In America they were made to propitiate gods, not apparently the ancestors of the reigning family, nor nearer to them in time than Quetzalcoatl. The principal object seems always to have been augury to obtain from the gods an indication of their will, which does not seem to have been the case in Dahomey. It was also no doubt considered that the sacrifice itself was agreeable to the deity, and it was expected that the oracle, which was the declaration of his will, would be favourable in proportion to the number of the victims.

It is by no means improbable that when looked for, Tree Worship will also be found to have prevailed extensively in the New World. Mr. Tylor mentions two instances that came under his notice.† The first was a venerable deciduous cypress, with a stem sixty feet in circumference near its root, and with a fountain gushing up within the hollow of the trunk itself. It was hung all over with votive offerings, besides hundreds of locks of hair, teeth, and bits of ribbon. The other was treated in the same manner, and had the valuable property for whoever touched it, that all feeling of weariness left him. Müller also finds traces of Tree Worship all over the continent of America, and generally in juxtaposition, if not in actual connexion, with that of the Serpent.‡ But here again we must pause for further information before attempting to generalize.

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\* p. 125. See also pp. 3, 7.

† Anahuac, 215, 265.

‡ Amerikanische Urreligionen, 494. See also 107, 124, 264, *et seq.*



## PART II.—EASTERN ASIA.

## PERSIA.

THE Eastern branch of our subject has been even less investigated by European scholars than those divisions noticed in the previous pages. This has arisen partly from a less degree of familiarity with Eastern tradition, but more probably because until the very recent discoveries in Cambodia and at Amravati no very tangible data existed on which any satisfactory conclusions could be based. The subject is now, however, assuming a very different aspect, and before long it may be hoped that great light will be thrown on the Tree and Serpent Worship of the ancient world, from a study of those forms of that faith which we now know existed at one time in India.

With Persia the case is slightly different. We have no material remains of Snake Worship in that country, and very little native history. The Zend-Avesta is the work from which we might hope most, not only from its antiquity, but because of its doctrinal character. It is, however, of very little use for our present purposes, inasmuch as it, like the Vedas, embodies the religious belief only of the Aryan, or as they are called here, the Iranian branch of the Persian people, and it need hardly be repeated here that they are not, and never were, serpent worshippers anywhere. If, indeed, there is one point which comes out more clearly than another in the course of this investigation, it is that Serpent Worship is essentially that of a Turanian, or at least of a non-Aryan people. In the present state of the enquiry it would be too bold a generalization to assert that all Turanian races were Serpent Worshippers; and still less can it be affirmed that all who looked on the Serpent as a God belonged to that family of mankind. It is safe, however, to assume that the whole tendency of the facts hitherto brought to light, lies in that direction; and it seems probable that eventually the worship of the Serpent may become a valuable ethnographic test of the presence of Turanian blood in the veins of any people among whom it is found to prevail.

At the time when the Greeks became acquainted with Persia, the whole country, under the influence of the Achæmenian kings, had been brought to acknowledge Zoroasterism with its elemental Fire Worship as their principal form of faith. This religion in its purity,—if we know it in that state,—was the faith which the Iranians brought with them from their original seats when they separated from the Indian Aryans, and was practically their common faith both in India and in Persia. In the latter country, however, in the time of the Achæmenidæ, it was strangely mixed up with Magism, a religion of much more Semitic, or even, it may be suspected, Turanian form, and the two were at that time so blended, that in the accounts of the Greeks at least it is impossible to separate the one from the other.

At the time when the Greeks first make us practically acquainted with Persia, Tree and Serpent Worship had ceased to be regarded as the religion of any important body in the state, though the probability is that it may have been followed to a considerable extent by large classes of people in that vast empire. As, however,

the Persians despised, and the Greeks did not observe the Ophites, we are left almost entirely at the mercy of the Mahomedan historians and poets of the eleventh and following centuries for such faint glimmerings of truth as can be picked up, and anyone who has ever opened one of their books will know what blind guides they are in such an investigation. It is doubtful whether even the critical skill of European scholars will ever sift a substratum of tangible history out of the fables of Firdausi or Mirkhond. At present the task has hardly been attempted, and when it has, with only a small modicum of success.

By far the most important and most interesting person in ancient Persian history, for our present purposes at least, is Zohák. According to all accounts he came from Arabia, and took his title, Bívar-asp, from his body guard of 10,000 horsemen by whom he was always accompanied.\* His genealogy from Tází or Táj, the eponymous of the Arabs, is given both in the Bundehesch and the Mojmil.† His father is represented as a simple possessor of flocks and herds, but he is said to have conquered Central Asia, and to have fixed his residence at Babel.‡ His reign, or rather that of his dynasty, is said to have lasted 1,000 years, when he was overthrown by Feridún, with the assistance of Gavah the blacksmith, by whom the original line of Jemshid was then restored.

Feridún has been identified almost without doubt with Thraétaona of the Zend-Avesta, celebrated as the slayer of the three-headed Serpent Daháka, who was the creation of the evil power Angra Mainyus,§ or more popularly Ahriman.

Zohák is represented by all the Mahomedan historians as having two snakes growing at his back, one from each shoulder, and they add that it was necessary to appease these monsters by sacrificing daily two young men in order that their cravings might be satisfied with their brains.|| All this has hitherto been mysterious enough, but as we shall presently see, all women of the Nága race had one serpent between their shoulders, and all men—in India—one with three, five, or seven heads; the two of Zohák seem an earlier form, being the exact duplication of those of the females, and it is also probable that the *three* heads of the Zend-Avesta¶ include the human head between the two snakes. We shall be in a better position to judge of this presently, but whatever explanation we adopt, it seems only to be an earlier form of a myth with which we are now becoming familiar in India. The human sacrifices are only what we find so universally accompanying Serpent Worship all the world over.

The most startling novelty with regard to Zohák is the assertion that he came from Arabia, where we have no reason to suppose that Serpent Worship then pre-

\* Justi Bundehesch, 1868, Glossary s. v. béwarásp. Handbuch der Zendsprache, 1866, Glossary s. v. Daháka.

† Windischmann, Zoroastrische Studien, pp. 30, 37, c. 39.

‡ Is it possible that this is the Arab dynasty which, according to Berosus, ruled in Babylon in the 13th century B.C.? Rawlinson's Ancient Monarchies, vol. I. p. 193.

§ Windischmann, quoting from the Yaçna, IX. 8, p. 29. See also Westergaard in Weber's Indische Studien, vol. III. p. 416.

|| Mojmil (156); Windischmann, 37; Sháh Náme, Atkinson's translation, p. 14.

¶ Tribus oribus præditum, tribus capitibus. Masaudi, III. p. 252, and the Mahomedans, on the contrary, always speak of "Two Serpents borne on the shoulders of Dahák."

(4799.)

ailed. Perhaps it only means right bank of the lower Euphrates, which to a man writing in Afghanistan, or the north-east of Persia, might be so described; the original seat of the empire being Babylon would bear that interpretation. Moses of Chorene\* would try to persuade us that Zohák was identical with Astyages the Mede, but as his assertion seems to rest more on a verbal coincidence than on historical evidence, too much reliance must not be placed upon it. The Serpent dynasty most probably reigned in Media rather than in Persia proper, but they must have been extinct before the time of Cyrus, though all this requires more careful examination than it has yet met with.

One remnant of the race of Zohák seems to have survived in Cabul, and it would be especially interesting to us, if we knew more about it, as it seems the connecting link between the Persian and Indian Serpent Worship. According to the Mojmil, "When Táj, the primogenitor of the Arabs, was settled in Babel, one of his sons married a daughter of Feridún and settled in Cabul, and his son was Rustem's maternal grandfather."† We find further particulars of the family in the Sháh Náme. When Zál the son of Sám went to Cabul he found Mihráb, a descendant of Zohák, on the throne, and having fallen in love with his daughter, Rudabeh, he was forbidden by the Mubids to marry her, because the chief of Cabul was of the family of Zohák, the Serpent King. The father too from this circumstance dreaded the resentment of Manuchehr if he allowed the union, and not without reason, for the king ordered Sám to destroy Kábul by fire and sword, and especially the house of Mihráb, then ruler of the serpent race, and all his adherents were to be put to death.‡ Fortunately for the lovers the difficulty was got over, and the result was the birth of Rustem, the most wonderful hero of Eastern romance. The point of interest to us, however, is, that it is probably to the preservation of this race of Serpent worshippers that we owe that remarkable development of Buddhism, which distinguished the valley of the Cabul river between the decline of the Greco-Bactrian kingdom and the rise of the Mahomedan power in that quarter.

The last material trace of Serpent Worship that is found in Persia occurs in a bas-relief at Nakshi-Rustem, near Persepolis. It represents Ormuzd bestowing the circlet of royalty on Ardishir Babegán the first king of the Sassanian line (A.D. 226). Beneath the feet of the horse on which the god (?) is seated, lies Ardevan, the last of the Parthians, and round his head are twisted two writhing snakes,§ not such as probably adorned the shoulders of Zohák, but still sufficiently important to mark that the sculptor intended to represent the Parthian as of the hated race of Zohák, the follower of the accursed Ahriman, whom Ormuzd tramples under foot while bestowing the emblem of royalty on the Zoroastrian, Fire-Worshipping Sassanian.

The more closely it is looked at the more probable does it appear that not only in this instance, but throughout the whole ancient history of Persia, the so-called dualism is much more an ethnographical expression than the result of any theological

\* History of Armenia, Postscript to Book I. "Les descendants d'Astyages établis en Arménie portoient encore le nom de Vischabazouni, ce qui signifie Race de dragon. Cette dénomination leur venait du nom du roi des Mèdes."—St. Martin, I. 285.

† Windischmann, 37.

‡ Atkinson's translation of Shah Nameh, p. 77 et seq.

§ Ker Porter, vol. I. plate xxiii. ; Flandin et Coste, Voyage en Perse, plate clxxxiii.

elaboration. It was the opposition of Turan to Iran, of Zohak to Zoroaster, of Ormuzd to Ahriman—an Aryan race, with their pure elemental worship, intruding into a country occupied by a serpent-worshipping people of Turanian origin, but instead of totally abolishing and ignoring the religion of the conquered, forcing it into an unnatural combination with their own. All this, however, was carried out in such a manner as to represent their own, as the source of all that is good and elevated, and that of the subject race as the origin of all that is evil and accursed.

The answer to the question whether Tree Worship did or did not prevail in Ancient Persia will mainly depend on the signification scholars may eventually agree to assign to the Homa or Soma worship, which forms so important a ceremonial observance both in the Vedas and the Zend-Avesta. If the Soma plant always was the *Asclepias acida* or *Sarcostema viminalis*, which is now used by the Brahmans for that purpose, it cannot be called Tree Worship in the sense in which the term is used throughout this essay. The *Asclepias* is a creeping shrub, almost without leaves, and only remarkable for a milky juice, to which the most important virtues are ascribed. It is now used as freshly expressed,\* but in former times was fermented so as to produce intoxication.

On the other hand, Windischmann, who had probably rendered himself more familiar with the spirit of the Zend-Avesta than any other scholar, thus expresses himself on the subject. "Homa is the first of the trees planted by Ahura-Mazda in the fountain of life. He who drinks of its juice never dies. According to the Bundehesh, the Gogard or Gaokerena tree bears the Homa, which gives health and generative power, and imparts life at the resurrection. The Homa plant does not decay, bears no fruit, resembles the vine, is knotty, and has leaves like jessamin, yellow and white."†

In another place he says, "From this it appears that the White Homa or the Tree Gokard is the Tree of Life which grew in Paradise."

In Persian mythology the Homa was also personified as a god, and converses with Ahura-Mazda with regard to the origin of all things, as if he were co-equal in knowledge with the great god of the Persians himself. Whatever form, however, it may have taken, our author adds, the Soma was unquestionably the greatest and holiest offering of ancient Indian or Iranian worship.‡

It would require a much more intimate knowledge of the subject than can be obtained from such translations as have been made, or such books as have been published, to speak at all definitely regarding the Homa. From such data as are available it would appear that the Homa had its origin in the same myth as the Trees of Life and Knowledge which grew in Paradise, and that it passed through a stage of Bacchic mystery, though whether the vine or some other plant was then the Homa is by no means clear; and at last it sank into the present innocent Soma form, which, however, can hardly be regarded as anything but a reminiscence of its former greatness and importance.

\* Haug Essays, p. 247 ff. Wilson, Introduction to the Rig-Veda-Samhitā, vol. I. p. xxxvi. et seq.  
† Ueber den Somacultus der Arier. p. 131.

‡ Windischmann, Zoroastrische Studien, pp. 89, 167, 251.

We shall have frequent occasion to speak of the Bodhidruma or Tree of Knowledge of the Buddhists, in the sequel. It is the principal object of worship at Sanchi, and among the most important at Amravati. It will only be possible to ascertain what connexion may have existed between it and the Gaokerena of the Persians, or the Homa, when some competent scholar, familiar with both Zend and Sanskrit, looks through the original authorities with special reference to this inquiry.

