

LECTURE II

SACRIFICE IN ANIMISM AND LOWER POLYTHEISM

THE contrasts which separate the savage from the civilised man are numerous and very emphatic. His ways are not our ways, his thoughts are not our thoughts. His gods are devils in our esteem, while "no spiritual being in his mythology possesses the characteristics of Satan." His religion is expressed in very revolting orgies and ferocious rites, involving the immolation of human victims, and tortures inflicted upon himself. Strangest of all, his worship in some cases is directed only to powers that are malevolent, for he reasons that it would be wasted upon the friendly and is only required to buy off the hostile.¹ Yet in spite of contradictions which seem to imply only antipodal relations to him, we are compelled, as soon as he confronts us in his wretchedness, to admit his claim to essential brotherhood with us. For, after all, the terms "savage," "barbarian," "civilised," applied to different sections of mankind, are not absolute but relative. They

¹ Bancroft, *Native Races of the Origin of Civ.*, p. 202, 4th ed.; Tylor *Pacific*, vol. ii. p. 1; Lubbock, *Prim. Cult.*, vol. ii. pp. 296-7.

designate only broad and shifting stages of human history. On the surface of the highest civilisation are found resemblances to barbarism which are as striking as its contrasts, and we have only to pierce it but very slightly to discover unmistakable traces of not very ancient savagery.

The attention which has been increasingly directed to those suggestive resemblances indicates an entirely new departure in the study of religion. Following the lead given long ago by Clement and Eusebius,¹ Outram and Spencer² became the pioneers of the science of Comparative Religion. Their range of research was limited to the classical literature of Greece and Rome, and the writings of the Jewish Rabbins; but now the recovery of the great literatures and monuments of Egypt and of the East has not only enlarged the field of research, it has also enabled us to verify or correct at first hand what their authorities only learned from hearsay. In addition the intellectual horizon includes peoples who have left behind them neither literature nor monuments, and it is maintained by some prominent expounders of the new science, that every inquiry into religion should either start from the beliefs and rites of such peoples, or should be constantly controlled and checked by reference to them.³ The aim is to discover what are called primitive beliefs, and it is assumed that these are more likely to be found in the unwritten traditions of barbarous peoples than in the oldest litera-

¹ *Stromata*; *Præp. Evangelii*.

² *Op. cit. supra*; also Fontanelle, *Origin of Fables*.

³ Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, pref. p. viii.

ture extant. The coarse superstition of the savage is thus for scientific purposes as valuable as the religion of the most civilised of ancient nations. Yea, one volume of folk-lore and custom gathered from the most abject aboriginal tribes may outweigh in respect of materials a whole library of sacred books of the East.

While neither supporting nor controverting the theory that the crude conceptions of the savage represent the germs out of which during innumerable ages of struggle our highest religious beliefs have been developed, we thankfully avail ourselves of such light as Mannhardt,¹ Bancroft, Tylor, Lubbock, M'Lennan, Frazer, and many others have thrown upon the sacrifice of peoples found in the lowest strata of humanity. Our most correct knowledge of what man is must be derived not merely from contemplation of the height to which he has risen, but also of the depth from which he has sprung, or into which he has fallen. Nothing which man in the lowest stage of existence has thought or felt about religion can be useless or unimportant for us to know. If we accept the unity of the human race as a clearly established fact, if we believe that all over the world, in spite of much external diversity, the life in every human being indicates a common fountain, manifests the same ancestral taint and points forward to a common destiny, then there is not a feature even of savage humanity without significance for us, nor is

¹ Mannhardt, *Der Baum-Kultus der Germanen und ihrer Nachbarstämme*, 1875; *Antike Wald- und Feld-Kulte*, 1877; *Mythologische Forschungen*, 1884.

there a savage custom, however revolting, from which some lesson may not be drawn. If only we have sufficient patience to consider, and sufficient sympathy to interpret them, we shall find that while the rites are rude and most disgusting, the beliefs which inspired them, and the intention which they expressed, may be regarded as crude and embryonic types of the Faith which all over the world is being accepted as the true ground of human hope, the true source of human comfort.

It is a significant fact that what has been called "the abstruse metaphysical doctrine of the Atonement" has only to be properly presented to savage peoples to be readily apprehended and heartily believed. The history of missions powerfully instructs us that the secret of the success of Christianity is the revelation of the Cross of its Founder. Even in grades of humanity as low as those represented by hordes herding like animals, having no fixed habitations, but only coverings of bark and leaves, and holes in the earth when these materials fail them, the story of the Divine sacrifice has only to be told to produce an effect like that of a new creation. Intelligence has been evoked, the moral sense, so feeble as to seem extinct, has been quickened, the brute in the nature sinks, and the man, conscious that he is not what he ought to be, rises and flees to the Divine mercy. What some anthropologists assert the savage never manifests, the sense of sin, missionaries everywhere assure us the savage experiences when confronted by that supreme expression of

love given in the substitution of the Divine man for the sinner.¹ These are truths which mankind are capable of receiving only at certain stages of intellectual development. "The soil of ideas is the same,"² but like the soil it has to be cultivated before the germs of certain truths can sprout in it. There is a long series represented in the development of the earth's capacity to produce at first only the microscopic growths found upon the summits of our oldest mountains, and then ages after the rich grass or grain covering its plains. In like manner there is a great and prolonged travail of intellectual culture represented by many stages, between man's earliest recorded explanations of natural phenomena and those of our latest science. Now the marvel is that while the minds of even civilised men have to be educated to receive and believe certain scientific truths, this so-called abstruse dogma of the sacrifice of God for man commends itself to the most degraded members of the human race, and proves among them, as it does among the most highly cultured, "the power of God unto salvation." This is a fact in religion of no mean significance, and however it is to be explained we seem justified in finding in it a manifest adaptation of the truth disclosed to man's elemental necessities as a moral and spiritual creature.

