



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Economics of primitive religion.—By WASHBURN HOPKINS,
Professor in Yale University, New Haven, Conn.

THERE hung for many years in the Boston State-house, and perhaps hangs still, a monster codfish, a token of the main industry hereabouts. It was placed there with respect, one might almost say with devotion, and it is not too much to hazard that, had our Puritan forefathers been less advanced theologically, they would have considered this effigy, and its original, to be in very truth worthy of devout regard and trust. Had they been on a low plane of civilization this trust would have been proximate to worship.

This State-house cod is then a symbol of more than it was carved to figure. It is in fact emblematic of an early principle of religion, utilitarianism, the principle that often underlies the adoration both of the benevolent and malevolent. This, of course, is by no means the only god-creative principle, but it is an important one and one generally recognized—recognized even as early as the Mahābhārata in the words: “Men worship Çiva the destroyer because they fear him, Vishnu the preserver, because they hope from him, but who worships Brahman the creator? His work is done.” Not a mere phrase, for in India to-day there are thousands of temples to Çiva and Vishnu, but only two to Brahman.

To linger, however, upon this principle of utilitarianism is not my purpose. It is, indeed, only my starting point, for to admit this cause of worship at once leads us farther. If we glance at the rich collection of divinities in a settled tribe or nation, such as those of Greece or India, we shall see that in any given locality the greatest usefulness and potency is ascribed to the local god. In a low state of savagery or barbarism local gods are universally the most important, and even in a high state of civilization they still form the undercurrent of popular divinity. Again, a great city makes great its local deity even at the cost of some anterior great deity, originally worshipped by city and country alike. But a villager, too, worships at his village shrine alone, and his real god is the god of that shrine. When the village is influenced by a wider theosophy the temple may belong to some universal god, as is to-day the case with that of Çiva, but such a shrine

does not faithfully represent the loftier conception to the lowly villager. He cannot see beyond his ken, and so he is continually reducing the great god to the size of his own small conception. Moreover, although a great god may be duly represented thus, if there is at the same time another shrine of a local deity, that local god will be or become paramount. Even more must this magnitude of the little have been operative before the higher conception became possible.

The environment which I have tacitly assumed is that of a settled people. Now let us change the economic conditions and ask ourselves what will, and must, have been the gods which obtained whenever a primitive people became migratory. It is evident that a migratory people can have no constant local gods. There is no perpetually familiar mountain or stream whose deity they dread. They may worship the sun, but they cannot worship him in a local form; they may worship the souls of the departed, but they cannot pay especial reverence to the man-god of one shrine.

What, then, are the gods that a wandering people can worship throughout their whole migratory state? Simply those gods which they have always with them. And what are these? Horace says *caelum non animam*, but if we should interpret the *caelum* very literally the poet's Greek original were nearer the truth, *τόπον ὃ τόπον*; man changes his abode, his mind remains the same, and the sky-god is not changed. The sky-god, not local but always with them, they will continue to worship wherever they go. This is not true of earth, for earth is not regarded by primitive people as one and the same, since a different locality implies a different divinity; there is a local mountain which is a separate god, etc.

Fire, on the other hand, though it often goes out, still remains the same magic fire, "the ever new god," as the Vedic poets call it; and it will continue to receive its antique worship, especially when, as may have been the case with the forefathers of the Romans, it is guarded and not allowed to become extinct.

But there is one more class of gods, the troop of spirits of the dead, that remains with a migrating people. When a people settle down they particularize in exact proportion as they localize the cult. This man's spirit, they say, resides here on the very spot where he lived. Here, then, we worship him and he will protect us here. The result is the innumerable shrines which we find raised, for example, in India to-day, to the local Birs or man-gods of the places where these heroes used to live. But so long

as the children's children roam about, they cannot localize nor particularize. Each family ghost soon becomes merged in one shadowy host of ghosts, travelling with the human tribe, worshipped by them in general. Only now and then the spirit of some special hero is worshipped by more than his own family; then he becomes a tribal god.