Though sufficiently absurd, the following legend from the Sháh Náme is curious. Sikander, after the conquest of India, went to Mekka, and thence to a country where there were two trees, one male, one female. The first spoke during the day, the latter at night. Whoever had a wish went there to have his desires accomplished. Sikander longed for length of days. When he came under the tree a horrible sound arose and rung in his ears; and on his asking what it meant, the attendant priest replied that fourteen years of his life still remained. Again he asked, "Shall I see " Rúm and my mother and children before I die?" The answer was, "Thou wilt " die at Karshán."\*

The oldest known authority for this legend is the Pseudo-Kallisthenes, who wrote apparently about the year 200 A.D.† As he relates it, there were two trees, one of the Sun, which spoke in the Indian language, and one of the Moon which spoke Greek.‡ In the Mediæval fables, the "leafless tree" was introduced between these two. This tree is mentioned by Marco Polo,§ and under the name of the "Arbre Sec" was one of the favourite myths of the Byzantine and of early Christian travellers, though it is even now by no means clear where it grew (my impression is that it was in Scistan, though others place it in Khorassan), nor what exact meaning the Mediævalists attached to the fable.

Unfortunately the classical authors afford us little or no assistance in regard to Tree Worship in the countries westward of India, except the incidental remark of Quintus Curtius, in speaking of the inhabitants on the banks of the Indus, "Arbores maxime colunt,"|| there is no passage bearing, so far as I know, directly on the subject.

The Chinese travellers are hardly more communicative; but Hiouen-Tsang does mention a great Pipal tree of Peshawar,¶ under whose shade the four preceding Buddhas had reposed, and under it the last had predicted the appearance of the great Kaniskha, who in consequence had erected alongside of it, about the Christian era, the largest and tallest of all the Stupas of which we have any record. This tree seems to have existed and been revered down to the time of Baber (in 1504), who mentions it as the great tree of Bekram.\*\* The Gûrh Katri he describes as close to it was probably the remains of the Monastery of Kaniskha. Even its site cannot now be ascertained.

#### CASHMERE.

Although from its position on the map, Cashmere might fairly be considered as an integral part of India, still its circlet of mountains has been sufficient to keep it distinct and separate, and we consequently find there vestiges of the old faith better

\* Atkinson, Translation, p. 507.

† Zacher, Pseudo-Kallisthenes. Halle, 1867, p. 102.

‡ Loc. p. 161.

§ Marsden, p. 109.

|| Hist. Alex. VIII. 9.

¶ Histoire de la Vie de Hiouen Tsang, I. p. 83.

\*\* Leyden's translation of Memoirs of Baber, 157, 264.

preserved than in most places on the plains. Another circumstance which has tended also in the same direction is that the Aryans on entering India do not seem to have turned aside to conquer or at least permanently to occupy the valley. If they entered India by crossing the Indus at or near Attock,—and there seems no good reason for doubting that this was so,—this seems so strange that we feel almost inclined to believe that Cashmere was really then in the state described in the earliest legends, a great lake, or at least a valley so filled with water and so swampy as to be unfit for human habitation. Though this may not be quite true we are no doubt justified in assuming that 4,000 or 5,000 years ago a much larger portion of the valley was under water than is the case now, and the real snakes may then have been relatively more important than their Naga successors afterwards became.

Be this as it may, Cashmere has always been considered, in historical times, as one of the principal centres of Serpent Worship in India, and hitherto it has been principally from her legends that what little was known of the Nagas has been gathered.

Cashmere is also fortunate in possessing in the Râja Taranginî something more like a connected history than almost any other country of India, and from its pages, with the incidental notices by classical, Chinese, and Mahomedan authors, we are enabled to form a tolerably distinct view of the subject.

Although from the context there is a strong presumption that Snake Worship prevailed in the valley from a very early period, still we have no direct testimony to the fact till the century before the Christian era, when the King Dâmodara having, it is said, offended some Brahman was converted into a snake,\* and still, it is said, haunts the spot. He was succeeded by three Tartar princes, known from history and from their coins to have been Buddhists, and to have reigned about the Christian era. In the reign of their successor Abhimanyu we are told that “in consequence of the disuse of the prescribed institutes, and the abolition of every form of sacrifice, and a departure from the lessons of the Nîla Purâna, the Nagas were particularly incensed, and visited the offences of the people with severe and unseasonable storms of rain and snow, and those especially perished who had adopted the Bauddha heresy.”† Gonerda III., who succeeded this king, prosecuted the reform which that prince had commenced.

The ancient ritual, according to the Nîla precepts,‡ was restored, and the worship of the Nagas and the offering of sacrifices re-established.§ During the following centuries we have several legends of Nagas, but the faith of the kings is seldom mentioned, and seems to have oscillated between Snake Worship, Buddhism, and Hinduism, but as our historian belonged to the latter faith his testimony is not always quite to be depended upon. When Hiouen Tshang entered the valley in 632,

\* Wilson's Abstract of the Râja Taranginî in Vol. XV. Asiatic Researches, p. 22. All the future references to this work are derived from the same source, which seems better and more trustworthy than the translation by Troyer. The volume and the page will, therefore, only be quoted.

† A. S. XV. p. 24.

‡ A. S. XV. p. 25.

§ The Nîla Purâna has not hitherto been seen by any European, but I trust to being able to add an abstract of its contents in an Appendix to this work. At my request Mr. J. Muir, the well-known Sanscrit scholar, wrote out to Sir D. Macleod, the Chief Commissioner in the Punjab, and he procured two copies from Cashmere, which are now in the hands of Professor Cowell, who has kindly undertaken to make the required analysis.

in the reign of Báláditya the last king of the Gonerdiya race, he found the Buddhist religion still very prevalent in the valley, though he admits that the king only interested himself in the heretics and in the temples of their gods, and despised the faith of Buddha.\* He repeats the usual story of the valley having been a lake, but adds, "50 years after the Nirvāna (B.C. 493?) a disciple of Ānanda converted the Naga "Raja, he quitted his tank, built 500 monasteries, and invited sages and saints to "come and dwell in them."†

It is not, however, only in the valley that our Chinese traveller repeats the Hindu legends about serpents and their power, but at every stage of his journey from Cabul to Cashmere, he everywhere finds some spot where a dragon king or Naga Raja resided, and played an important part in the legendary history of the land. These legends, as might be expected, were found in the seventh century very much altered from their more primitive forms, but they are interesting, in the first place, as showing how essentially the north-west corner of India was at one time the seat of Serpent Worship, and also, in what manner it was eventually—except perhaps in Cashmere—amalgamated with Buddhism.

Among these legends one of the most pertinent to our present purpose is that of a member of the family of Śākya—that of Buddha—who when travelling in Udayana—the Kamboja of the Hindus, lying northward from Peshawar—fell in love with a serpent king's daughter. He was eventually married to her, and by the advice and with the assistance of his father-in-law, killed the king of the country and obtained the sovereignty. Though his wife had obtained and was confirmed in the possession of a human body, a nine-headed snake occasionally appeared at the back of her neck, which on a certain occasion her husband cut off at a single blow while she was asleep. The result was blindness, of which she was afterwards cured by Śākya-muni himself, and her son Uttarasena was present at the distribution of his relics at Kuśinagara, where the great ascetic obtained Nirvāna.‡

An almost equally curious legend is told of a Buddhist priest (Bhikshu) who became a serpent, because he had killed the tree Elāpatra, and resided in a beautiful lake or spring near Takshaśilā (Taxila). In our traveller's day when the people of the country wanted fine weather or rain, they went to the spring accompanied by a priest (Śramaṇa) "and snapping their fingers, invoke the dragon, and immediately "obtain their wishes."§ In these legends the chief characteristic of the Serpents throughout the East in all ages seems to have been their power over the wind and rain, which they exert for either good or evil as their disposition prompts.||

A curious confirmation of the prevalence of Nagas in the north-west of India is obtained from the Buddhist account of the proceedings consequent on the Third

\* Hiouen-Thsang, II. 180. † Voyage de Hiouen-Thsang, I. 168. ‡ Hiouen-Thsang, II. 141.

§ Hiouen-Thsang, II. 152. General Cunningham visited this spring at Hassan Abdul in 1863, and found it still revered. Other legends are told at pp. 49, 99, 133, &c.

|| This power over the weather, which is one of the leading characteristics of Nagas, has led to their being confounded with the Vedic Ahi. In their origin and purpose I believe the two to have been perfectly distinct, but in the process of time the one legend borrowed from the other till the two have become so mixed up together that it will now be extremely difficult to separate them again. My own impression is that the Vedic myth is an adaptation of a local superstition; borrowed in fact from the serpent-worshipping aborigines among whom the Aryans were settled.

Convocation held B.C. 253. Missionaries were then sent to all the neighbouring countries. Among others Majjhantiko was dispatched to Kashmîra and Gandhâra.\* A Naga king of that country, named Aravâlo, endowed with supernatural powers, by causing a furious deluge to descend was submerging all the ripened crops in Kashmîra and Gandhâra. The Nagas and their king tried every means to terrify the missionary, but were subdued by his calmness and address; "whereupon the Théro propounded his doctrines, and the Naga king attained the salvation and state of piety in that faith." In like manner "in the Himawanta (Himalaya) regions, 84,000 Nagas were converted, and the Naga king placing the Théro on a gem-set throne respectfully stood by fanning him. On that day the inhabitants of Kashmîra and Gandhâra, who had come with offerings to appease the wrath of the Naga king, bowing down to the Théro (instead of the Naga king) stood reverentially by his side," &c. These extracts from the Mahawanso,† depict faithfully the Buddhist belief on the subject two centuries before Hiouen-Thsang's time, though not from personal observation. The account is further interesting, because these in the north-west were the only Nagas to whom missionaries were sent by Aśoka. Either it was that the others had been converted before, or that Cashmere and the mountain countries east and west of it, were the most prominent seats of the faith.

These accounts by native authorities are fully confirmed by such scanty notices as we glean from classical authorities; Onesicritus tells us that two ambassadors sent to the king of Cashmere by Alexander, brought back news that the king of the country cherished two large serpents of fabulous dimensions.‡ Maximinius of Tyre tells us, that when Alexander entered India, Taxilus (King of Taxila) showed him a serpent of enormous size which he nourished with great care and revered as the image of the god whom the Greek writers, from the similitude of his attributes, called Dionysus or Bacchus.§

The latest authority we have, is that of Abulfazl, who tells us that in the reign of Akbar (1556—1605) there were in Cashmere 45 places dedicated to the worship of Siva, 64 to Vishnu, 3 to Brahmâ, and 22 to Durgâ, but there were 700 places in the valley where there were carved images of snakes which the inhabitants worshipped.||

All this is fully confirmed by the architecture of the valley; with very few exceptions, all the ancient temples of Cashmere seem to have been devoted to Serpent Worship. They stand in square courts which were capable of being flooded and were crossed by light bridges of stone, some of which still remain. Even at the present day some of these temples are unapproachable without wading, in consequence of the water which surrounds them, and all might be rendered so by a slight repair to their waterworks. There are, of course, no images in the sanctuaries which long prevented antiquaries from perceiving the form of faith to which they were dedicated. But where the deity is a living god and mortal, when he and his worshippers pay the debt of nature, they leave no material trace to recall the memory of their past existence.

\* In this wide sense Gandhâra seems to include all the countries westward of the Indus as far as Candabar. Relics of this missionary, as we shall presently see, were deposited in No. 3 Tope at Sanchi.

† Turnour, Translation, p. 72 and 73.

‡ Strabo, XV. 698.

§ Maxim. Tyr. Diss. XIII. ed. Lip. 140.

|| Ayeen Akbaree, Gladwin's Translation, p. 137.



## CAMBODIA.

There is another country on the other side of the Bay of Bengal the study of whose antiquities is nearly as important to the elucidation of Serpent Worship in India, as those of Cashmere, though in a totally different sense. In the last-named country we look for the "incunabula" of the faith, in Cambodia for its fullest known development. The ruined cities of Cambodia have, however, been only so recently discovered, and are yet so little known, that it is extremely difficult to feel sure on many points connected with their history or purposes.\* Whatever doubt may, however, exist on other points, it seems certain that the great Temple of Nakhon Vat was wholly dedicated to Serpent Worship. Every angle of every roof is adorned with a grim seven-headed serpent, with a magnificent crest of what is apparently intended for feathers, and every cornice of every entablature is adorned with a continuous row of these seven-headed deities, but without crests. The former may be counted by hundreds, the latter by thousands. But it is not only these; every balustrade, every ridge, almost every feature of the building bears the same impress. The arrangements too of the temple are such as are suitable for Serpent Worship, and that only. There is no image in the sanctuary, and no worship represented in the bas-reliefs. All the courts are tanks to contain water, and everything recalls the temples of Cashmere, but with ten-fold magnificence. Neither in India, nor so far as is known is there any other temple, displaying the same amount of patient labour devoted to the elaboration of appropriate ornament over so extended a surface as in this newly-discovered temple. It is 600 feet square at base, and rises to a height of 180 feet in the centre, while every part is covered with carvings in stone, generally beautiful in design, and always admirably adapted to their situation, and to tell the story they were meant to convey. The startling thing to us is, that simultaneously with the erection of the great cathedrals of York, Amiens, or Cologne, a larger and more magnificent temple than either of them was being erected in another part of the globe, in a style and dedicated to a religion of which the western builders knew nothing. What seems equally strange is that all memory of the people, and all knowledge of their buildings, should have so completely passed away that till within the last ten years no one in Europe suspected their existence.

