

DEMONOLATRY.



CHAPTER I.

DUALISM.

Origin of Deism—Evolution from the far to the near—Illustrations from witchcraft—The primitive Pantheism—The dawn of Dualism.

A COLLEGE in the State of Ohio has adopted for its motto the words ‘Orient thyself.’ This significant admonition to Western youth represents one condition of attaining truth in the science of mythology. Through neglect of it the glowing personifications and metaphors of the East have too generally migrated to the West only to find it a Medusa turning them to stone. Our prosaic literalism changes their ideals to idols. The time has come when we must learn rather to see ourselves in them: out of an age and civilisation where we live in habitual recognition of natural forces we may transport ourselves to a period and region where no sophisticated eye looks upon nature. The sun is a chariot drawn by shining steeds and driven by a refulgent deity; the stars ascend and move by arbitrary power or command; the tree is the bower of a spirit; the fountain leaps from the urn of a naiad. In such gay costumes did the laws of nature hold

their carnival until Science struck the hour for unmasking. The costumes and masks have with us become materials for studying the history of the human mind, but to know them we must translate our senses back into that phase of our own early existence, so far as is consistent with carrying our culture with us.

Without conceding too much to Solar mythology, it may be pronounced tolerably clear that the earliest emotion of worship was born out of the wonder with which man looked up to the heavens above him. The splendours of the morning and evening; the azure vault, painted with frescoes of cloud or blackened by the storm; the night, crowned with constellations: these awakened imagination, inspired awe, kindled admiration, and at length adoration, in the being who had reached intervals in which his eye was lifted above the earth. Amid the rapture of Vedic hymns to these sublimities we meet sharp questionings whether there be any such gods as the priests say, and suspicion is sometimes cast on sacrifices. The forms that peopled the celestial spaces may have been those of ancestors, kings, and great men, but anterior to all forms was the poetic enthusiasm which built heavenly mansions for them; and the crude cosmogonies of primitive science were probably caught up by this spirit, and consecrated as slowly as scientific generalisations now are.

Our modern ideas of evolution might suggest the reverse of this—that human worship began with things low and gradually ascended to high objects; that from rude ages, in which adoration was directed to stock and stone, tree and reptile, the human mind climbed by degrees to the contemplation and reverence of celestial grandeurs. But the accord of this view with our ideas of evolution is apparent only. The real progress seems here to have been from the far to the near, from the great to the small. It

ORDEAL OF FIRE AND WATER. 3

is, indeed, probably inexact to speak of the worship of stock and stone, weed and wort, insect and reptile, as primitive. There are many indications that such things were by no race considered intrinsically sacred, nor were they really worshipped until the origin of their sanctity was lost ; and even now, ages after their oracular or symbolical character has been forgotten, the superstitions that have survived in connection with such insignificant objects point to an original association with the phenomena of the heavens. No religions could, at first glance, seem wider apart than the worship of the serpent and that of the glorious sun ; yet many ancient temples are covered with symbols combining sun and snake, and no form is more familiar in Egypt than the solar serpent standing erect upon its tail, with rays around its head.

Nor is this high relationship of the adored reptile found only in regions where it might have been raised up by ethnical combinations as the mere survival of a savage symbol. William Craft, an African who resided for some time in the kingdom of Dahomey, informed me of the following incident which he had witnessed there. The sacred serpents are kept in a grand house, which they sometimes leave to crawl in their neighbouring grounds. One day a negro from some distant region encountered one of these animals and killed it. The people learning that one of their gods had been slain, seized the stranger, and having surrounded him with a circle of brushwood, set it on fire. The poor wretch broke through the circle of fire and ran, pursued by the crowd, who struck him with heavy sticks. Smarting from the flames and blows, he rushed into a river ; but no sooner had he entered there than the pursuit ceased, and he was told that, having gone through fire and water, he was purified, and might emerge with safety. Thus, even in that distant and savage

4 *CELESTIAL ORIGIN OF CHARMS.*

region, serpent-worship was associated with fire-worship and river-worship, which have a wide representation in both Aryan and Semitic symbolism. To this day the orthodox Israelites set beside their dead, before burial, the lighted candle and a basin of pure water. These have been associated in rabbinical mythology with the angels Michael (genius of Water) and Gabriel (genius of Fire); but they refer both to the phenomenal glories and the purifying effects of the two elements as revered by the Africans in one direction and the Parsees in another.