Now all other classes of gods are virtually enshrined in local material. Animal gods depend on the environment for their very existence. Totems are possible only where the worshippers are fairly stationary. No one continues to revere a tiger or an eagle who has no idea what these animals look like, and no one claims descent, if he can help it, from a nonentity. Gods of the imagination—genii, devils of various sorts, and nymphs—lose their power in losing their habitation. As the dryads perish with the removal of their tree, so when the site is left, the special devil or fairy, potent in its local habitation, becomes vague and eventually perishes from the mind. The belief in such beings may be unimpaired, but the particular object of the cult is variable, so that no one individual demon, genius, or other supernatural being can permanently receive worship from the migratory people. The same is true of a sub-division of these gods of fancy, the disease-gods. No one worships the cholera or small-pox, as do millions in India to-day, who is no longer afraid of it. Diseases change with environment, and their malevolent gods are left behind by travellers.

Thus far I have considered the hypothetical case of any migratory nation. Before I take up a concrete instance let me point out one more fact. If such a people were once settled and afterwards wandered for centuries, all traces of what used to be their local gods will have vanished. They, too, will hold as gods only those divinities which they have with them always, sky, and ancestral ghosts, and fire. If they wander in the tropics they will doubtless, even at the start, have in addition to these the sun-god, and if they continue to wander there they may retain this god. But if they start in the north they are more likely to regard the sun as at best a dim cloudy deity or as merely the eye of the sky-god. They will not worship him as a fiery, omnipotent, tyrant god till they reach the proper environment. So a storm-god may accompany one or more branches of a dividing people while they move in a circumscribed area; but just as soon as one branch settles down amid a different environment this storm-god will yield his power and name to some new local product. In general,

then, sky, with perhaps such celestial phenomena as sun, moon, and stars (but these latter are more dependent on circumstances), and fire, and the manes will be the oldest, the most venerable gods that a migratory people can remember ; unless, indeed, they bear with them some effigy or memorial of another deity which tends to perpetuate artificially what would otherwise pass from memory.

Now let us take in illustration a concrete example. If these general statements, *a priori* as they are, yet seem probable, what gods should we expect to find as the oldest among the Indo-Europeans—oldest, that is to say, from the point of view which we must perforce take, the view afforded by linguistic and literary evidence. This oldest evidence represents merely a phase of development, but it appears to me fully to support the interpretation I have made. What god is worshipped under the same name by more than two of the Indo-European nations? Only the sky-god, Dyāuspitar, Zeuspater, Jupiter. Under another name the sky is worshipped as Varuṇa, Ouranos. Both in India and in Greece this god appears as the most venerable of all gods of phenomena. But what other gods are worshipped by several of these severed nations? The Fathers, manes, *pitaras*, not under a particular name but as a host, exactly as we should have anticipated. And lastly we have the fire-cult practiced in India, Persia, Greece, and Italy as far back as records go. But because the (later) twofold Indo-Iranians lived long together, we find also in India's oldest pantheon, as in Persia's, a *soma-haoma* cult and a Mitra-Mithra sun-cult not found among other nations. So too we find the same storm-god in Slavic and Vedic form, but not elsewhere.

Here we have, as I am convinced, the true explanation of an apparently mysterious fact, a fact that has led observers astray and is apt to do so still. I will not recall to criticize the older hypotheses of an original monotheism among the Indo-Europeans. These theories were of their time, and represented a reasonable stage of mental accomplishment in the interpretation of religious phenomena. The great Sanskrit scholars of an earlier generation were profoundly impressed by the fact that the sky-god held the highest and apparently oldest place ; that he was the most venerable deity of the Indo-Europeans ; and that some of the Vedic hymns addressed to him show an almost monotheistic conception, certainly a much higher conception of godhead than attaches to any other god of the Vedic age. Hence they naturally argued a

primeval monotheism. And it is true that the figure of the supreme Zeus and the majestic Varuṇa are such as to suggest this consequence. Even a latter-day scholar, Oldenberg, is so impressed with the lofty character of the ancient sky-god of India that he wishes to derive it from the Semites, as something incompatible with the grossness of Vedic polytheism.