We shall not know whether the other temples in the city of Nakhon Thom are equally dedicated to Serpent Worship till some one visits them who has some previous knowledge of the subject. They are so completely overgrown with jungle that photography will hardly help us in this instance. They were more extensive, and seem to have been as elaborately ornamented as the one temple of which we

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\* The temples were first discovered by M. Mouhot, a French naturalist, in 1858-60, but he did not pretend to any knowledge of their history. They were afterwards visited by Dr. Bastian, who has written voluminously regarding them, but either it is that he knows nothing about them, or for some reason he is afraid to commit himself to any statements regarding them. The greatest amount of information has been obtained from the photographs of Mr. J. Thomson, and his personal communications. From these sources a tolerably connected account is condensed in my *History of Architecture* (II. p. 713, et seq.), to which the reader is referred. Since it was published, Messrs. Edmiston and Douglas, of Edinburgh, have published a selection of Mr. Thomson's photographs, with explanatory text taken principally, with my consent and collaboration, from my work above referred to.

have some knowledge, but they seem rather to have been dedicated to some bastard form of Buddhism than to the worship of the Serpent in the form in which it is found at Nakhon Vat.

The question that principally interests us at this stage, is to ascertain how this marvellous development of Serpent Worship arose in Cambodia, and at what time.

The first impulse would be to assume that it was indigenous, but this certainly does not seem to be the case. The architecture of the temple is, if anything, classical—Roman Doric. The ornaments—bassi-relievi—are all subjects borrowed from the Rāmāyana or Mahābhārata, and fade gradually into the myths of the Hindu religion. The people are Indian. The natives, wherever they appear, are represented as an abject race, and are very cruelly treated by the superior race who were the builders of the temple, and the carvers of the bas-reliefs.

Another theory, which at first sight seemed plausible, was that the worship had reached Cambodia from the north. We know from Hiouen-Thsang that Serpent Worship was to be found in Koutche in the north of Thibet,\* we know that the Strī Rājya, or Amazon kingdom, was in Thibet,† and we have so many traces of Serpent Worship all along the north of the Himalaya, Hindu Kush, and Caucasus, that it looks like a Scythian or northern form of faith, and may have leaked through the mountain ranges into both Cashmere and Cambodia, radiating from a common northern centre.

When more closely looked into, this theory seems as untenable as the last. The communication between Thibet and Cambodia is barred by ranges of mountains, which have hitherto proved practically impassable either as trade routes or for military operations. The southern country could only be reached through China, and Serpent Worship could hardly have passed through that country without leaving more traces of its passage, or bringing with it more evidences of Chinese civilization, than appears to be the case. We know so little, however, of the local superstitions of China that we must pause before expressing any decided opinion on this subject.

The only remaining hypothesis that suggests itself is that they came from India direct by sea. When we turn to their own traditions for any confirmation of this, the answer is distinct, "Our ancestors came from Myang Rom, or Romavisei, not far from Takçasila" (Taxila).‡ Startling as this may at first sight appear, there are many circumstances which not only take away from its strangeness, but seem to render it probable. In the first place Taxila, as just pointed out, was one of the great centres of Serpent Worship. The country they claim to have migrated from is, by the ancient Sanskrit authorities, called Kamboja.§ Their capital they call Inthapattapuri (Indraprastha), and that of Siam was Ayuthia (Ayodhyā), the two capitals of the Mahābhārata and Rāmāyana, and almost all the other principal towns throughout the country bear Sanskrit names. If Halifax, Boston, and New York, are evidence of an English people having settled in America, the names of the Cambodian cities are equally conclusive in this respect.

\* Mémoires, I. 4.

† Asiatic Researches, XV. 48.

‡ Bastian, Völker des Östlichen Asien, I. p. 393.

(4799.)

§ Wilford, A.R., VI. 516., VIII. 336; Muir, orig. Sanscrit Texts, II. 368. ff. &c.

Another argument which seems as important as any other, is the similarity of the style of architecture in the two countries. This is not only traceable in the arrangement of their temples, but in the details. The Cashmere pillars are curiously like those of the Grecian Doric order,\* those of Cambodia are even more classical, but resemble Roman Doric. Nothing similar to either has yet been discovered between the two points, but there is an amount of classical influence apparent in the sculpture at Amravati which seems to supply a connecting link.

The improbability of such a migration is considerably lessened by the knowledge that an Indian colony did reach Java, by sea of course; did introduce there their own faith, and built those wonderful temples of Brambanan and Borobuddor, which in many respects resemble, though they do not rival, those of Cambodia. All this has been rendered more probable within the last year by the discovery of Serpent Worship existing to the extent it does at Amravati, near the mouth of the Kistnah, the very country whence navigators set sail who were about to cross the bay of Bengal going to the Gold Coast,† which we may almost certainly fix at Ligor, and this seems to point out the route which the Cambodians took on their migration.‡

Every day since my attention was turned to the sculptures at Amravati, fresh evidence of the prevalence of Serpent Worship in Central India has come to light, and it seems now tolerably clear, either that serpent races passed down the valley of the Indus, across Central India by the valley of the Godavery, and thence by sea to Cambodia; or that they passed from Tashsaílâ direct by land to Amravati, and thence to the Golden Chersonese. If a straight line is drawn on the map between these two first-named places it passes over Sanchi and other spots where Snake Worship once prevailed, and on the whole this route seems to be the one the emigrants would most probably have taken; but we are only yet on the threshold of the inquiry, and must wait for further information before deciding.

The time when this migration took place is not so easily fixed, but it appears to have first commenced in the fourth century, (after 318,) to have been continued in the fifth and sixth, and probably reached its height in the era of the religious disturbances and persecutions in India in the tenth and eleventh centuries. Cambodia was conquered by the Siamese between the years 1351-74, the capital destroyed, and depopulation set in. From that time Serpent Worship seems to have declined rapidly from its position of splendour and supremacy, and to have been succeeded by Buddhism, which is now the faith of all the civilized Indo-Chinese provinces.

The Cambodian legends which refer to the colonization of the country and the building of the city of Inthapattapuri, are all extremely similar to those related by Hiouen-Thsang, when speaking of the country whence they came, as noticed above. In all the dragon king's daughter is the principal personage, and from her the royal race claim to be descended. In the Cambodian legend it is related that the banished prince, Phra Thong, was driven, after a long sea voyage, on an island where grew a wonderful Talok tree, "Grewia inæqualis." He ascends its branches to look about him, but the tree grows faster than the celebrated beanstalk of Jack, and he

\* Essay on the Arian order of Architecture as exhibited in the Temples of Kashmir, by Captain A. Cunningham, J.A.S.B., September 1848.

† Ptolemy, VII. 1.

‡ Jour. Asiat. Soc. Beng. XVII. 86.

fears he shall never see his mother earth again. In descending, however, he finds himself in a wonderful grotto in the hollow of the tree, where he meets with the dragon king's daughter, and marries her. The father consents to their union, and builds the city of Nakhon Thom for their residence, where he comes frequently to visit his beloved daughter; but the people complain of his presence, and his ungrateful children frighten him away by placing an image of the four-faced Brahma over the gate of the city.\*

Another form of the legend is, that king Pathumma Surivong, while reposing under the wonderful tree, saw the dragon king's daughter bathing with her companions in a neighbouring lake, fell in love and married her, and went to the underground abode of his father-in-law, where he spent a fortnight. According to this legend he behaved much better to the old Serpent than Prince Phra Thong.

According to a third form, Indra had come down from heaven, but had neglected to bring any female attendants with him; feeling the loneliness of his situation, took up with the dragon king's daughter, who bore to him Ketumalea, the father of Pathumma Surivong, who seems really to have been the founder of the city.†

We have a date twice repeated, 957-8 A.D., for the accession of the last-named king, and if the names above quoted were really or closely connected with one another, as the legends would lead us to suppose, the migration and all the subsequent events down to the founding of the city really took place in the tenth century. If we were to draw our conclusions from the legends alone, this view must probably be adopted; but the context, and the indications from Indian experience, incline me to extend the time between the first migration and the building of the city to four or five centuries; but it is at present little more than guess work, in so far as the earlier dates are concerned. The circumstance that interests us most is the important part played in these legends by Nang Nakh, the Serpent King's daughter, and the description of her father and his kingdom. Foolish and legendary as all this may appear at first sight, it assumes considerable importance when we find it resulting in some of the most wonderful temples which the world ever saw, and in the most remarkable development of pure Serpent Worship anywhere to be found.

#### CHINA.

It is extremely difficult to ascertain anything that is at all satisfactory regarding the worship of the Serpent in China. No scholar, so far as I know, has investigated the subject, nor has any traveller devoted special attention to such indications of it as may exist in the country. We are consequently left to such stray passages as are scattered here and there in the various authors who treat of Chinese subjects, and

\* The Serpent King was, it appears, a Sabbatharian, at least he devoted every seventh day to prayer. Bastian, I. 397. See also Trans. R.A.S., vol. II. p. 94, where Col. Low reports, "Every seventh day the mighty "Raja Naga issues forth from his palace, and having ascended a high mountain, pours forth his soul in ardent "devotion."

† All these legends are taken from Bastian's *Völker des Östlichen Asien*, pages 393 to 439. They are so mixed up together and with extraneous matter that it is impossible to quote separate pages, even if it were worth while.

without knowing exactly what reliance to place on the information so afforded. It is nevertheless impossible to observe the very important part the Dragon plays in the imagery and decoration of Chinese temples, on the dress and ornaments of the kings, or on the standards of the army, without feeling that some important symbolism is concealed beneath its almost universal employment. It is true that in modern times the dragon has been invested with wings, and teeth, and claws, and transformed into a monster more horrible than any nightmare that ever disturbed the sleep of a mediæval herald; still it is difficult to avoid the conviction that, if we could trace him far enough back, we should find that he was developed out of something much more nearly resembling "a beast of the field."

To take one instance among many, Kæmpfer\* relates that two heaven-sent Serpents watched over the first washing of Confucius, for which a spring burst forth from the floor of the cave in which he was born. It would be interesting, for many reasons, to know when this tradition arose, and whether it is really Chinese or imported from India. Confucius was nearly contemporary with Buddha, and at a slightly subsequent time† was teaching doctrines so similar to those of the Indian philosopher, that now that they have got mixed up together in China, it is extremely difficult to discriminate what belongs to each. The connexion between Buddhism and Serpent Worship will be sufficiently apparent in the following pages. It would be curious if the same parentage could be traced for the Chinese philosophy.

The following is another example. "Father Martin, one of the Jesuits who obtained a settlement in China, says that the Chinese delight in mountains and high places, because there lives the dragon, upon whom their good fortune depends. They call him the father of happiness. To this dragon they erect temples, shaded with groves."‡ This is exactly what we would expect; but when we meet with such a passage as this we are forced to ask, If this be so, why has not everybody seen it, and why have others not told us the same story?

The most satisfactory evidence I have obtained regarding Serpent Worship in China is from a Chinese work, entitled "The Great Cloud Wheel Rain asking Sutra." It is an Imperial work, printed in its present form under the auspices of Keen Lung, A.D. 1783, and forms part of a great collection of Buddhist standard works. It is supposed to be spoken by Buddha in the "beautifully adorned Great Cloud Circle Hall of the Nāga-Rāja Nanda Upananda, and consists of a succession of Dhāraṇis imparted by Buddha to the dragons for the sake of those who in their worship desired rain."§

The most curious part of the book is the plates. These represent, first, a Naga temple, which very much resembles—though the likeness is, of course, accidental—the tabernacle of the Jews. The shrine is a tent, standing in a rectangular enclosure,

\* Japan, 426. See also Life of Confucius, Chinese Classics, vol. I. p. 59.

† Confucius was 8 years old when Buddha died.

‡ The Rev. Bathurst Deane, quoting Cambrey, Mémoires Celtiques, p. 163.

§ The work in question was lent to me by the Rev. S. Beal, a thoroughly competent Chinese scholar, who furnished the above particulars. His opinion is, that the work even in its present form is older than the 13th century, though the woodcuts may be more modern. See also J. R. A. S. XX. 170.

surrounded by canvas screens. The furniture consists of an altar and four lighted candles. Seven tables, or stands, are laden with cakes (shewbread), and as many with fruits; and seven lamps take the place of the seven-branched candlestick. There are four woodcuts representing the deities worshipped in the temple. One of these

No. 3.



NĀGA, FROM CHINESE SUTRA.

is reproduced in fac-simile in the annexed woodcut. It is a form of the Serpent God which was invented in India in the twelfth or thirteenth century, and with which we shall presently become familiar.\* A human head and body, ending in a serpentine form from the waist downwards, but with the much more characteristic accompaniment of a degenerate serpent hood. In the first figure in this Chinese work, the Nāga has three serpents rising behind its head; in the second, five; in the third—that in the woodcut—seven; and the last, nine serpents. The lower extremities of the first and second are spotted like serpents. This one and the fourth have scales more like those of a fish. In India between the third century B.C. and the thirteenth A.D., we find serpent hoods ranging from three to seven heads, but never the human body terminating in a serpent downward, till after the last quoted date.