It is so difficult to ascertain the beliefs of savages, that it is no wonder some observers have concluded that they have no religion at all. This conclusion is as erroneous as the other one, that they have no moral

¹ *History of Moravian Missions*, pp. 198, 281, 373, 440.

² Müller, *Physical Religion*, p. 211.

standard, and are even devoid of the moral sentiment. Though not expressed in formal precepts, savages have a very binding standard in an uncodified consensus of public opinion. A savage, far from being free to do as he pleases, is governed by a most complicated set of customs, which form in some cases the most despotic of tyrannies. He has a strong sense of law, thus understood, though his sense of right may be so feeble as to regard theft and murder virtues if practised against strangers. The fact that he regards them as tokens of "vir" in the individual, is itself an evidence of the moral sentiment either imperfectly developed or greatly corrupted.¹ And so it is in regard to religion. The very rudest savage practises periodically certain rites, which, when properly examined, are found to be rooted in religious beliefs. His religion, however, is a mystery, in which the stranger and the uninitiated have neither lot nor part. Their presence when he practises it would be profanity; and the divulgence of its secrets is considered a sacrilege to be avoided, even as it would be punished by his own death. It is difficult, therefore, in many cases to ascertain the real intention of his ceremonies; and the difficulty is increased by the fact that he has no organised system of belief. His mental condition is chaotic, his thoughts are confused and corrupt, broken together without order or any attempt at classification. There are great differences in the degree of intellectual capacity among savages, but there

¹ Quatrefages, *L'Espèce Humaine*, 482; Tylor, *Primitive Culture*, 10th edition, 1890, p. vol. i. p. 380.

are several conceptions common to all, which, as regulating their relations and the daily business of life, may be regarded as their unformulated creed.

The religion of the savage is best described by the word Animism. It is founded upon the very realistic opinion that in everything complex there is a spirit, which forms its unity.¹ Any object which strikes his ignorant imagination forcibly enough, induces the belief that it is as living and conscious as he is himself. He conceives of himself and of it as doubles, having within them miniature selves of more subtle and less tangible materials, moving and inspiring all their actions. Thus, all things in the world are to him personal beings, moved and directed as he is, not by soul, in our sense of the word as immaterial and immortal, but by this double inner self, incorporate in them. It is his way of explaining his personal activity, and the inactivity of death, which to him is the result of the inner self departing or being willed or stolen away. As to where the inner self goes after death, he does not generally know, and is not curious to inquire, for to him the only life worth living is the life that now is, and his vigilant endeavour is to save and keep it, by preventing the inner self from leaving or from being extracted from his body by an enemy.²

And his enemies are innumerable, being represented

¹ Renan, *History of the People of Israel*, i. p. 35.

² Burton, *Abcokuta*, i. p. 204; Williams, *Fiji and Fijians*, i. p. 242; Mariner, *Tonga Islands*,

ii. p. 138; *Journal of Anthropol. Instit.*, viii. p. 282; *Relations of the Jesuits in Canada, 1639*, p. 43; Rinks, *Tales and Traditions of the Eskimo*.

not only by the visible and tangible, but by such invisible and intangible forces as the stormy wind and the thunder, and the ghostly shadows that haunt him in nightmare. The events in his dreams are considered by him to be as real as those of his waking hours.¹ Everything strange to him is regarded as sinister in its intent; every unknown face is that of an enemy, or of one who is bent more upon injuring than helping him. He is thus living in a world all the more dangerous that the distinction drawn by us between the natural and supernatural is hardly conceivable by him. And yet he can afford to move about in it with considerable confidence, for all the powers or beings by which he is surrounded, even when hostile, are believed to occupy relations of tolerable equality to himself. Some may be confessed to be stronger or more ferocious than himself, but they all act upon impulses and from motives like his own, and all are as liable as he is to be influenced by fear, and hope, and self-interest. His relations to them are so conceived that he imagines he can not only match, but even manipulate them to his own advantage. If they do not yield to his persuasions, or promises, or coaxings, he can protect himself against their ill-will, and even compel them to do or to grant what he wishes.²

This he believes he can do by the power of his fetish. Now Fetishism, though generally referred to as a very low form of religion, can hardly be called a religion.

¹ Lubbock, *Origin of Civilisation and Primitive Condition of Man*, 4th edition, p. 214 seq.

p. 31; Keary, "Early Religious Development," *Nineteenth Cent. Mag.*, August 1878.

² Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, i.

Lubbock¹ has properly described it as essentially "anti-religious," for though recognising a ritual of sacrifice, the savage practises it not as worship to express homage to a superior, but as sorcery to control or coerce him. The fetish, though it may be a likeness or substitute of the object which he fears, is the reverse of an idol. It is not an object of reverence commanding a worshipper, but a means devised to capture an invisible power, and to keep it under control. The savage employs it just as he uses some rude imitation which he has made of his enemy, or when, unequal to that effort, just as he uses some part of his enemy which he has been able to procure. Armed with a few of his hairs, a bit of his nails, a little of his saliva, or a crumb of his food,² he believes that he has his enemy thoroughly at his command; for what he does to these things is so felt by his enemy that, when they are injured he is wounded, and when they are destroyed he cannot survive. The ritual of fetishism, therefore, is not religious either in character or intent, but purely magical. Supported by it the savage can confront even the play of the mighty forces of nature without much concern. Unlike his civilised brother, who, the more he knows and learns to utilise the laws of nature, is the more impressed by his helplessness, he, with a very limited range of thought and imagination, believes that he can influence the course of nature to an almost limitless extent.

¹ *Loc. cit.* p. 343.