Not less significant are the facts which were attested at the witch-trials. It was shown that for their pretended divinations they used plants—as rue and vervain—well known in the ancient Northern religions, and often recognised as examples of tree-worship; but it also appeared that around the cauldron a mock zodiacal circle was drawn, and that every herb employed was alleged to have derived its potency from having been gathered at a certain hour of the night or day, a particular quarter of the moon, or from some spot where sun or moon did or did not shine upon it. Ancient planet-worship is, indeed, still reflected in the habit of village herbalists, who gather their simples at certain phases of the moon, or at certain of those holy periods of the year which conform more or less to the pre-christian festivals.

These are a few out of many indications that the small and senseless things which have become almost or quite fetishes were by no means such at first, but were mystically connected with the heavenly elements and splendours, like the animal forms in the zodiac. In one of the earliest hymns of the Rig-Veda it is said—‘This earth belongs to Varuna (*Oṽpavós*) the king, and the wide sky: he is contained also in this drop of water.’ As the sky was seen reflected in the shining curve of a dew-drop,

PRIMITIVE PANTHEISM.

5

even so in the shape or colour of a leaf or flower, the transformation of a chrysalis, or the burial and resurrection of a scarabæus' egg, some sign could be detected making it answer in place of the typical image which could not yet be painted or carved.

The necessities of expression would, of course, operate to invest the primitive conceptions and interpretations of celestial phenomena with those pictorial images drawn from earthly objects of which the early languages are chiefly composed. In many cases that are met in the most ancient hymns, the designations of exalted objects are so little descriptive of them, that we may refer them to a period anterior to the formation of that refined and complex symbolism by which primitive religions have acquired a representation in definite characters. The Vedic comparisons of the various colours of the dawn to horses, or the rain-clouds to cows, denotes a much less mature development of thought than the fine observation implied in the connection of the forked lightning with the forked serpent-tongue and forked mistletoe, or symbolisation of the universe in the concentric folds of an onion. It is the presence of these more mystical and complex ideas in religions which indicate a progress of the human mind from the large and obvious to the more delicate and occult, and the growth of the higher vision which can see small things in their large relationships. Although the exaltation in the Vedas of Varuna as king of heaven, and as contained also in a drop of water, is in one verse, we may well recognise an immense distance in time between the two ideas there embodied. The first represents that primitive pantheism which is the counterpart of ignorance. An unclassified outward universe is the reflection of a mind without form and void: it is while all within is as yet indiscriminating wonder that the religious vesture of nature will be this undefined pantheism. The fruit of the tree of the know-

ledge of good and evil has not yet been tasted. In some of the earlier hymns of the Rig-Veda, the Maruts, the storm-deities, are praised along with Indra, the sun; Yama, king of Death, is equally adored with the goddess of Dawn. 'No real foe of yours is known in heaven, nor in earth.' 'The storms are thy allies.' Such is the high optimism of sentences found even in sacred books which elsewhere mask the dawn of the Dualism which ultimately superseded the harmony of the elemental Powers. 'I create light and I create darkness, I create good and I create evil.' 'Look unto Yezdan, who causeth the shadow to fall.' But it is easy to see what must be the result when this happy family of sun-god and storm-god and fire-god, and their innumerable co-ordinate divinities, shall be divided by discord. When each shall have become associated with some earthly object or fact, he or she will appear as friend or foe, and their connection with the sources of human pleasure and pain will be reflected in collisions and wars in the heavens. The rebel clouds will be transformed to Titans and Dragons. The adored Maruts will be no longer storm-heroes with unsheathed swords of lightning, marching as the retinue of Indra, but fire-breathing monsters—Vritras and Ahis,—and the morning and evening shadows from faithful watch-dogs become the treacherous hell-hounds, like Orthros and Cerberus. The vehement antagonisms between animals and men, and of tribe against tribe, will be expressed in the conception of struggles among gods, who will thus be classified as good or evil deities.

This was precisely what did occur. The primitive pantheism was broken up: in its place the later ages beheld the universe as the arena of a tremendous conflict between Good and evil Powers, who severally, in the process of time, marshalled each and everything, from a world to a worm, under their flaming banners.

(7)

CHAPTER II.

THE GENESIS OF DEMONS.

Their good names euphemistic—Their mixed character—Illustrations :
Beelzebub, Loki—Demon-germs—The knowledge of good and
evil—Distinction between Demon and Devil.