Although all this may have been derived from India, and in its present form probably was so, still it is interesting to find it practised in China so long after it has been forgotten there. At the same time, however, as hinted in speaking of Cambodia (p. 49), it is by no means clear that both India and China may not have borrowed their Serpent Worship from some common centre in Thibet. We are not yet, however, in a position to say whether it penetrated to China by the southern route it afterwards certainly took, or whether it may not have reached it by the north, or from a common centre in Tartary.

## OCEANIA.

It has long been known that Serpent Worship prevailed to a considerable extent in some at least of the islands in the Pacific, but the notices of it that I have met with are singularly vague and unsatisfactory. No one with the requisite local knowledge has yet thought it worth while to collect and arrange the facts, so as to render them available as historical data; and till this is done, it is impossible to employ usefully even such information as we possess.

My own impression is that, wherever we find human sacrifices prevailing, or what—if we dare put such words together—we ought rather to designate as religious

\* Vide infra, page 67.

cannibalism, there Serpent Worship will be found also. In the Feejee islands it certainly exists. Degei, one of their principal gods, is supposed to be enshrined or to exist in the form of a serpent, lying coiled up in a cave of Navata, a mountain on the coast of Viti Levu. Some traditions represent him with the head and part of the body of a serpent, the rest of him being of stone, emblematic of his everlasting and unchangeable nature.\*

The savages of Australia, it is said, believe in the existence of a gigantic serpent, who created the world by a blow of his tail, and who is the cause of earthquakes. Nothing will induce them, however, to reveal to the white man the rites with which they worship the serpent, but which are reported to include human sacrifices and cannibalism.†

Traces of Serpent Worship are found at Suku and Kedal, and other places in Java, but there apparently not connected with Buddhism,‡ but as a local superstition of the natives; and other instances might be quoted, if it were worth while, or they could be depended upon. So little, however, is this the case, that the subject would hardly have been worth mentioning at all, were it not that one of the most interesting problems connected with the subject is the supposed connexion between the Serpent Worship of the Old World and that of Central America. Is it possible it could have migrated viâ the Feejee Islands and the Marquesas? There does not seem to be any other route which presents greater probabilities, if we are prepared to concede the previous question that America did borrow her Serpent Worship from the East; but as yet this is far from being settled.

#### CEYLON.

We must wait for further information before we can speak with anything like certainty, either regarding the extent to which Serpent Worship prevails in Ceylon, or with reference to any material evidences which may attest its existence in former days. Except Mr. Upham's,§ no work that I am aware of treats of the subject, and no drawings except his have been published which afford any information regarding it. Though far from being exhaustive, Mr. Upham's work is sufficient to show how imperfect the conversion of the natives to Buddhism has been, and to what an extent the worship of the Nâga still prevails. In Ceylon, however, it seems now to be mixed up with Demon Worship and the worst superstitions of the Hindu Pantheon to such an extent as to be barely recognizable, and it will require considerable labour to resolve all these superstitions into their component parts.

In addition to this, I have seen native drawings of mythological subjects, which show a greater admixture of Serpent Worship than would be found in similar representations on the continent of India; and I have also had access to original drawings by Europeans in which the three or seven-headed Naga is found adorning

\* Seemann, Mission to Viti, p. 290.

† Manuscript information.

‡ Sir S. Raffles, Java, vol. ii. p. 47. Crawford's Dictionary of the Eastern Archipelago, sub vocibus.

§ History and Doctrine of Buddhism in Ceylon, by Ed. Upham. London, 1829.

almost every sacred spot in the country.\* The difficulty is to judge from such imperfect materials of what is really old and what may have been added, and till the photographer reaches Ceylon this uncertainty must probably prevail in so far as people in Europe are concerned; but any competent antiquary on the spot could very easily tell us all we wish to know.

On the other hand, the testimony of the Buddhist scriptures seems to be as distinct as such evidence can be expected to be, that Ceylon was inhabited by a Naga race of serpent worshippers when converted to Buddhism, the legends say in the sixth, but more probably in the third, century, B.C. Whether Gorresio, the translator of the Rāmāyana, is correct in asserting that the Rākshasas whom Rāma encountered in that island were Nagas or not, is a question that must be left to Sanskrit scholars to decide. It does not appear that the passages are so understood by the modern Hindus. Snakes never appear as Rāma's opponents in any of the thousand and one representations of that famous war; but Gorresio may be correct nevertheless, and it would be interesting to know.†

The three Ceylonese historical works which have been translated—the Mahāwanso, the Ratnācari, and Rājāvali—all commence with an account, more or less detailed, of the conversion of the Nagas of Ceylon by Buddha himself.

The account in the Mahāwanso is to the following effect‡:—In the fifth year of his Buddhahood, the vanquisher of the five deadly sins perceiving that a conflict was in hand between the Nagas Mahodaro and Chūlodaro for possession of a gem-set throne, out of compassion to the Nagas visited Nāgadwīpo.§

At that time this Mahodaro was a Naga king of a Naga kingdom, 500 yojanas in extent, bounded by the ocean. His sister had been given in marriage to a Naga king of the Kanawaddhamāno mountain, and her son claimed the throne by inheritance, &c. “To them the vanquisher preached a sermon of reconciliation. Both parties rejoicing thereat, made an offering of the gem-set throne to the divine sage. The divine teacher alighting on the earth, seated himself on the throne, and was served by the Naga kings with celestial food and beverage. The lord of the universe procured for 80 koṭis of Nagas, dwelling on land and in the water, the salvation of the faith, and the state of piety” (p. 6).

The maternal uncle of Mahodaro, the Naga king of Kalyāṇi, who was preparing to join in the war is also converted, and at parting Buddha promises to return, meanwhile bestowing on the Naga king the gem-set throne, and having planted the Rājāyatana tree, at parting addressed them thus, “Oh, Naga kings! worship this my sanctified tree; unto you, my beloved, it will be a comfort and a consolation.”

The same story is told, with slight and unimportant variations, in the other

\* Mr. Nicholl, the artist who made the drawings from which all the architectural subjects in Sir J. Emerson Tennent's work were engraved, recently showed me his original sketches. Everywhere at Anurādhapura, Pollonaruwa, Dambool, &c. the Naga appears prominent. The engraver, not knowing what it was, has converted it into a head-dress, which it requires a very practised eye to recognize as a seven-headed snake.

† When so good a Sanskrit scholar as Muir doubts, it would be presumptuous in me to advance an opinion. See Sanskrit Texts, II. 436.

‡ Mahāwanso translated by the Hon. G. Turnour, p. 4.

§ The translation limits the term Nāgadwīpo to the northern portion of Ceylon, but on what grounds does not appear. The context seems to imply the whole island.



two histories, and from that time forward the Mahawanso teems with Naga legends; they seem, however, all to refer to the continent of India rather than Ceylon, and will be alluded to when necessary hereafter. The conversion of the island seems to have been complete in the time of Asoka, B.C. 250,\* and as the earliest of the scriptures we have were not reduced to writing in their present form before the fifth century after Christ, we must not expect from Buddhist authorities any admission of a faith adverse to Buddhism existing in the island at that date.

This, however, is just one of those cases in which the monuments are so useful to supplement the "litera scripta." If they were examined we should see how far the conversion was radical, and to what extent the people still adhered to their old faith. My impression is, that after more than 2000 years, their conversion is still far from being complete. Whenever any competent person will look below the surface, I am very much mistaken if the old Serpent Worship is not found still practised by the aboriginal races in all remote parts of the island; but it is useless speculating when real information can be so easily obtained.

Whatever may be the result of the investigation into the Serpent Worship of Ceylon, there is no doubt whatever about the prevalence and importance of Tree Worship in that island. The legend of the planting of the Rājāyatana Tree by Buddha has already been alluded to, but the history of the transference of a branch of the Bo Tree from Buddh-gyā to Anurādhapura is as authentic and as important as any event recorded in the Ceylonese annals. Sent by Aśoka (250 B.C.) it was received with the utmost reverence by Devanampiyatisso, and planted in a most conspicuous spot in the centre of his capital.† There it has been revered as the chief and most important "numen" of Ceylon for more than 2000 years, and it, or its lineal descendant sprung at least from the old root, is there worshipped at this hour. The city is in ruins; its great dagobas have fallen to decay; its monasteries have disappeared; but the great Bo Tree still flourishes according to the legend, "Ever green, never growing or decreasing, but living on for ever for the delight and worship of mankind." Annually thousands repair to the sacred precincts within which it stands to do it honour, and to offer up those prayers for health and prosperity which are more likely to be answered if uttered in its presence. There is probably no older idol in the world, certainly none more venerated.‡

#### INDIA.

In every essential respect the religious history of India is extremely similar to that of Persia, but with one curious accidental difference, which influenced to a considerable extent their outward aspect and ultimate fate. From the accession of the Achæmenidæ till the old religions were practically swept away by the Mahomedan invasion, all the countries of Central Asia were united under one sceptre, and subject

\* Throughout this work the year 250, as a date easily remembered, is assumed as that of Asoka. It is probable that the true date of his accession is 270, and as he reigned 35 years, his death took place in 235 B.C.; 250 B.C. is therefore a fair mean, and has the merit of involving no hypothesis as to the chronology of the period.

† Mahawanso, chap. xviii.

‡ Sir Emerson Tennent, Col. Forbes Leslie, Chapman, and indeed everyone who has written about Ceylon, mention the fact. The drawings of it also are numerous.

to one code of laws. The consequence is, that the Turanian, the Semitic, and the Aryan races, which successively occupied those countries known as Persia in its widest sense, all became more or less amalgamated into a homogeneous people, and their religions were also fused into one great whole. The Aryan religion of Ormuzd was united in bonds of most unholy matrimony with the Turanian form of Ahriman, and the Magian religion acted as a flux to unite the two, at least to such an extent as probably to defy all the efforts of modern analysis to separate them again into their original elements.

The case of India was widely different. No native tradition represents India as ever united under one rule. When the Greeks visited it they found it divided into 122 different nations,\* and the number probably was never less, it may have been more, till towards the end of the seventeenth century, when the Moguls under Aurangzebe nearly succeeded in rendering their sway paramount in India; but just as the house of cards was about to be completed, it fell to pieces from the inherent want of cohesion in the parts.

This circumstance renders the history of the religions of India very much more perplexed and more difficult to follow; but once the subject is mastered the Indian form becomes not only more instructive, but also very much more interesting to the student of comparative mythology.

No Semitic element apparently ever existed among the populations of India, but from the earliest historical times we find two well defined and perfectly distinct races. One, the Aryan, or Sanskrit-speaking race, who entered India, it is generally supposed, across the Upper Indus, and eventually spread themselves throughout the whole of the valley of the Ganges, and the countries between the Vindhya and the Himalaya mountains. The other a Turanian race, known as the Dravidians, and speaking Tamul, or languages closely allied to it, entered India probably earlier than the Aryans, but across the Lower Indus, and now occupy the whole of the southern part of the peninsula nearly up to the Vindhya mountains.†

There seems to be no difference of opinion among Indian ethnologists with regard to these two great divisions of the people, but it is not quite so clear whether there was not a third occupying the countries north of the Vindhya and between them and the Himalayas, of which they were dispossessed by the Aryans. The language of the superior race has so completely taken possession of every department of literature at the earliest period to which our knowledge extends, that we have no written record of the existence of this aboriginal people; and the blood of all has in modern times been so mixed by migration and colonization, that it seems impossible to dig back to the roots through the jumble of languages and races that now exists in the valley.

The mode in which the question presents itself as bearing on the present inquiry is this:—It may safely be asserted that no Aryan race, while existing in anything like purity, was ever converted to Buddhism, or could permanently adopt its doctrines. If we take, for instance, the three leading features of that faith, atheism, metempsychosis,

\* Arrian, *India*, VII.

† *Comparative Grammar of the Dravidian or South Indian family of Languages*, by the Rev. R. Caldwell, B.A. London, 1856.  
(4799.)

and absence of caste, they are essentially Turanian, and found everywhere among people of that race, but are distinctly opposed to the feelings of the Aryans wherever they are found. It is quite true that the Indian Aryans may, during their 2,000 years residence, have become so mixed with the native tribes, and so impure, that some of their families may have temporarily adopted the new faith. Even this, however, seems hardly probable, when we consider how they cling at the present day to their old sacred books, and how many germs of the old faith still survive even in the filth and corruption of doctrine in which they are now immersed.

On the other hand, it does not appear that the Dravidian races ever were essentially, or to any great extent, serpent worshippers, or ever were converted to Buddhism. It may be too bold a generalization, in the present state of our knowledge, to assert that no race ever permanently adopted Buddhism who had not previously been serpent worshippers—but, if not quite true, it is nearly so; and though Serpent Worship can be detected south of the Kistnah, it is not, nor does it ever appear to have been, the national faith. In like manner, though there were Buddhists in Drávida-deśa, there are no traces of Buddhist buildings or establishments now to be found south of Amravati.