Inhabitants, pp. 86, 167; Turner, *Nineteen Years in Polynesia*, p.

² Taylor, *New Zealand and its* 90.

Just as he may overpower his foes in flesh and blood by force, or circumvent them by cunning, so he fancies that by spells and charms he can reduce and keep under his control the forces which we consider unmanageable. He has traditions of an ancestor who caught and wrestled with the sun till he forced him to reveal his name, and so lamed him as to make him ever after move through the sky at a more moderate pace. He has heard of another hero who shut up the sun in a cave for weeks; and so it is easy for him to believe that by certain rites he can delay or hasten the close of day, cause the rain to fall, and rouse or silence the storm. In like manner he can defend himself against the ills which we consider the inevitable entail or heritage of human life. Sickness and death in the savage conception are not natural events, but the work of an enemy; but by the medicine of his wise man sickness can be extracted or expelled from the body; and when death has become the lot of a kinsman, the foe who caused it can similarly be found out and destroyed.¹

In practising fetishism and shamanism—which latter is just a higher form of fetishism designed to influence and compel gods not identified with the powers of nature, but supposed to be superior to man and to be

¹ Williams, *Polynesian Researches*, vol. ii. p. 228; Shortland, *Traditions of the New Zealanders*, p. 117; Bonwick, *Daily Life of the Tasmanians*, p. 178; Dubois, *Description of the People of India*, p. 347; De Brosses, *Du Culte des dieux fetiches*;

Smyth, *Aborigines of Victoria*, vol. ii. p. 384; Curt, *Australian Races*, vol. iii. p. 145; Astley, *Collection of Voyages*, vol. ii. p. 217; Lubbock, *Origin of Civilisation*, p. 328; Frazer, *Golden Bough*, i. pp. 24, 25.

living in a higher world of their own—savage and barbarous peoples act in self-defence against powers believed to be dangerous, or likely to be used for their advantage.¹ The real religion, however, of a savage is the outcome of another belief, and is expressed by different rites. It is rooted in the peculiar conceptions which he has formed of his relations to the animal and vegetable kingdoms of nature. He is simply confused with a world of being from which we are separated by an abyss. All things animate and even inanimate, occupying as he thinks a common level of life and passion, are related to him as superiors, inferiors, or equals. He is distinguished from them not by his nature but only by his personality, and he treats them accordingly; those which he dreads because of their ferocity he propitiates, and he conciliates those which he must use for his sustenance. In felling a tree, or in slaying an animal he believes he exposes himself to the vengeance of its kindred just as if he had slain a man. So in all such cases he apologises for the act, entreats his victims not to be angry, and by various devices tries to appease them, and make compensation to their kin for their loss. Zoolatry is thus almost universal among savages, and instead of the fear of man being upon the animal, the fear of the animal is too much upon the man.²

¹ *Siberia and the Polar Sea*, p. 123; Graah, *Voyage to Greenland*, p. 123; Williams, *Fiji and the Fijians*, vol. i. p. 224; Myers, *The Greek Oracles*, pp. 7, 8.

² In cutting up animals for cooking, some savage tribes are very careful to lay aside the eyes, ears, lungs, and other special organs. Some tribes so

In addition to the creatures which have to be propitiated or conciliated when slain for the sake of their flesh or skin, there are particular animals which are never slain, and never molested because held to be sacred as kindred. They are considered to be related to the savage horde not "as a patron saint was adopted by a mediæval knight"¹ but in the most literal of senses. The blood in the veins of both is supposed to be identical; they believe that they are united by physical descent from it, or with it from a common ancestor. In some instances that human ancestor is supposed to live in the animal in disguise, and so not only the ancient doctrine of transmigration, but the modern theory of man's evolution from the animals, is believed and employed by the lowest savages to account for their origin.²

This phase of zoolatry, designated Totemism, prevailed among the North American Indians, and has been found in various parts of the world. Indeed traces or survivals of it are discoverable in the folk-lore and customs of the most civilised nations. The problem of

widely separated as the North American Indian and the Arabs will thus not eat of the "sinew of the thigh." In other cases not a bone of the animal must be broken; and in others again, when the carcass has been dismembered and the flesh has been consumed, the bones are carefully arranged in anatomical order, and buried so that the creature may find a resurrection in the under world. Brunton, *Myths*

of the New World, p. 279; Petittot, *Indian Traditions of N. W. Canada*, p. 32; Hodgson, *Letters from North America*, vol. i. p. 244; Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, ii. p. 124, note p. 132; Robertson Smith, *Religion of the Semites*, p. 360, note.

¹ Bancroft, *Nat. Races*, vol. iii. p. 128.

² Schoolcraft, *Archæol.*, vol. v. p. 215; *Folk Lore Record*, vol. ii. p. 22.

its origin is admitted to be still unsolved. The practice of naming a man and his family after a particular animal instead of accounting for the superstition may have been originated by it. Herbert Spencer,¹ who finds its origin in a "misinterpretation of nicknames" of particular animals first applied to individuals, and afterwards confounded with their ancestors already revered, "attributes to verbal misunderstandings far more influence than in spite of the so-called comparative mythology, they ever seem to have exercised."² The hypothesis which founnds it in the desire to claim descent from the animals which are superior to man in strength, or cunning, or longevity,³ is contradicted by the fact that frequently the totem is a creature inferior to man as, for example, the turtle, the beaver, and even the mouse. One of the cleverest guesses is that lately advanced by Mr. Frazer,⁴ who accounts for it by the endeavour to guard the double or inner self by externalising and hiding it in some natural object. According to this superstition, traces of which survive in many of our own nursery tales, so closely connected is the man with the creature in which his life is supposed to be hid, that he will pant when it is chased, faint when it faints, and die if it be killed. And yet as long as it is uninjured he is believed to be invulnerable.⁵ This explanation throws

¹ *Principles of Sociology*, vol. 260, 334.

i. p. 367.