THE first pantheon of each race was built of intellectual speculations. In a moral sense, each form in it might be described as more or less demonic ; and, indeed, it may almost be affirmed that religion, considered as a service rendered to superhuman beings, began with the propitiation of demons, albeit they might be called gods. Man found that in the earth good things came with difficulty, while thorns and weeds sprang up everywhere. The evil powers seemed to be the strongest. The best deity had a touch of the demon in him. The sun is the most beneficent, yet he bears the sunstroke along with the sunbeam, and withers the blooms he calls forth. The splendour, the might, the majesty, the menace, the grandeur and wrath of the heavens and the elements were blended in these personifications, and reflected in the trembling adoration paid to them. The flattering names given to these powers by their worshippers must be interpreted by the costly sacrifices with which men sought to propitiate them. No sacrifice would have been offered originally to a purely benevolent power. The Furies were called the Eumenides, 'the well-meaning,' and there arises a temptation to regard

the name as preserving the primitive meaning of the Sanskrit original of Erinyes, namely, *Saranyu*, which signifies the morning light stealing over the sky. But the descriptions of the Erinyes by the Greek poets—especially of Æschylus, who pictures them as black, serpent-locked, with eyes dropping blood, and calls them hounds—show that *Saranyu* as morning light, and thus the revealer of deeds of darkness, had gradually been degraded into a personification of the Curse. And yet, while recognising the name Eumenides as euphemistic, we may admire none the less the growth of that rationalism which ultimately found in the epithet a suggestion of the soul of good in things evil, and almost restored the beneficent sense of *Saranyu*. ‘I have settled in this place,’ says Athene in the ‘Eumenides’ of Æschylus, ‘these mighty deities, hard to be appeased; they have obtained by lot to administer all things concerning men. But he who has not found them gentle knows not whence come the ills of life.’ But before the dread Erinyes of Homer’s age had become the ‘venerable goddesses’ (*σεμνὰ θεαί*) of popular phrase in Athens, or the Eumenides of the later poet’s high insight, piercing their Gorgon form as portrayed by himself, they had passed through all the phases of human terror. Cowering generations had tried to soothe the remorseless avengers by complimentary phrases. They could invest it with many profound and beautiful significances. But these more distinctly terrible deities are found in the shadowy border-land of mythology, from which we may look back into ages when the fear in which worship is born had not yet been separated into its elements of awe and admiration, nor the heaven of supreme forces divided into ranks of benevolent and

SOLAR ANTAGONISMS.

9

malevolent beings; and, on the other hand, we may look forward to the ages in which the moral consciousness of man begins to form the distinctions between good and evil, right and wrong, which changes cosmogony into religion, and impresses every deity of the mind's creation to do his or her part in reflecting the physical and moral struggles of mankind.

The intermediate processes by which the good and evil were detached, and advanced to separate personification,



Fig. 1.—BEELZEBUB (Calmet).

cannot always be traced, but the indications of their work are in most cases sufficiently clear. The relationship, for instance, between Baal and Baal-zebub cannot be doubted. The one represents the Sun in his glory as quickener of Nature and painter of its beauty, the other the insect-breeding power of the Sun. Baal-zebub is the Fly-god. Only at a comparatively recent period did the deity of

the Philistines, whose oracle was consulted by Ahaziah (2 Kings i.), suffer under the reputation of being 'the Prince of Devils,' his name being changed by a mere pun to Beelzebul (dung-god). It is not impossible that the modern Egyptian mother's hesitation to disturb flies settling on her sleeping child, and the sanctity attributed to various insects, originated in the awe felt for him. The title Fly-god is paralleled by the reverent epithet *ἀπόμυιος*, applied to Zeus as worshipped at Elis,¹ the *Myiagrus deus* of the Romans,² and the *Myiodes* mentioned by Pliny.³ Our picture is probably from a protecting charm, and evidently by the god's believers. There is a story of a peasant woman in a French church who was found kneeling before a marble group, and was warned by a priest that she was worshipping the wrong figure—namely, Beelzebub. 'Never mind,' she replied, 'it is well enough to have friends on both sides.' The story, though now only *ben trovato*, would represent the actual state of mind in many a Babylonian invoking the protection of the Fly-god against formidable swarms of his venomous subjects.

Not less clear is the illustration supplied by Scandinavian mythology. In Sæmund's Edda the evil-minded Loki says:—

Odin! dost thou remember
 When we in early days
 Blended our blood together?

The two became detached very slowly; for their separation implied the crumbling away of a great religion, and its distribution into new forms; and a religion requires, relatively, as long to decay as it does to grow, as we who live under a crumbling religion have good reason to know. Protap Chunder Mozoomdar, of the Brahmo-Somaj, in an address in London, said, 'The Indian Pantheon has

¹ Pausan. v. 14, 2. ² Solin. Polyhistor. i. ³ Pliny, xxix. 6, 34. init.