If this should eventually prove to be the correct view of the case, it becomes necessary to assume the existence in the valley of the Ganges of a people differing from Dravidians and more closely allied to the Thibetans, the Burmese, and other Indo-Chinese races. Some kind of Buddhism probably existed beyond the Himalayas before Śákya-muni's time. It still flourishes there, and seems indelible in all these lands. In India it did attain great prevalence and power during a thousand years, but it does not seem to have existed before the time of Śákya-muni; and it is now so completely washed out, that there probably does not exist a single Buddhist, certainly not a Buddhist establishment, between the Himalayas and Cape Cormorin.\*

Assuming this view of the matter to be correct, we shall of course look in vain, in the Vedas or any of the earlier writings in Sanskrit, for any trace of Serpent Worship. Not only was it repugnant to their own feelings, but they so utterly despised the Dasyus—or by whatever other name they chose to designate the aborigines—that they would not even condescend to notice their superstitions.†

The traditions from which the Rámáyana was compiled also represent a state of Aryan society so comparatively pure, that, except in cases above alluded to (p. 55), there is probably no mention of Nagas there. But the heroes of the Mahábhárata were much less pure a race. Their origin, their polyandry, and other peculiarities, all point to the Himalayas; and from this work, consequently, we may expect some light on Serpent Worship. The poem, however, was compiled—in its present form at least—by Brahmans long after the events it describes; and although many ancient fragments are enusted in its more modern form, little even of its narrative can be accepted as true history.

\* In a recent statistical report on the population of Bombay, I see "Boodists" enumerated among the sects. Who are they?

† M. Vivien de St. Martin, in his "Géographie du Veda," pp. 103—4, states that the Aryans ascribed to the Dasyus the power of controlling the elements, and of granting or withholding rain at their pleasure. If this were so, it was not to the people themselves, but to their Serpent God, that this power should have been ascribed by the writers of the hymns of the Vedas. I confess, however, that my reading of the work in Wilson's translation does not bear out this attribution.

## MAHĀBHĀRATA.

One of the most remarkable coincidences connected with the subject of Serpent Worship arises from the fact that this great epic poem, which may practically be considered as one of the books of the Hindu Bible, opens, like the Pentateuch, with a curse on the Serpent. What is even more curious is that in both instances the same "equivocal" as to the name exists: read carelessly or in a translation, the curse in the Mahābhārata is on the reptile, not on its worshippers, just as happens in the Bible, where, however, the conciseness of the narrative does not enable us to rectify the meaning from the context. In the Hindu epic, however, the story of the great sacrifice for the destruction of the Serpents is so mixed up with historical and human action that it is evident at once that the ambiguity\* about the name is only seized upon by the Hindu poets as an excuse for introducing the supernatural into an ordinary human transaction, and to enable them to give rein to that exuberance of fancy which is the curse of their poetic effusions. It is not of course to be expected that anything like real history can ever be elaborated out of such a mass of fables, but if any competent Sanskrit scholars were to apply themselves to the task, they might at least recover as reasonable a narrative as it is now possible to frame out of such materials as are available for the history of Greece before the fall of Troy.

Passing over the first canto, which is a general introduction to the whole poem, the next three (ślokas 657 to 2197), are wholly occupied by the affairs of the Naga race, commencing with the marriage of the two sisters Kadrū and Vinatā with the Rishi Kasyapa, and the strange desires of the two with regard to their progeny. These led to Kadrū, the eldest, being the mother of 1,000 Nagas, who were the progenitors of the whole serpent race. The names of her principal descendants are then given,† some of which have already been quoted, others will frequently be referred to in the sequel; such, for instance, as Śesha, Vāsouki, Airāvata, Takshaka, Karkotaka, Kāliya, Aila or Elāpatra, Nīla and Anīla, Nahusha, and others. Her sister, on the other hand, became the mother of Garuḍa, who, in consequence of the trick played by Kadrū on her sister, became the all-powerful enemy of the Naga race, and hence also the mother's curse, from which such fatal consequences flowed.

When divested, however, of its poetic garb, and all its mythological rubbish, the story of the Mahābhārata, in so far at least as Serpent Worship is concerned, does not seem difficult to understand, and may be succinctly narrated.

The Lunar race, to which the heroes of the great war belonged, were a second great horde of the Aryan race, who seem to have entered India across the Upper Indus at least 1,000 years after the purer so-called Solar race. The first seat to which we can trace them back seems to be Takt-i-Bahai, north of Peshawar.‡ Thence, passing

\* In the Ādi Parva the word used for serpent is almost invariably "Nāga." In the Vana Parva, where Bhīma gets into trouble with Nahusha in the form of a real serpent or boa, it is as usually "Sarpa."

† Ādi Parva 1551, et seq.

‡ Bellew, Report on the Yusufzais, p. 136. Some very curious sculptures have recently been discovered at this place, but they are all long subsequent to the age of Bhārata, and betray a Bactrian; or at least a Western influence, which give them a character very different from anything found in India. They are all Buddhist; but with a strong infusion of Græco-Bactrian feeling.

through the Punjáb, we find them settled at Hâstinapura, between the Jumna and Ganges, about the thirteenth century B.C., when the real action of the poem commences.

The first transaction in which the Nagas appear, is the burning of the forest of Khândava.\* Simply, it seems, that when the family at Hâstinapura became too numerous, it was determined to found a second capital, and for this purpose the spot where Delhi now stands was cleared by burning the forest which then occupied its site, and dislodging the Nagas who occupied the spot. The Nagas were protected by the Buddhist deity Indra. But, attacked by the Vedic god Agni, the Brahman poet represents them as all perishing except their king Takshaka.

Subsequent to this the relations between the Pândus and the Nagas seem to have been of the most friendly description. Arjuna, in his first banishment, marries first Ulûpi,† the daughter of a Naga king at the foot of the Himalayas, near Hurdwar; and shortly afterwards he formed a still more important connexion, by marrying Chitrângadâ, daughter of Chitravâhana, the Naga king of Manipur, by whom he had a son, Bhabra-vâhana, who played so strange a part in a subsequent episode, when his father, in the performance of the Aśwamedha, or horse sacrifice, again visited Manipur.‡ From these and other minor particulars it would seem that the author of the Mahâbhârata wished to represent the Aryans of that day as cultivating friendly relations with the aborigines. The real quarrel took place some time after the great war was ended, and in this manner:—Parîkshit, the grandson of Arjuna, had succeeded to the throne; and one day, while hunting in the forest, incensed at the contumacious silence of a hermit,§ insulted him by hanging the dead body of a snake round his neck. His son and disciple cursed the king for the insult to his father, and invoked the aid of Takshaka, the king of serpents, to avenge it. The consequence was, that on the eighth day from that time Parîkshit was bitten|| by Takshaka, who is always represented as king of Takshaśilâ.¶ It was to avenge this assassination of his father, that Janamejaya undertook the great sacrifice for the destruction of the Nagas.\*\* Thousands—myriads—had already perished, when the slaughter was stayed at the intervention of Astîka, a Brahman, though at the same time the nephew of Vâsuki, the serpent king of the eastern Nagas.†† It is probable the remnant either, like Astîka, became converts, or at least promised submission to the dominion of the Aryans. We consequently hear no more of them for three or four centuries, till at last, about the year 691 B.C., we find a Naga dynasty on the throne of Magadhâ;‡‡ and it was under Ajâtaśatru, the sixth king of this race, in the year 623, that Buddha was born, and the great regeneration of the subject races was inaugurated.

\* Âdi Parva, Fauche's translation, 8050, et seq.

† Loc. 7788.

‡ Wheeler's History of India, vol. I, p. 404.

Professor Goldstûcker informs me that the version of the Aśwamedha adopted by Mr. Wheeler is not really a part of the original Mahâbhârata, but the facts are the same in both versions. (See Westminster Review, April 1868.)

§ Âdi Parva, 1696, et seq.

|| Idem, 1801.

¶ Idem, 678, 830, et seq.

\*\* Idem, 2073, et seq.

†† Idem, 1025, et seq.

‡‡ Wilson's Vishnu Purâna, p. 467. Lassen's Ind. Alt. I. (2d ed.) App. p. xxxviii. et seq.

If we knew more of the local ethnology of India, all this narrative might probably be authenticated to an extent which it is now impossible to attempt. It is curious to observe that in Manipur, the scene of Arjuna's marriage with Chitrāngadā, and his slaughter by her son, that at the present day the peculiar god of the Royal family is a species of snake, called Pa-kung-ba, from which the family claims descent. When it appears, it is coaxed on to a cushion by the priestess in attendance, who then performs certain ceremonies to please it. This snake appears sometimes, they say, of great size; when he does so, it is indicative of his being displeased with something. So long as he remains of a diminutive form, it is a sign he is in good humour.\*

In the immediate neighbourhood of Manipur there are numerous tribes of aboriginal people, still called Nagas. From their name and locality it might be supposed they must be serpent worshippers; but no one has yet observed that form of faith among them. The subject must, therefore, be remitted for further inquiries.

The locality of Janamejaya's sacrifice is said in the Mahābhārata to have been the Kurukshetra, the famous battle-field of the Pāṇḍus and Kurus, north-west of Delhi, but another and more probable site is still pointed out at Agrahaut, in Orissa.† There, within the precincts of a very old and remote, but now ruined, temple, may be seen numerous small models of temples, said to have been there placed by Janamejaya, to represent those princes who could not be present on the occasion. They are probably not so old; but it is strange to find the traditions of the Mahābhārata still clinging to these spots, and Serpent Worship still prevailing there. At least, not far from this—at Sumbulpore—in 1766, Mr. Motte and another‡ went to visit a great snake that had been worshipped there since the world began! They saw him emerge from his cave, which he does every seventh day,§ and accept the offering of a goat which his worshippers had provided. After devouring it, he took a bath in a canal that surrounded his dwelling place; and from the mark he left in the mud at the edge, Mr. Motte estimated his diameter to have been about two feet. He does not even guess his length, but it must have been considerable. When Major Kittoe visited Sumbulpore in 1836 he was still alive,|| and probably is so still; and I have no doubt but that numerous other deities of the same sort could easily be found if only looked for; but attention has never hitherto been directed to the subject.

## RISE OF BUDDHISM.

As has been frequently suggested in other works,¶ the great characteristic of the ancient as well as of the modern history of India is the constant recurrence of one typical phenomenon which controlled the destiny of the nation in all ages to which our knowledge extends. From the earliest dawn of tradition to the present

\* Account of the Valley of Munipur, by Major Maculloch: Records of Government of India, No. XXVII. 1859.

† Asiatic Researches, XV. 257.

‡ Asiatic Register, vol. I. p. 82.

§ Vide ante, note, p. 51. Is it possible that the

period of creation in Genesis being limited to seven days is a part of the primeval Ophite faith?

|| J. A. S. B. vol. VIII. p. 478.

¶ History of Architecture, by the Author, vol. II., p. 446, et seqq. &c.

day the great underlying stratum of the population of India seems to have been of Turanian race, very unwarlike, and incapable of any rise in civilization, except through admixture of blood. These consequently easily fell a prey to the hardier and more warlike races bred in the countries now known as Bokhara and Afghanistan, and the result has been that at periods of from five to ten centuries horde after horde has crossed the Indus; and settled in the fertile plains of India. For awhile these retained their freshness and vigour, but by degrees, partly from the enervating effects of the climate, but more from intermixture with the aboriginal races, they sunk to the lower level of the indigenous inhabitants, and in their turn became a prey to the next horde that followed the steps of their forefathers across the Indus.

For our present purpose it is not necessary to inquire when the first great immigration of the Aryans or Dravidians took place, or when they first settled in the north and south of India respectively. It is sufficient that we are able to state that the less pure horde of the Aryans known as the Lunar race probably reached the Ganges about the thirteenth or fourteenth century B.C. From that time till the third or fourth century, or for more than one thousand years, no horde of any race, so far as we know, crossed the Indus. This may, in a great measure, be owing to the existence of the powerful empires of Assyria and Persia on the other side of the river, which may have kept the barbarians in check, or to local causes we cannot now detect. Be that as it may, the fact that interests us here is, that during this long period the blood of the Aryans had become so mixed and so impure that the Veda was no longer possible as a rule of faith, and when Śākya-muni attempted to revive the religion of the aboriginal Turanians his call was responded to in a manner which led to the most important consequences, in a religious point of view, not only in India, but to all the Turanian families of mankind.

So far as we can now see, Buddhism was little more than a revival of the coarser superstitions of the aboriginal races, purified and refined by the application of Aryan morality, and elevated by doctrines borrowed from the intellectual superiority of the Aryan races. Buddha himself was undoubtedly of purely Aryan race, being the descendant of a junior branch of the Solar kings of Ayodhyā. Burmese traditions represent his son Rahula as assuming the garb of a priest;\* but the Hindus, with more probability, record his succeeding to the throne of his grandfather, and we gather from them, that the dynasty retained its Brahminical faith till its extinction shortly afterwards.† The dissemination of the Buddhist religion is wholly due to the accident of its having been adopted by the low caste kings of Magadhā, and to its having been elevated by one of them to the rank of the religion of the State.

As a part of the reform which he introduced, ancestral worship was abolished, and the sepulchral tumulus became the depository of relics of saints, Serpent Worship was repressed, and its sister faith of Tree Worship elevated to the first rank.‡ Absolute negation of sensual enjoyment, which to the Turanian in all ages

\* Bigandet, *Life and Legend of Guadama*, p. 229.