⁴ *The Golden Bough*, ii. pp.

² Frazer, Art. in *Ency. Brit.*, 279, 335.

vol. xxiii. pp. 467-476.

⁵ *Anthrop. Institute Rev.*, xv.

³ Lubbock, *loc. cit.* pp. 206, p. 416, and xviii. p. 56.

some light upon the yearly "dances" by which savage youths of both sexes are matriculated into the rights and responsibilities of clanship. Circumcision, the "savage rite of confirmation," is a prominent feature in these ceremonies, and through the operation the individual is admitted into the life of the tribe and hence of its totem, just as in the ancient mysteries candidates through severe exercise were initiated into communion with the god. The object of the whole function is said to be the extraction of the "double" and its transference to the totem. As it proceeds the youth is supposed to die, being really thrown into a deathlike trance, and his recovery, accounted as a resurrection, is attributed to fresh life infused into him from his totem. With good right therefore does he call himself ever after by its name, seeing he believes that he has died to his own old life, and lives only by the life which he has with it and from it.¹

Whatever be the explanation, Totemism is a phase of religion. The totem is regarded as so sacred on account of the mysterious connection existing between it and the savage clan that no member dare kill it, or eat of its flesh, or wear its skin.² If a god is conceived of apart from the totem, the animal is regarded as the living nexus between the god and the clan, and is treated not only with affection but reverence as more essential to the general welfare than any other kinsman. Rela-

¹ Chalmers, *Pioneering in New Guinea*, p. 85; Bentley, *Life on the Congo*, p. 78; Catlin, *North American Indians*, i. p. 36 seq.

² Casalis, *The Basutos*, p. 211; Livingstone, *Travels in South Africa*, p. 13; Dalton, *Ethnology. Description of Bengal*, p. 254.

tionship is determined by the totem, for the individual is born of its stock, and from it kinship is reckoned. All so related to the totem are mutually obliged to fight for and defend and avenge each other, while outside of that circle of kinship no obligation is acknowledged or even felt. "The sanctity of a kinsman's life and that of the totem are not two things but one; for ultimately the only thing that is sacred is the blood, which is identified with the common tribal life, and whoever partakes in that life is sacred in the estimation of all the clan."¹

Among our Aryan ancestors archaic worship was that of the family, and the earliest traceable sacrifice was the domestic meal; but savages have no family, the wife never eats with her lord, who feeds just when he can. Savages, however, are said to feast together as a clan upon certain occasions, and to these feasts only kinsmen are admitted. They are sacrificial in their import, for all slaughter of animals unless of those killed in hunting is serious, and a domestic animal can only be slaughtered with the consent of the clan, and for its use. According to the savage creed, feasting seals friendship, and maintains full and strong for the common benefit the life of all. If at such a feast the god was supposed to be present, it was not to ratify any compact between kinsmen, but as a kinsman to share with them what was provided, to renew mutual

¹ Prof. Robertson Smith, *Kinship and Marriage in Early Arabia*, p. 186 seq.; *Religion of the Semites*, pp. 82, 271; M'Lennan,

Worship of Plants and Animals; Fortnightly Review, October and November 1869, and February 1870.

obligations and promote solid fellowship.¹ So the savage idea of sacrifice, though involving an act of homage, is far removed from that of tribute rendered as tax, or from that of fine paid to appease wrath, or of bribe offered to secure goodwill. Rooted in confidence in the goodwill of the god as one with the clan and really interested in its welfare, the feast, no matter how revolting it may appear to us, is an act of communion, a sacrament rather than a sacrifice. It would indeed be illegitimate to connect their coarse conception of physical union with their totem with the idea of spiritual communion with Deity which inspires our loftiest act of Christian worship; but surely it is interesting to find in the very lowest strata of humanity the sense that through special exercises and acts, man, in virtue of one sphere of his nature, can hold intercourse with power believed to be divine. It is also worthy of note that such religion as does exist, instead of expressing abject terror of the gods, is inspired by trust in their kindly intent, and by desire to promote good fellowship with them.

The materials for an ordinary clan feast would, generally speaking, be such as could be offered to the totem, for upon no occasion could a savage eat of that which he could not present to it. Whatever the totem was supposed to affect would be acceptable, and specially acceptable would be the totem of a hostile or alien tribe. If the totem were carnivorous, flesh and blood would be shared with it; if the clan were cannibal,

¹ *Religion of the Semites*, p. 294.

they would feast with the god upon a human victim when such could be procured by the capture of an enemy or of a stranger. Not even cannibals, however, will eat the flesh of a kinsman whose life is the same as their own, and for the same reason the life of the sacred animal was strictly protected not merely by law but by religion. It was not only a crime which would surely be visited by the vengeance of man, but also a sacrilege which the god would severely punish by misfortune and fearful disaster. This belief, as far as zoolatry has left any traces of itself, appears to have been universal. Injury or slaughter inflicted upon the sacred animal was regarded as not only a criminal invasion of the sanctity of kinship, but also as an assault upon one on whose life and strength the health and prosperity of the whole clan depended. So unpardonable, therefore, was the atrocity that leprosy, madness, and dreadful death were considered its just, yea its natural penalty.¹

¹ Herodotus, ii. 47; Plutarch, *De Superstition.*, c. 10; and *Isis et Osiris*, 8; Ælian, *Nat. Anim.*, x. 18; Turner, *Samoa*, p. 17 *seq.*, p. 50 *seq.*; Mariner, *Tonga Islands*, i. 434, ii. 82, 222 *seq.*; M'Kenzie, *The Orange River*, p. 135; Frazer, *Golden Bough*, ii. p. 51; Art. "Totemism," *Ency. Brit.*, vol. xxiii. p. 468; Tylor, *Prim. Cult.*, ii. p. 213 *seq.*