These gods represent, however, as I have shown, not anything original, but only what was oldest in the migratory life of their worshippers. For all the Indo-Europeans were migrating for centuries; that is to say they shifted from place to place, leaving behind what was local, carrying forward only those divinities which were really ubiquitous and were felt to be always identical.

The sky-god is physically lofty, and does not easily lend himself to the hocus-pocus of demonolatry. If we add to this the fact that to the Vedic Aryans he was, as has been explained, the object of their oldest remembered worship, we can easily understand why his figure stands out so large in the background of the pantheon. We can also understand why the figure fades and dwindles as the Aryan invaders exchange the tending of herds for agriculture, as they move more and more slowly from Cabul to Delhi (to use modern names), and become permanent settlers. For with the permanent home rises the local god, Indra the war-god, true image of the monsoon-fury; Çiva, the combination of a Vedic storm-god and a local aboriginal disease-god. So with all the gods potent at a later date. Every one is local, not one is inherited. Even Agni, the fire-god, inwrought as he is into every sacrifice, and having thus a firmer hold than had most of his peers, becomes a mere godkin, the servant of the great local gods who arise in settled communities. These latter appear even in the Veda itself, the first insignificant 'god of the field,' and such prototypes of the Bhairobas and Viṭṭhalas (modern Viṭhobas) of to-day, as at Pandharpur in the Deccan.

The Veda thus presents us with at least three strata of divinities; the newest local gods, already potent, and destined in the end to be most powerful; the intermediate gods, derived from the last protracted local settlements and not yet forgotten, Soma, and Trita, and perhaps the storm-god Parjanya; and the still older gods which the Aryans revered even before their separation, which alone they could have preserved (as they had no images) through all changes of time and place, sky-god, fire, and ghosts. The venerable position, then, of the sky-god depends on the economic position of the people who worshipped him as the god

they always had with them. He naturally and inevitably superseded, in the grandeur of his history as well as in the loftiness of his physical attributes, all the merely local deities which the nation found on its route, adopted, and abandoned again, as they successively passed into, through, and out of their spheres of divine influence. It was only when the Aryans remained permanently stationary that they could adopt a permanent local god. As soon as they did so, this god, as is always the case, began to gain ascendancy over the sky-god and over Agni, and finally outstripped them both in the race for popularity, only to be in turn dethroned as the people passed again into a new environment. But in this and in all subsequent moves the old gods were no longer obnoxious to the chances of fickle piety, for literature now had them comparatively safe. Even with this safeguard, however, Varuṇa becomes before very long a mere god of waters, and Dyāus like Zeus is degraded to a Hermes-like thief.

On one aspect of the case I have scarcely touched. To become settled is to be agricultural. Now the settled condition of agriculturists raises a great crop of local earthly divinities. The peoples of the Rig-Veda are in a transition state, represented now as tending and raping flocks, now as reaping fields; at one time as still in transit across the Puñjāb, at another as permanently located. In this shifting of economic conditions there is reason to anticipate exactly what we find at this epoch. The figures of the ancient sky-god and fire-god are still held in greatest reverence, though already decadent in popularity. But what is most important is that the older gods are no longer unique in being historical gods. For the people are at least so thoroughly settled that they regard the local gods also as historical. In other words, the latter have already begun to become such inherited divinities as Dyāus and Agni, and in less degree Trita and Soma. But at the same time they are local, the reflex of the very conditions in which the worshipper lives, vivid personalities, near and real. When this happens, more important than the upper god becomes the god that holds life and death in his hands as the monsoon comes on, later, as the season of disease begins to slay. The god that answers to the environment, the local god, first Indra, then Īiva, becomes most important. And as Īiva rises, the sky-god falls, for the Aryans never again migrated beyond the reach of the local conditions into which they had now entered, descending as they did from healthy uplands to a land of monsoon and fever.