† Wilson's *Vishnu Purana*, p. 463.

‡ When in 1866 I wrote the second volume of my *History of Architecture*, I, after hazarding the assertion "that before the Aryans reached India, the inhabitants of the valley of the Ganges seem to have been Tree and Serpent Worshipers," then added, in speaking of the Buddhist reform (p. 448): "Serpent Worship was utterly rejected, but Tree Worship was adopted as an important part of the new faith." When in the following

is as the breath of life, was elevated into a crucial test of faith, and asceticism became ultimately the one path to salvation. There is every reason to believe that human sacrifices were common in ancient India. War was the normal state of its kingdoms, and persecution is too essentially a characteristic of the Aryan races not to have flourished there. On the other hand, the Buddhist expanded the Jewish commandment "Thou shalt do no murder" into "Thou shalt not kill," and extended it to the meanest of created beings. No war was ever waged by Buddhists, as such, and toleration of the faith of others was one of the most marked characteristics of the new religion. No faith was ever so essentially propagated by persuasion as that of Buddha, and though the Buddhists were too frequently persecuted even to destruction, there is no instance on record of any attempt to spread their faith by force in any quarter of the globe.

The Turanian of course had no caste, so that institution was put aside only to be revived when a second upheaval of local superstition under Aryan influence on the decay of Buddhism brought Śivaism and Vishnuism to the surface, together with all the monstrosities of the modern Hindu pantheon.

Although doubts have been expressed as to the exact date of Buddha's birth to the extent of about 60 years, the usual chronology,\* which is that adopted throughout this work, represents him as born at Kapilavastu, a small principality on the north of the Ganges, in the year 623 B.C., and he died at Kuśinagara, not far from the place of his birth, 543 B.C., in the eighth or eighteenth year† of the reign of Ajātasatru, the sixth king of the Naga dynasty of Magadha, who was then the lord paramount of Northern India.

The name of Śīśunāga is applied by the Brahmins to the first king of this dynasty; the Buddhists give it to the tenth, and add the following legend:—On a certain occasion one of the chief of the courtezans bore a child to one of the Licchhawi Rajas, but the child proving an abortion was put into a basket, and at night thrown on a dungheap. A certain Nāgarāja, the tutelary of the city, observing it, encircled it with its folds, and sheltered it with its hood. The people who congregated there made a noise, "Śū, Śū," to frighten the snake, and on examining the basket found the abortion matured into a male child with every mark of greatness on it. In consequence of this incident he received the name Śīśunāga, and in time ascended the throne of Magadha.‡ The second convocation was held 100 years after the death of Buddha, during the reign of his son Kāśāpaka, and we gather, though somewhat indistinctly, that his successors, including the nine Nandas, till

spring I discovered\* the Amravati sculptures in the coach house at Fife House, I hastened to add as an erratum on the last page a recantation or at least modification of this assertion. Further investigations now incline me to go back to my old faith. The serpent, I believe, was rejected by Buddha and his earlier followers, but cropped up again among other mediæval corruptions, and, as we shall presently see, became an important element in Buddhist mythology.

\* I have myself no doubts as to the correctness of the usually received date, and propose as soon as this work is published to submit my reasons for this belief to the Royal Asiatic Society. Meanwhile the conclusions I have arrived at in my chronological researches will be found in the table at the end of this volume. The reasoning on which they are founded must be reserved for the journal of that society, but the results have meanwhile been adopted as data throughout this work.

† Turnour, *Mahawanso*, XLVII, LII.

‡ Turnour's Introduction to the *Mahawanso*, XXXVII. See also Bigandet, *Life of Gaudama*, p. 362, et seq.



the accession of the celebrated Chandragupta (B.C. 325), were Nagas or serpent worshippers pure and simple.\* They certainly were considered as of very low caste and hated by the Brahmans, and were not loved by the Buddhists.

With the Mauryan kings Buddhism seems to have entered on a new phase; at least in Aśoka's inscriptions we have no trace of the worship of either Buddha himself, nor of Trees nor Serpents. Pure abstract morality seems to have been the form it then took or was intended to take.† But in the Mahāwanso, one of the great events of Aśoka's reign, is the despatch of a branch of the Bo Tree of Buddha Gyā to Ceylon,‡ showing that form of faith to be then prevalent; and in the Caves of Orissa, which probably are anterior to the Christian era, we find both Tree and Serpent Worship prevailing. There are, however, few periods of Indian history during which such scanty materials exist for settling any point, either historical or mythological, as during the two centuries and a half before the Christian era. We know nothing that happened during that period, and we hardly see where light is to come from to illumine those dark ages.

Immediately preceding the Christian era a great revolution took place in Buddhism under the influence of Nāgārjuna,§ one of the most important names connected with the history of the religion. Although we cannot fix the date of this patriarch with absolute certainty, we can within very narrow limits. The quotation from the Thibetan Tāranātha in Vassilief's work|| places him between 14 years B.C. and 28 A.D., both dates reconcileable with a not very long life. But we have another means of ascertaining it even more satisfactorily. Nāgārjuna was the ruling spirit in the great council or convocation held under Kanishka, the Tartar king of Cashmere and Northern India. In a tope erected by this king at Manikyāla a number of Roman consular coins were found around the principal deposit. These date from 73 to 33 B.C.,¶ and as we cannot suppose they were deposited there till some time after the year in which they were coined, the building of the tope by Kanishka must be placed within the thirty years that preceded the Christian era.

At that time the Buddhists were divided into eighteen sects, grouped into four great divisions,\*\* a circumstance from which we may infer that Buddhism was torn by internal dissensions, and might have perished without the impulse given by this fresh importation of Tartar blood from the north. At the same time also we learn that Milinda, king of Eastern Panjāb, had silenced the Buddhist priests in argument, and driven them from the country across the Himalaya to Rakshita Tal and Manasarovara.†† At this critical juncture the youthful Nāgārjuna appeared. He was then a monk in the celebrated monastery of Nālanda in Behar‡‡—the Monte

\* Mahā Padma and Nanda, the only two of their names we know with certainty, are both names of serpents. Their coins I believe to be those depicted, J. A. S. B., vol. VII., pl. LX., No. 1 to 9. On all these the serpent is the principal symbol.

† J. A. S. B., VII. p. 219; J. R. A. S., XII. 153.

‡ Vide ante, p. 56.

§ His name is singularly suggestive, being compounded of "Nāga," a serpent, and a tree, "Arjuna," under which he was born. Vassilief, &c. *Bouddhisme*, 213.

|| *Le Bouddhisme*, 201.

¶ Cunningham, *Bhilsa Topes*, 130.

\*\* *Asiatic Researches*, XX. 92, 297.

†† Cunningham, *Bhilsa Topes*, 130.

‡‡ This monastery took its name and probably owed its original sanctity to a dragon or Nāga called Nālanda, who resided in a pool close by. General Cunningham saw in 1861-62 the tank in which he resided. Report to Government for those years, p. 12.

Cassino of India,—and proclaimed himself the restorer of the old faith. According to this prophet the words uttered by Śākya Muni during his life-time had been heard and noted down by the Nagas, who had kept them to themselves in their own abode, till such time as mankind should become worthy to receive them. Nāgārjuna gave out that he had received these documents from the Nagas and was commissioned to proclaim them to the world.\* This gave rise to an entirely new school of Buddhism known as Mahāyāna, or as M. Julien translates it†, the “Grand Véhicule,” as opposed to Hīnayāna or the “Petit Véhicule;” the distinction between the two being in almost every respect identical with that which exists between Evangelical and Mediæval Christianity.

This is another of those curious historical coincidences that exist between Christianity and Buddhism, and there are few so startling. In the first three centuries after the death of its founder, Buddhism was a struggling sect, sometimes petted, sometimes persecuted, but in spite of all we are told, in subsequent legends, never spread to any great extent among the people. Three hundred years after Buddha, Aśoka did for Buddhism exactly what Constantine did for Christianity. He adopted it, made it the religion of the state, and with all the zeal of a convert, used every exertion to assist in its propagation. Six hundred years after Buddha, Nāgārjuna and Kamishka did for the eastern faith what St. Benedict and Gregory the Great did for the western, they created a church with a Hierarchy and Doctrine. We must go on further still for four centuries more, to Buddhaghosa (A.D. 410) and to Hildebrand, before we find our Mediæval churches quite complete, and the priesthood quite segregated from the laity, and the system perfected in all its parts. In the sixteenth century after Christ came the reformation, and with it the restoration of Evangelical Christianity. In the sixteenth century after Buddha came a reformation, but it was one of extermination of the faith, in so far as India was concerned. Śankara Āchārya was the Indian Luther, but his aim was widely different. Whatever may have been the abuses and corruptions that had crept into Buddhism in the eighth and tenth centuries of our era, they were replaced by a faith much less pure, and far fuller of idolatrous absurdities than that which it superseded. What the western reformers aimed at, was to restore the Christian Hīnayāna. In the east this was not thought of, hence the different fate of the two faiths. In Europe Christianity was invigorated by the struggle, in India Buddhism perished altogether.

The consequence of all this is, that we are now very much in the position of a foreign investigator who might have entered some great conventual establishment in Europe in the fourteenth or fifteenth century to study Christianity. Worse than even this; it is as if the monasteries of the middle ages had lasted for four or five centuries longer without any reform or light from without, and that then an attempt should have been made to ascertain within their walls what primitive Christianity originally may have been. The explorer would have found lives and legends of saints in abundance; miracles and divine communications without end; ponderous tomes of scholastic divinity, and a marvellously falsified history. Instead of the Bible, he would have been referred to that mass of beautiful but purely legendary fictions which, in the course of centuries, had attached themselves to the name of the Virgin

\* Vassilief, *Bouddhisme*, 119.  
(4799.)

† *Voyages de Hiouen-Thsang, passim.*  
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Mary, and to all the members of the Holy family. All this, too, he would have found mixed up with stories from the Old Testament, and from the lives of Mediæval saints in most marvellous confusion. If among all these works he chanced to light on the Bible, it certainly would not be pointed out to him as the one true Life of Christ, or as the basis of the Christian faith. We would, no doubt, appreciate the Gospels of Buddhism if we found them; but all that has yet been disinterred from the monasteries of Thibet, or the libraries of China or Ceylon, is subsequent to Buddhaghosa; more than one thousand years after the death of the founder of the religion, and long after the Naga revelation had superseded the original faith. We are thus precisely in the position of the student of Christianity who had only the library of some Mediæval monastery at his command. In so far as books are concerned, we depend almost wholly for our knowledge of the Life of Buddha on the *Lalita Vistara*,\* and other works of the same age and class. The *Lalita Vistara*, however, was reduced to its present form in the fourteenth century of Buddha, and is the exact counterpart in purpose and authenticity to the *Legenda Aurea*, and similar works of the Christian middle ages. It is true all these Buddhist books profess to be founded on earlier works, and no doubt this to some extent is true; but as these earlier works have not yet been discovered, we are left very much to our own powers of critical discrimination to say what is original and what may have been added to suit the tastes and feelings of an age long subsequent to the events.†

Looking at what has been done within the last twenty years, it is not impossible that we may recover even the original Sûtras, the Vinaya and the Abhidharma, as they are said to have been compiled by Upâli, Ânanda, and Kâśyapa immediately on the death of Śākya Muni,‡ or at all events we may hope that the keen criticism of modern scholars may be able, at least to some extent, to separate the wheat from the chaff, and restore to us a tolerably correct picture of primitive Buddhism as it existed before the Christian era. Notwithstanding all the difficulties of the task, considerable progress has already been achieved in this direction. Burnouf's contributions are invaluable,§ while the works of Barthélemy St. Hilaire,|| of Bigandet,¶ and Vassilief,\*\* are most useful résumés of what is known. The Germans also and our own scholars have collected a mass of materials, and discussed and dissected a number of problems which will clear the way for a correct understanding of many questions whenever a serious attempt is made to combine the whole into a consecutive history.

In the meanwhile it is of the utmost importance that everything should be gathered together and published that can throw any light on Buddhism anterior to the time when the books we now possess were reduced to their present form. The

\* Translated from the Thibetan by Foucaux. Paris, 4to., 1847.

† If anyone would wish perfectly to realize the position of Buddhist scholars at the present day, let him read carefully any one of the many versions of "L'histoire du Noble et Vaillant roy Alexandre le Grand," as compiled in the middle ages, and compare it with the narrative of the life of the same monarch as related by classical authors. Having done this, he will appreciate the difficulty in which Oriental scholars are now placed as regards the early history of Buddhism in the life of the founder of that religion.

‡ J. A. S. B., vol. I. p. 6; Asiatic Researches, XX. 42, &c.

§ Introduction à l'Histoire du Bouddhisme Indien. Lotus de la bonne loi, &c.

|| Le Bouddha et sa Religion. Paris, 1860.

¶ The Life or Legend of Gaudama. Rangoon, 1866.