In this belief Mr. Frazer and Professor Robertson Smith find the explanation of tabooed animals or creatures regarded as unclean. They suggest that a savage conception of sanctity and

uncleanness may not have been differentiated. The savage regards it dangerous to eat, or touch, or look at what he considers very sacred, just as if it was "uncanny." In Isaiah lxx. 3-4, and lxxvi. 3, 17, the eaters of the abominable sacrifices in the gardens are represented as saying: "Stand off, for we will sanctify them," in the heathen sense of injuring, not in the Bible sense of purifying. The savage's idea of uncleanness was as far removed from the biblical idea of it as was his idea of holiness. His ideas of both are said to have met in his

Yet although it was most sacred, as instinct with their own life and that of the god, there were occasions of public calamity when it must be slain in order to preserve them from destruction. It is to be observed that on all occasions, when under the pressure of necessity, it must give up its life for its clan, the savage made a sacrifice of its slaughter. It was slain with the greatest publicity, for as far as was possible every kinsman was held as a consenting party and made a partaker of the act, so that the responsibility for it was equally and universally distributed. The life was taken with the greatest precaution so as to clear the actual slayer of the charge of murder. Devices were resorted to, survivals of which are found in the altar rites of ancient Greece, by which the animal was made to appear a willing victim freely surrendering its life. In some cases the slayer was attacked; the axe which he had used was tried, condemned, and cast away; while over the victim as great lamentation was made as for a slain kinsman and chief.¹

conception of taboo, which, applied to animals, meant that they were sacrosanct rather than polluted. So originally the pig may have been forbidden to the Egyptians, as the bear was to the Iroquois, and the deer to the Khonds of India, because it was sacred. It was spared from slaughter and defended from injury because supposed to be the visible and essential bond be-

tween the clan and the god on whose life the prosperity of the clan depended. — Schoolcraft, *Indian Tribes*, ii. p. 49; Campbell, *Wild Tribes of Khandistan*, p. 26; Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, ii. 51 *seq.*; Art. "Taboo," *Ency. Brit.*, xxiii. pp. 15-18; Robertson Smith, *Religion of the Semites*, p. 272.

¹ Porphyry, *De Abstin.*, ii. 29 *seq.*; Pausanias, i. 24, 4, and i.

In addition to these exceptional occasions, when the animal, *although* sacred, was sacrificed for the common good, on the ground that necessity knows no law, there were periodical occasions when it was sacrificed just *because* it was sacred, and therefore the only proper victim. It had to yield its flesh and blood for its clan when in perfect health and strength, and entirely free from blemish or fault, because it thus embodied at its very best the life which was to be given for them. The whole aim of savage totemistic observance was to secure the healthy maintenance of the life-bond between the god and the clan. On this account the life which was so precious to them must be kept full and strong in the sacred animal. Their care of it was similar to the attention which the Egyptians lavished upon their sacred bulls; for by neither people was the sacred animal allowed to grow old, or to become feeble, or to die a natural death. Should that catastrophe occur, the consequences would be unspeakably evil, and so both peoples found a ready mode of averting it by the sacrifice of the animal before it showed the slightest symptom of decay. An opportunity was thus afforded of transferring its life into a more vigorous successor. If the victim was slain in a condition of disease or of declining strength, the life transferred would be correspondingly enfeebled, and so by killing it when free from every blemish, and from the slightest symptom of decline, they secured the

28, 10; Varro, *De Re Rustica*, ii. 5, 4; Robertson Smith, *Religion of the Semites*, p. 236 seq.; Frazer,

The Golden Bough, ii. p. 39 seq.; Lang, *Myth, Ritual, and Religion*, ii. p. 232.

transference of its life at the very best for revival in another and stronger embodiment.¹

The Egyptians maintained their sacred bulls in more than royal state and luxury for over twenty years, and then drowned them with great solemnity; but some barbarous peoples sacrificed their sacred animals annually, at periods marked by the lowering of the temperature and the fading and death of vegetation. The vastness of the scale upon which this yearly decay occurs, together with man's intimate dependence upon nature for subsistence, has always and everywhere affected powerfully the untutored mind. In such climatic conditions life is low, and mortality increases among ill-fed, scantily-clad, and rudely sheltered peoples. Their own lives and the life of all things seem to be imperilled, and the danger to nature and man must be averted at any cost. To this end the life that is most precious because most sacred, must be sacrificed; and more than sacrificed. Believing that they and the victim

¹ Probably this superstition accounts for the custom, to us so unnatural, of killing beloved parents and honoured chiefs and ministers of religion. Turner (*Samoa*, p. 335) tells us a Polynesian chief counted it a disgrace not to be buried alive; and that peoples, not savage like the Polynesian, but civilised like the East Indians, killed their kings and their priests in the fulness of their strength, has been abundantly proved by the many instances cited in the *Golden Bough*, vol. i. p. 214

seq., and ii. p. 220 *seq.* In some cases they had to commit suicide, when the limit of their supposed usefulness was reached; in others they were allowed to retain office only as long as they could defend their own life against violent assault. The reason in all such cases is found in the belief that the divine life was in them for the sake of those whom they ruled and served, and so it was essential that it should never be allowed to deteriorate.

had a life in common, they sought to obtain the incorporation with their own of the life which was slain on their behalf in the most realistic of ways. The sacred victim must not only give its life for them, it must give itself to them. They must eat of the flesh and drink of the blood of their sacrifice in order to having its life renewed in themselves. Such sacrifices were wholly consumed by the sacrificers, and after a most disgusting fashion. In the oldest form of Arab sacrifice, described by Prof. Robertson Smith,¹ the sacred animal was bound upon a rude altar of stone, and when the slaughterer had led the worshipper round it in procession to the chanting of spells, he inflicted the first wound, and "while the last words of the wild chant were upon the lips of the others, he hastened to drink the warm gushing blood. Forthwith all proceeded to hack the still living animal with their knives, and to devour the quivering flesh in such haste that in the short interval between the rise of the day-star, which marked the commencement of the rite, and the melting away of its rays in the sunrise, the entire body, skin, and entrails were consumed." Similar sacrifices—for example, that of a cow buffalo by the people of Todas, that of the lamb by the negro tribe of Morus, and notably that of the bear in Japan, described by Mrs. Gordon Cumming and by Miss Bird—present the same horrible features.² Yet when

¹ *Religion of the Semites*, pp. 301, 319.

² Bird, *Unbeaten Tracks in Japan*, 1885, pp. 269, 275 seq.; Reed, *Japan*, vol. i. p. 446; Mar-

shall, *Travels among the Todas*, p. 129 seq.; Felkins, "Notes on the Madi or Moru Tribe of Central Africa," *Proceed. Royal Society, Edin.*, vol. vii. 1882, p.

we master the revulsion excited by the record of such rites, and endeavour to inquire into their intention, we find that, though self-interest was the all-prevailing motive in them, the orgies were not attributable to cruel self-gratification. The desire to secure the life-powers of the sacred animal in all their strength, accounts for all that is revolting. Savages, who have to endure much physical suffering, make light of inflicting it; but their purpose in devouring the living flesh and warm blood of the victim was not to cause pain. They believed that thus they would recruit their own physical vigour from the source which they considered the most sacred.

For the same reason, when they performed such a sacrifice, they were careful to consume the whole carcase, so that none of its efficacy might be lost. What on any occasion they could not wholly eat, was scrupulously buried or destroyed; for, should an enemy get possession of a hair of the victim, or the least fragment of its bones, he could by sorcery work through it upon all of them the most deadly mischief, and render futile their most earnest endeavour to transfer to themselves the "vir" of their sacrifice.¹

386 seq.; *Golden Bough*, ii. 100 seq.

¹ The belief is widespread and deep rooted among barbarous peoples that the peculiar quality of an animal is transferred to the eater of it. The North American Indians loved venison because it made them swift; the South American Indians eschewed heavy

meat because it made them sluggish. The eating of hares and timorous creatures was supposed to make men faint-hearted, while the flesh and blood of lions, tigers, and wolves gave courage and vigour to the fearful and feeble. Cannibal savages everywhere, and some peoples not savages, have complimented their dead enemies

With their annual sacrifices, intended to reinforce the divine life in a savage clan, there was often associated the annual cleansing of the kraal and the expulsion of evils from the land. Weakness, sickness, and death being always attributed to sorcery or to the interference of malignant beings, a special endeavour was made upon such occasions to exorcise and banish them. All over the savage world the new year was inaugurated by ceremonies designed to secure this end. They were generally preceded or followed by a period of license, though among some North American tribes

by devouring their hearts; yea, some tribes have eaten the ashes of their forefathers, to whom they paid Divine honours, in order to become possessed of their virtues. — Bancroft, *Nat. Races of the Pacific*, iii. 316; Dalton, *Ethnology of Bengal*, p. 38; Adair's *History of the American Indians*, p. 133; St. John, *Life in the Forests of the Far East*, i. pp. 186, 206; Ellis, *Polynesian Researches*, i. 358; Callaway, *Nursery Tales and Traditions, and History of the Zulus*, p. 163, note; Buchanan, *The Shire Highlands*, p. 138; Frazier, *The Golden Bough*, i. p. 166, and ii. 85 seq.

The same beliefs which inspired the savage to devour his living sacrifice, accounts for all customs by which men seek to unite themselves with one another, or with a god. The blood covenant with the living, in which two persons become one by mingling or drinking each other's blood; the

mourner's covenant with the dead, sealed by the shedding of his own blood upon the corpse, are traceable to it. In like manner, tattooing among savages at puberty, like the stigmata of the Syrian priests, is a symbol and pledge that a life bond has been established between the totem or god and the worshipper. But wherever there was laceration needed, the wounding had almost no value, though the blood set free and its application had much. The savage revered it as the life; and in sacrificing the sacred animal, it was not its death that was supposed to do good, but the life which he desired to appropriate. — Reville, *Hibbert Lecture*, 1884, p. 219; Robertson Smith, *Religion of the Semites*, pp. 303, 306, 316; *Kinship and Marriage in Early Arabia*, p. 213 seq.; Spener, *De Leg. Heb.*, ii. 14; Trumbull, *The Blood Covenant*, p. 7 seq.

they were introduced by scrupulous cleansing of the wigwam and all its furniture, and by purification of the body, not only externally, but also internally by the use of cathartics. In such ceremonies the sacred animal was sacrificed with special solemnity, and upon it was laid the accumulated misfortunes and troubles of the whole tribe. The custom, however, was not universally associated with the death of a victim. Some South Sea Islanders, and some tribes in Borneo, used to pack the evils that afflicted them in a prao and send them out to sea ; and some aboriginal tribes in India still inclose them in a jar, which they consign to the river. In a great many instances reported from all quarters, however, a victim was demanded. By some tribes a miserable human being was actually slaughtered ; by others the human victim was bound to a stake along with the animal one, and when it was slain he was driven away into the jungle or desert, as one whom no one dare lodge or feed or even converse with, because he had become accursed on account of the load of evil which he was supposed to bear away.¹