\*\* Le Bouddhisme, ses Dogmes, son Histoire, et sa Littérature, traduit du Russe par La Combe. Paris, 1865.

only written documents which certainly belong to the earlier epoch are the edicts of Aśoka, engraved on the *lāts* at Delhi, Allahabad, and elsewhere; and on rocks at five or six places in India, extending from the shores of the Bay of Bengal to Guzerat, and to the Himalayas and Peshawar on the north. Except that at Bhabra,\* these are neither doctrinal nor historical. They are dry moral precepts, and so unlike the Buddhism "quæ nunc est," that, but for collateral secondary evidence, it might very well be doubted whether they belonged to that religion at all, or it might be disputed, as was done by the late Professor Wilson, whether they were written by Aśoka. The Bhabra inscription and further investigations have set these questions at rest. But the picture these inscriptions afford us of Buddhism 250 B.C. is a wonderful contrast to what we find in the *Lalita Vistara* of Thibet,† as compiled in the eighth or ninth century of our era, or any other written records of the religion which we possess.

Next in importance to these inscriptions are the sculptures of the two Topes, illustrated in this work. The gateways at Sanchi were erected, as nearly as can be ascertained, in the first half of the first century of our era, and, therefore, nearly contemporary with Nāgārjuna. They are not pure, but they are purer than anything else of their kind now known to exist. Buddha never appears in them as an object of worship. The Dagoba, the Chakra or wheel, the Tree, and other such emblems are revered. The Serpent does appear but rarely, and we have very little of the absurd supernatural fables which afterwards form the stock of the legends. At Amravati, three centuries afterwards, we find a state of affairs much more in accordance with modern notions. Buddha is worshipped, but the Naga is his co-equal. The Dagoba, the Tree, the Chakra, are all revered; and almost all the legends of modern times may probably be traced in its sculptures, though in a purer form than in the books. The first may be taken as the nearest approach we possess to an illustrated Bible of the Hīnayāna period, five hundred years before the oldest Buddhist book we possess; and Amravati as a pictorial illustration of the Mahāyāna three centuries after its promulgation, and just before Fa-Hian‡ visited the country and gave us the earliest description we have of the faith by any outsider, since at least the very meagre and unsatisfactory accounts of the Greeks.

In the frescoes that cover the walls of the Caves at Ajanta is found a third picture, three centuries later than the sculptures at Amravati, this time representing the state of Buddhist belief just before its decline. Owing to the unfortunate fire at the Crystal Palace these are not now available for purposes of illustration, but they may become so hereafter. Even, however, if we possessed drawings or photographs of them, they could never be so important for the history of the faith as the sculptures of the two Topes of Sanchi and Amravati, which represent it before the existence, in their present form, of any of the books we now possess. Our regret, however, at the loss of these copies, is very much lessened, in so far as our present purposes are concerned, by the knowledge that there were no traces of Serpent Worship in the paintings. The only representations of the Naga found at Ajanta are among

\* J. R. A. S., XVI. p. 367.

† These inscriptions will be found reprinted, in so far as it is necessary for present purposes, in Appendix B.

‡ *Foë-Kouë-Ki*, translated by Rémusat, &c., 4to., Paris, 1836.

the sculptured decorations of the doorways or in detached bas-reliefs outside the caves,\* where they may be considered as accessory or subordinate to the principal form of worship. For a history of Buddhism, the paintings are of great interest; as illustrating either Tree or Serpent Worship, they are comparatively unimportant.

The same remark applies to the frescoes in the Caves at Baugh, and generally to the western Caves. The tendency of the migration from Takshasilâ seems to have been southward, and towards the East, and never to have descended the Ghauts or penetrated into the Concan. On the other hand, the most recent example I am acquainted with of any great Naga sculptures belonging to the classical age of Indian art, is the well-known bas-relief at Mahavellipore,† on the eastern shore, about forty miles south of Madras, and executed apparently in the thirteenth century. This is carved on two great masses of granite rock, and extends about 90 feet north and south, by 30 or 35 feet in height. On the northern or right-hand portion, a group of elephants, beautifully executed, is advancing towards the centre, and above them some thirty figures, interspersed with lions and other animals, are all turning in the same direction. On the left-hand rock the lower part was evidently intended to contain the representations of the rest of the animal kingdom, but is only commenced. The upper portion has a number of human figures, equal to that of the other half of the bas-reliefs, and all equally turning towards the centre. The artist has utilized the edge of the northern rock, so as to give his principal figures a higher relief than could be obtained in the flat portions, and also to heighten their effect by having a shadow behind them. But unfortunately from this cause they were so exposed that the upper portion has been broken away. When Mr. Babington drew them, in 1827, only the lower part of the great Naga was remaining, but his wife below him was quite perfect, and presents us with a form not found either at Sanchi, Amravati, or Ajanta. The Nagas here, both male and female, are represented as Serpents at full length, but human from the waist upwards. They still, however, generally have the Snake hood of three or five heads canopying their own; in the same manner as in the Chinese woodcut, No. 3, introduced on page 53, where this more modern form of the Naga has been adopted.

This form is found among the sculptures at Hullabeed and in the Caves at Iwullee, both certainly of the thirteenth or beginning of the fourteenth century, and the form continues down to modern times; but this example at Mahavellipore is, so far as I

No. 4.



SHIVA WITH NAGAS FROM HULLABEED,  
ABOUT 1300 A.D.  
[From a Photograph.]

\* I possess some hundreds of *sculptured* representations of the Naga. I never saw or heard of a *painted* Naga anywhere.

† This bas-relief was described by Bishop Heber and Mrs. Graham. A notice of it by Mr. Goldingham appeared in the *Asiatic Researches*, vol. v. A view of it was published by Daniell; but the best is that by Messrs. Babington and Hulston, in the *Transactions of the Royal Asiatic Society*, vol. ii. plates I. and II. I have two photographs of it by Dr. Hunter, of Madras, lying before me.

know, among the earliest examples of the form.\* In other respects the grouping there of the figures around the Naga is so similar to what we find at Sanchi, that it is at first sight difficult to believe that twelve or thirteen centuries had elapsed between the execution of the two sets of sculptures. Such, however, appears undoubtedly to have been the case; and this great southern bas-relief worthily closes a series of Takshac sculptures, which for the present we must be content to commence with Sanchi, though there is little doubt but that earlier examples will hereafter be found;† but whether that is the case or not, many intermediate illustrations will certainly be discovered when looked for, and so enable us to complete as curious a picture as anywhere exists of the latest form of the primæval worship of the world.

## HINDU RELIGION.

It might have sufficed for our present purposes to have stopped when we had brought the history of Serpent Worship in India to the point when the Buddhist scriptures were rescued from the keeping of the Nagas and revealed to mankind. As this happens to be also the time when the Gateways were added to the tope at Sanchi, we might have left the sculptures to tell their own tale, and continue the history of Naga worship from that point. It will add, however, very much to the clearness of what follows if we anticipate still further, and describe briefly what took place afterwards.

Speaking broadly, the modern religions of India may be divided into two great groups or classes, that of Śiva and that of Viṣṇu. It is extremely difficult to offer even a plausible conjecture as to the origin of the former, or to guess when it first came into vogue. It has been attempted to identify Śiva with the Rudra of the Vedas, and it may be so, but it is certainly a local, not an Aryan form of faith, and seems originally to belong rather to the south than to the north of India. It may have existed there as a native local superstition for any length of time, but it only rose to eminence on the decline of Buddhism. Its principal teacher if not its founder, in its present form, seems to have been Śankara Āchārya, who may have lived in the eighth or ninth century.‡

There does not seem to be a trace of Tree Worship mixed up with it, nor any real connexion with Serpent Worship. It is true Śiva is occasionally represented holding a cobra or other venomous snake in his hand; serpents are also sometimes twisted round his neck or entwined with his hair; but in all these instances the serpent is a weapon, an implement of terror, not an object of worship. As the

\* When I published, in 1845, my description of the Rock Temples of India, I fixed the date of the excavation of Mahavellipore within the limits of the thirteenth century (pp. 58, 59). I have since seen no reason to alter this description.

† There are, I believe, older Naga sculptures in Cuttack, but whether this is so or not, it is interesting to find the three principal seats of Naga worship at three nearly equidistant points on the shores of the Bay of Bengal, Cuttack, Amravati, and Mahavellipore; exactly opposite to Cambodia, which as above explained was its principal seat in modern times. Sanchi seems to have been a sort of half-way house between these places and the North, for all their traditions point to Takshasilā as the original seat whence this form of faith was disseminated, and the Yavanas as the people by whom it was propagated.

‡ Asiatic Researches, XVII. 139.

destroyer everything that can add to the terrible was represented with him. In his hands the serpent is as a sword or trident, and, as his chaplet of skulls, merely meant to overawe and impress the beholder. It never is many-headed, and never seems the guardian god. It is only the earthly serpent taught to do the will of its master.

Occasionally the serpent does appear in a more religious aspect in connexion with this form of faith. He is sometimes represented as entwined round the Lingam, and in some southern temples two serpents are sometimes seen erect with their heads above the Lingam, on either side as if worshipping it. In all these instances, however, the serpent is subordinate. It seems nothing more than we would expect to find in a country where Serpent Worship was at one time so prevalent that the apostles of the new faith should represent the older as doing homage to the new god. In so far as the materials available enable an opinion to be formed, the amount and nature of the Serpent Worship we find mixed up with Śivaism is just what we might expect when a new form of faith superseded an old one. Much of the more ancient worship passes into the new, partly because the priests desire to conciliate the votaries of the old, partly in order to exhibit the triumph of the new god, but more perhaps because nothing is so difficult to kill as an old superstition, and the more unreasonable it is the harder it dies.

When we turn to the Vaishnava group of religions, we find a very different state of things. This religion is descended from a group of faiths in which the Serpent always played an important part. The eldest branch of the family was the Naga worship, pure and simple; out of that arose Buddhism, as frequently hinted above, and on its decline two faiths—at first very similar\* to one another—rose from its ashes, the Jaina and the Vaishnava. The first named was the purest and most direct descendant of Buddhism, retaining more of its doctrinal purity, and less of the local element, and consequently less Serpent Worship than the other. Still the Naga is almost always to be found in Jaina temples, and placed where it evidently was intended as an object of worship, but subordinate to the saint to whom the temple was dedicated.

The Vaishnava faith, on the other hand, arose contemporaneously with the Śivite, on the ruins of Buddhism, but with much less of the appearance of being a local indigenous superstition; on the contrary, it bears many marks of being a foreign introduction, as if imported at some remote period by some of the immigrant races, and after rotting and fermenting for ages in the fertile soil of India, at last found the means of coming to the surface between the eighth and the tenth centuries. Garuḍa, Vishṇu's Vāhana, the enemy of the Nagas, is almost certainly the hawk-headed deity of Assyria; and in all the avatars of Vishṇu we find more traces of western superstition than in anything Śivite; but what interests us most here is, that the Naga appears everywhere in Vaishnava tradition. There is no more common representation of Vishṇu than reposing on the Śesha, as the seven-headed snake is called by the Brahmans, contemplating the creation of the world. It was by his assistance that the ocean was churned and Amrita produced. He everywhere

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\* Asiatic Researches, IX. 270., and XVII. 285.

spreads his protecting hood over the god, or his avatars, and in all instances it is the seven-headed heavenly Naga, not the earthly cobra of Śiva.\*

The worship of the Tulsi plant, which is one of the commonest forms of Vaishṇava adoration, is another of those indications which point to a common origin for the two religions. It would of course be absurd to designate as Tree Worship the adoration of such a plant as Sweet Basil, but the descent from the "Ficus religiosa" to "Ocimum Sanctum" is just such a change as might be expected to take place when a dogma is transferred from an older and higher faith to one of a less elevated character. Both symbolize the worship of the vegetable kingdom, and are a part of that curious association of men with animals and plants which is so marked a characteristic of both the Buddhist and Vaishṇava forms of faith.

The strongest evidence, however, of the connexion between the worship of Vishṇu and that of Buddha is found in the fact, that the Hindus, even to the present day, recognize Buddha as the ninth avatar of Vishṇu. From a historical point of view they are no doubt correct in this; all the eight preceding avatars refer to events that certainly preceded the time of Śakya-muni, and when we understand them they may point to a long chain of tradition out of which Buddhism arose, and into which Buddhism fell, which, when philosophically examined, may throw a flood of light on the origin of Buddhism and of Indian religions generally.†

At present it must suffice to point out that the group to which Buddhism belongs comprises Tree and Serpent Worship as the base, combined with the association of men with animals, especially monkeys, either in consequence of the doctrine of metempsychosis, or as the origin of that belief. These grew into Buddhism, and then bifurcated into the Jainism and Vishnuism of modern times.

It is extremely difficult in the present state of our knowledge, to say to what particular section of the Indian population this group of religions belongs. We know that they were anti-Aryan, yet they do not appear to belong to the Dravidian group. The peculiar deity of the latter I fancy must have been Śiva, and his worship is antagonistic in every essential to those religions composing this family. We must pause till we know more of the ethnology of India before we can decide this question in anything like a satisfactory manner.

Meanwhile, however, the similarity of this family of religions points to an identity of race which can hardly be mistaken. For the present, Scythian is a term that might

\* Nothing is more common than to connect the worship of the Lingam with the impurities with which the Hindu religion is only too justly reproached. This, however, is a mistake. The worship of Śiva is too severe, too stern, for the softer emotions of love, and all his temples are quite free from any allusion to it. The contrary is the case with the Vaishṇavas, who adore the Lingam. Love pervades all their myths, and their temples are full of sexual feelings generally expressed in the grossest terms. The existence of any such representation in a temple at once fixes it as originally dedicated to the worship of Vishṇu, or some of his Avatars.