In all these cases, pathetic travesties of solemnities described in the Old Testament, the sacrifice though piacular was performed without any moral intention. It was not offered to procure forgiveness for offences then confessed, or to reconcile the offerers with an

¹ Bancroft, *Native Races*, etc., iii. 168 ; Frazer, *Totemism*, p. 48 ; *The Golden Bough*, ii. pp. 48, 203, 206 ; Robertson Smith, *Religion of the Semites*, p. 386 ;

Crowther, *The Gospel on the Banks of the Niger*, pp. 343-345 ; *Allgemeine Missions-Zeitschrift*, xii. (1885), pp. 476, 478.

alienated god. It is a misuse of language to call it the "savage day of atonement,"¹ for of the expiatory rites described in the Old Testament the savage had no conception, and such ideas as he formed of his own could not possibly have intruded into the ceremonials described in the Old Testament. His sacrifices proceeded from no sense of wrong-doing or wrong-being in our sense of the word. He simply desired to defend himself by purging his land of the ills to which human life is liable. When the sacred animal died to give its life for and to him, it was understood to do so in the most realistic sense. So if he had evil to expel from his village it was only such evil as is represented by trouble or disease or death, or by the hostile powers which brought them upon him, and he sought to expel them by no other means than magic and sorcery.

It is surely, however, a fact of great and solemn import, that in the very lowest strata or debris of humanity, there are found ideas and sentiments suggesting analogies to the lofty spiritual truths of our religion. The customs are horrible, but the beliefs upon which they rest, if they have been correctly interpreted for us, constitute a powerful appeal to our sympathetic consideration. In reading such expositions of savage religious rites as we have referred to, we are always haunted by the fear that the interpreter has unconsciously put into them not a little of what he professes to have found. It is very difficult to guard against the *subreptio vilis*, and to keep ourselves from

¹ *Religion of the Semites*, pp. 389, 392.

reading into them our own beliefs. We do well, however, to deal generously with the very lowest religions, and to interpret them more by their reach than by their actual grasp. In any case there have been brought to light by these researches materials which can surely be utilised by the Christian missionary in repairing the desolations and in rebuilding the ruined shrines of humanity. In their most corrupted or least developed form they indicate capacity for appropriating and assimilating the regenerating truths of our religion. For example, the savage's concept of himself as double is either a lingering trace in his nature of the truth of the existence of the soul which has been imprinted upon the constitution of all men, or it is a prophetic feeling after it. His confession that he is not sufficient to preserve or keep alive his own soul, and his endeavour to find an external security for it, suggest surely our own daily confession, and also the blessed sacrament, through which in infancy, our life was committed to the protection and worship of the Holy Trinity. It seems almost blasphemous to associate his coarse and childish superstition with our sublime belief in spiritual oneness with Christ, with whom in God "our life is hid."¹ And yet St. Paul might have employed it to teach the savage to trust for salvation in One whom he knew to be able "to keep the deposit which he had committed to His care."² Then, the savage's belief in the unity of all the members of his clan with one another and with the god is an "unconscious prophecy," though monstrously expressed,

¹ Coloss. iii. 3.

² 2 Timothy i. 12.

of one of the first truths proclaimed in our Bible, and which lies at the root and is the inspiration of Christianity. It proves that the consecration of kinship is one of those thoughts which live imperishable even in sections of humanity so degraded that the family, man's oldest and most divine institution, does not seem to exist among them. It was not in his private capacity, but as one of the clan, that he was admitted to the feast of the god, and by the act of partaking he bound himself by the closest obligations of brotherhood to every member of it. Christianity is the only religion which aims at the consecration of the family and the sanctification of the community. The worship of God as our heavenly Father involves confession that we have all men for our brethren, and therefore that "no man liveth unto himself." Christianity certainly is far from having realised its ideal—the universal kinship of men in communion with Christ—but it alone of all religions has the potential promise of ultimate success, for the essential nexus between humanity and the Creator is revealed in its Author even "Christ who is our life,"¹ who came that through His death "we might have life, and have it more abundantly."²

So, as we contemplate those dreadful sacraments in flesh and blood, those horrible sacrifices performed with mingled lamentation and rejoicing—lamentation over a kinsman who had died for his kin, and subsequent rejoicing for life renewed in them through his

¹ Coloss. iii. 4.

² John x. 10.

death—can we help thinking of the Divine reality on which our faith is based. The truth of God dying for men in order to give to them eternal life is foreshadowed in forms most materialistic and monstrous, far removed from the moral and spiritual ideas which the Christian dogma of the Divine sacrifice derives from a profound sense of human sinfulness and Divine holiness. Let it be remembered that the Divine reality never entered the mind of any man, even the purest and loftiest to conceive. The purest symbolism of Levitical sacrifice no more resembles the reality of which it was appointed a type, than the savage's attempted picture or model resembles the man whom he seeks to portray. In regard to symbolism it is only by degree that the highest differs from the lowest. And if the Jew was trained by his symbolic religion to receive the reality which fulfilled it, in the savage in like manner has been preserved the capacity to recognise and embrace the truth which abolishes his revolting rites. A savage could recognise in a statue sculptured by Phidias the ideal which his own undeveloped imagination and skill were too rude and poor to suggest. So when the revelation of Christ, who gave Himself for a race He was not ashamed to call His brethren, dawns upon his soul, the savage will at once spring up from his debased and debasing zoolatry to adore Him as the God of his salvation.