† The 10th or coming Avatar of Vishṇu is Kalki, or the Horse, of which we shall have several opportunities of speaking when we come to describe the sculptures of the Amravati Tope, where the horse frequently appears as an important character, but with a rôle not easily understood. The Chakra or Wheel, which occupies the principal place among Buddhist emblems both at Sanchi and Amravati, afterwards becomes one of the principal emblems of Vishṇu. But perhaps the most striking coincidence is to be found at Puri. The Temple there occupies the site where the tooth relic of Buddha was long enshrined, and the worship of Vishṇu under the name of Jaganath, as there practised, is little else than very corrupt Buddhism.



possibly be applied with advantage. It is sufficiently vague, but perhaps it would be wiser to wait for more definite knowledge before applying any terms.\*

The subject is only mentioned here because it will recur again and again in the following pages, and unless these generalizations are borne in mind, the sequel will hardly be intelligible. The sculptures at Sanchi and Amravati may not suffice to settle these questions, but if I am not mistaken they throw as much or more light upon them than any other documents that have yet been brought to light.

#### MODERN WORSHIP OF TREES AND SERPENTS IN INDIA.

Few probably have read the preceding pages without it occurring to them to ask the question, Does Serpent Worship exist in India at the present day, and if so, to what extent? If the inquiry were addressed to even our best-informed Indian authorities, the reply would probably be negative. We have actually possessed India now for more than a century. The Asiatic Society was established in 1784. Since then, with the branch societies in Madras and Bombay, and the Asiatic Societies of England, France, and Germany, some hundreds of volumes have been published, containing some thousands of papers. As not one of these is devoted to Serpent Worship, or even describes it as existing, it may well be argued that it cannot possibly now be found there.

To this line of argument the answer is plain. None of these thousand and one papers are devoted to the ancient worship of the Serpent, nor do any of them contain anything beyond the haziest allusions to the Naga or his previous influence. Yet, if I mistake not, before this work is concluded, it will appear that the Serpent did play an important part in the mythology of India, and that his worship not only prevailed, but considerably influenced forms of faith where we would least suspect his presence.

The truth of the matter seems to be that attention has not hitherto been specially directed to the subject, and till this is the case, the most obvious evidences might be passed by without being noticed.

As an instance of this, I may perhaps be allowed to quote against myself what occurred at Ajanta. I spent a considerable time in exploring these caves, but my mind was full of architecture. I measured everything, drew every detail, and familiarized myself with every architectural affinity. But neither then nor subsequently† did I note the presence of any Nagas. Now that my attention is turned to it, I find in drawings and photographs twelve or fifteen sculptured representations of the seven-headed Naga, and there may be many more. I now also recollect seeing Nagas in all the Jaina temples at Abu, at Sadree, and elsewhere, but I then passed them over. Now I cannot take up a photograph of any temple belonging to the group of religions which include the Buddhist, Jaina, or Vaishṇava faiths, without seeing snakes everywhere, but in places where neither I nor anyone else detected them before.

\* It would take a volume to discuss, and an unlimited number of references to establish these conclusions. At present I will only refer to two inscriptions; that at Buddh Gyā, *Asiatic Researches*, vol. I. p. 284, and that of Belgola, vol. XVII. p. 270.

† I have twice published on the subject of these caves; first, on the Rock-cut temples of India, folio, 1845, and subsequently, a volume on the same subject in 1864, illustrated by photographs by Major Gill.

The same I believe to be the case with the living worship. In Forbes' Oriental Memoirs,\* in Bishop Heber's Travels, and in fifty other places, allusions are made to the feelings of respect and reverence paid by the natives of India to snakes, and no one can reside long in the country without perceiving it; yet, except in Miss Frere's charming little volume, entitled "Old Deccan Days," I hardly know a book in which snakes, and especially seven-headed snakes,† play an important part, or which reflects the feelings of the natives regarding them. The stories of serpents there related are only an accidental selection out of thousands of similar legends, all which might easily be localized or traced to their source, and many of which will no doubt be investigated so soon as attention is really directed to the subject.‡

Two instances of Serpent Worship, at Munnipore and Sumbulpore, have already been mentioned (page 61). Two others are still more remarkable. In the great temple at Madura the three principal images in the Tosak Khâna are a golden (?) image of Hanumân, another of Garuða, the Vâhana of Vishnu, but the terrible enemy of the snakes. Between these two stands an image of the seven-headed Naga, richly jewelled, and under a splendid canopy. In the great temple at Seringham, likewise, the principal images are two golden statues of the seven-headed Naga, larger apparently than that at Madura, and even more richly jewelled;§ and I have no doubt that many other such might be found, but they have not yet been looked for.

In the meanwhile the following two paragraphs, introduced incidentally in two works published in London during the present season, may serve to indicate the class of illustrations which will no doubt be found everywhere when looked for. "At the Nág Kûán or Serpent Well, in the city of Benares," says Mr. Sherring, "the Nág or Serpent is worshipped. In a niche in the wall of one of the stairs is a figure representing three Serpents (query, a three-headed Serpent), and on the floor is an emblem of Mahâdeva in stone, and a snake crawling up it. The well

\* Vol. II. pp. 329, 384, &c.

† In the narrator's narrative (p. xxvii.), the following singularly naive and interesting passage occurs:—"All the cobras in my grandmother's stories were seven-headed. This puzzled us children, and we would say to her, 'Granny, are there any seven-headed cobras now, for all the cobras we see that the conjurers bring round have only one head each.' To which she used to answer, 'No, of course there are no seven-headed cobras now. That world is gone, but you see each cobra has a hood of skin, that is the remains of another head.' Although we often looked for seven-headed cobras we never could find any of them." Had they not been converted to Christianity they might have believed in them, even if they had not seen them.

‡ No one at all familiar with the subject, who reads these tales, can fail to be struck with the similarity that exists between them and many of those collected by the brothers Grimm and others from German and Scandinavian sources, and also with some of the more ancient Grecian myths. The usual mode of accounting for this identity, which can hardly be accidental, is to assume that the tales were originally invented by Aryan nurses beside the cradles of the race in Balkh and Bokhara, and that they were carried east and west by their Alumni when they set out on their travels some 4,000 or 5,000 years ago. The results of my reading have led me to conclusions widely different from this fashionable hypothesis. My belief is that all the serpents and dragons, all the dwarfs and magicians of these tales, all the fairy mythology, in fact, of the east and west, belongs to the Turanian races. These, as I have frequently had occasion to mention, underlie the Aryan races everywhere in Europe as in Asia, and occasionally crop up here and there through the upper crust, often when least expected. So far as I understand the idiosyncrasy of the two races, nothing can be more antagonistic to the tastes and feelings of the Aryans than these wild imaginings; while few things, on the contrary, could be more congenial to the comparatively infantile intellect of the Turanian race.

§ Both these groups were photographed by Captain Tripe, and published by him for Government with other views of the temples in which they are found. I had hoped to have obtained more information regarding them before publishing, but have been unsuccessful.

“ is visited for religious purposes only once a year, namely, on the 24th and 25th days of the month of Sáwan, when immense numbers of persons come to it from all parts of the city. The women come on the first day, the men on the second; they offer sacrifices both to the well and to Nágeswar, or the Serpent God.” \*

The other relates to Tree Worship. “ In Beerbhoom once a year the whole capital repairs to a shrine in the jungle, and makes simple offerings to a ghost who dwells in a Bela Tree.” “ The shrine consists of three trees—a Bela Tree on the left, in which the ghost resides, and which is marked at the foot with blood; in the middle is a Kachmula Tree; and on the right a Saura Tree.” “ In spite of the trees being at the most 70 years old, the common people claim the greatest antiquity for the shrine, and tradition says that the three trees that now mark the spot neither grow thicker nor increase in height, but remain the same for ever.” †

There is no doubt whatever with regard to the worship of Trees in modern times, and numerous instances might be adduced if necessary. The Bo Tree at Buddh Gyá is worshipped now as it was in the days of Aśoka, ‡ and the Tree at Anurádhapura is, as mentioned above, the principal object of worship in Ceylon at the present day. And all over India there are numerous examples which we may hope some day to see registered. §

Since this work was commenced I have made every effort to obtain from India information regarding the present existence of Serpent Worship, but though not so successful as I could have wished, I have been able to obtain several documents on the subject of considerable interest. One of these is by Dr. C. E. Balfour, of Secunderabad, whose long study of native manners and customs especially qualify him to speak on the subject. The other is from Colonel Meadows Taylor, so well known for his various literary works connected with India, and who likewise is especially competent, by long residence and intimate knowledge of the natives, to speak regarding their forms of worship. Both these documents, with several others of more or less importance, will be found printed in the Appendix. They are satisfactory as far as they go; but we shall never know exactly what we are to believe regarding the present position of Serpent Worship, till some qualified persons make a special study of it on the spot.

From these documents, as well as from such information as I have been able to gather from other sources that were available, my impression is that successive immigrations of non-worshipping races have nearly obliterated the religion of the Serpent from the valleys of the Ganges and Indus. I believe it still exists in Cashmere

\* The Sacred City of the Hindus, by the Rev. M. A. Sherring. London, 1868, p. 89.

† Annals of Rural Bengal, by W. W. Hunter, B.C.S. London, 1868, p. 131.

‡ Buchanan Hamilton, in Martin's Eastern India, I. p. 76.

§ The following instance of Tree Worship which I myself witnessed is amusing, even if not instructive. While residing in Jessore I observed at one time considerable crowds passing near the factory I then had charge of. As it might be merely an ordinary fair they were going to attend, I took no notice; but as the crowd grew daily larger, and assumed a more religious character, I inquired, and was told that a God had appeared in a Tree at a place about six miles off.

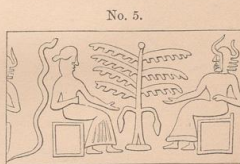
Next morning I rode over, and found a large space cleared in a village I knew well, in the centre of which stood an old decayed Date tree, hung with garlands and offerings. Around it houses were erected for the attendant Brahmins, and a great deal of business was going on in offerings and Pôjá. On my inquiring how the God manifested

and Nepaul, and in the hills generally, but not in the plains. Though I have no proof of it, I cannot help suspecting its existence also in the hills north of Sylhet. I feel nearly certain it will be found throughout the valleys of the Nerbudda and Tapti, and among the hill tribes perhaps as far East as Burdwan. It probably is also more or less prevalent all along the western Ghauts down as far as Travancore, and sporadically over the whole of the Madras Presidency. Its existence in any particular spot now must not be taken as a proof either of its presence or absence at an earlier period. Its presence may show either that a Serpent-worshipping tribe have not been disturbed or may have migrated to that spot, and its absence may equally be taken to prove either that it never existed there, or that it has been obliterated by other forms. All this will require much care and study before it can be satisfactorily mapped out; but the subject is one of great interest, as bearing on one of the oldest forms of faith that the world knows, and would amply repay any pains that might be bestowed on its investigation.

## NOTE.

The annexed woodcut—which ought to have been inserted on page 42—is interesting, not only as showing the Tree and Serpent in juxtaposition, and honoured on a Babylonian cylinder, but because the Tree is of a form with which we are familiar\* on the earliest types of Indian coinage, as will be explained hereafter.

The cylinder from which the representation is taken is in the collection of Mr. Stuart, and is engraved in Lajard's *Culte de Mithra*, Plate VI., Fig. 4., but without any indication by which its age could be determined. My impression is, that many of these cylinders, and this among the number, are more modern than is generally supposed, and may come down to Achæmenian times. In itself this representation is perhaps not of much importance, but it may be well to quote it, in order that those who are familiar with similar objects may turn their attention to them as sources from which information may be obtained regarding Tree or Serpent Worship. This is certainly not a solitary example.



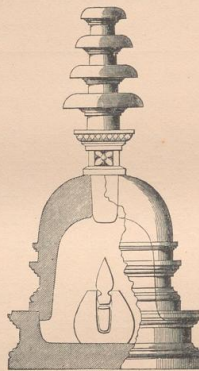
CYLINDER, WITH TREE AND SERPENT.  
From Lajard.

his presence, I was informed that soon after the sun rose in the morning the Tree raised its head to welcome him, and bowed it down again when he departed. As this was a miracle easily tested, I returned at noon and found it was so!

After a little study and investigation, the mystery did not seem difficult of explanation. The Tree had originally grown across the principal pathway through the village, but at last hung so low, that in order to enable people to pass under it, it had been turned aside and fastened parallel to the road. In the operation the bundle of fibres which composed the root had become twisted like the strands of a rope. When the morning sun struck on the upper surface of these, they contracted in drying, and hence a tendency to untwist, which raised the head of the Tree. With the evening dews they relaxed, and the head of the Tree declined, thus proving to the man of science, as to the credulous Hindu, that it was due to the direct action of the Sun God.

\* J. A. S. B., vol. VII., Plate XXXII.

No. 6.



RELIC CASKET, FROM MANIKYALA,  
In the possession of General Cunningham.  
No. 6.