The customs which thus far we have been considering are those of peoples without a history, for history implies a past, and into the past of the savage we cannot

penetrate. When discovered in his native haunts he is found to be just what he must have been for many previous ages. For how long he has come and gone "counting the winters by the moons and the sleeps, hunting or hunted, feasting or fasting,"¹ we can only speculate. Living like the beasts and the birds in respect of lack of restraint, he has to submit to their unprogressiveness; for he scoops out his cave, and builds his wigwam precisely as the birds have woven their nests, and the beasts have dug their dens since their creation. Where law in our sense of the word is unknown, real freedom and advance are impossible. So the savage wherever and whenever he is discovered confronts us as a creature who has only a present; for alas, judging from the corrosive and destructive effect of our civilisation upon him, we cannot predict for him much of a future. The savage, however, is not the type of heathenism, he represents its residuum or degradation. Above his condition there is an ascending series, in which through barbarism and the rude beginnings of culture, we reach a high degree of civilisation. And, as throwing important light upon the relations subsisting between the sacrificial rites of savagery and those of the highest heathen religions, what has been preserved to us of the sacred customs of the Aborigines of America, especially of those who attained to the civilisation represented by Mexico and Peru, will be found worthy of study.

Before the advent of the Europeans the vast continents of North and South America were densely

¹ Bancroft, *Nat. Races*, vol. i. p. 155.

inhabited by many types of humanity, reflecting on their lowest extreme—in the Shoshone cave-dwellers—modes of life almost brutal. Only one of the many varieties among them, the Eskimo, has been clearly identified with any people in the old world, though several tribes of them buried their dead with suttee rites similar to those practised among the ancient Aryans. The great majority of them are grouped under the designation Red Skins, and their condition is described as savage or barbarous. One stock of them, however, quite distinct from either Red Skins or Eskimo, attained in Central America a degree of civilisation which might have instructed Europe of that era. The birthplace of this people was believed by themselves to be the Isthmus; their oldest ruins are found at Palenque, and the centre of their widest influence was Yucatan. There, cut off from the world by the sea, and by the profoundest savagery around them, they prospered in a rich maize growing land. Migrating northward, and eventually surging southward again, they made for themselves a kind of history, divided into the Toltec, Chichemec, and latterly the Aztec period, in which the Spaniards invaded them. It is said that the Aztec period represented deterioration and relapse from the higher civilisation attained by the Toltecs several centuries before, but what was its origin, and what were the successive stages in its development there is little hope of discovering at a date so remote from even their own traditionally historic epoch.¹

¹ Bancroft, *Nat. Races*, vol. i. pp. 42, 126; ii. p. 84 seq.; iii. 310.

The discovery of this people was sudden, and the wonder occasioned by it was very great, but alas, over the rising of this strange world, the eclipse fell very speedily. Mexico and Peru simply withered away under the touch of their rapacious invaders, and yet the condition of things which met the gaze of the destroyers lasted sufficiently long for them to depict it. The Mexicans had no written records, but only some rude paintings and hieroglyphs; and the only chronicles found among the Peruvians were tallies or thongs, with a peculiar system of knots. In the narratives of the Spaniards we have only traditions of these peoples, and yet, as the customs and ceremonies which they described were actually observed by them, we learn from them something concerning ancient religion which we would not have known so well had we only the monuments and literatures of the Old World to examine. There, in the sixteenth century of our era, were actually witnessed phases of nature worship which Asia and Egypt and Europe of the historic period had long outgrown. In the Old World, nations, on account of their proximity and mutual relations, corrected each other's extravagances, supplemented each other's defects, and helped each other's progress. The more monstrous manifestations of physiolatry which at one period were common to all of them were sooner or later modified so as to survive only in symbol. In the Americas there was no such check and no such stimulus. There was no civilisation around the Mexicans to compete with them. If their own had a higher and better past, then, as in the

case of the Aryans in their descent into India, the memory of it did not suffice to check deterioration through contact with only inferior tribes. In any case, we have in the Aztec religion the reality of nature worship when left untrammelled and uninfluenced by any higher cult.

In Mexico the Spaniards were confronted with polytheism, not in the higher forms which it assumed in the historic periods of the Old World, but in the lower phases reflected in survivals of the prehistoric ages. The polytheism of the Aztec was superior to the animism of the savage, for it was the worship not of individual physical objects, but of the most general and imposing physical phenomena. No particular animal or tree was conceived of as divine, but the life of nature in general, which seemed to have annually a birth and death and resurrection, was so regarded. Particular elements like the wind and the rain, particular objects like the sun, which had power over earth to fertilise it, over the animals to make them multiply, and over men themselves to further or hinder their happiness, were addressed and worshipped as dominant deities. In this stage of religious thought "there is a general tendency to clothe all such abstractions in concrete forms, and that generally in the form of the thinker."¹ Yet though the conception of the god is not zoomorphic like that of the savage, but anthropomorphic, his essential character remains unaffected, so that, though conceived of in the form of a man,

¹ Reville, *Hibbert Lectures*, 1885, pp. 40, 248.

he is no more judged according to the standard of man than is the capricious power of nature which he personifies. Where men personify and deify the natural forces by which they are surrounded, their creations, though superior to themselves as regards longevity and power, are inferior to them in character, and quite upon a level with them in respect of predilections and dislikes. In regard to appetites and inclinations, these gods are supposed to conform closely to their worshippers. They are therefore addressed by them in epithets of praise and compliment, and they are honoured with such gifts as are acceptable to themselves or are required for their own maintenance. So since the pleasure of eating choice food takes foremost rank in the estimation of uneducated humanity, it was natural that food and drink oblations should be so frequent and important in polytheistic rites.¹ And in like manner, considering the strength of the sexual appetite, we need not wonder at the almost universal dedication of women to the gods, reserved alive for "brides of the sun," as in Peru, or as in Mexico sent regularly to them by immolation.

Such sacrifices may be described as ordinary or honorific; the extraordinary or piacular sacrifices of polytheism are clearly related to those of animism. In polytheism certain animals which could not be eaten for food, or even used upon ordinary occasions to furnish the table of the god, were upon certain occasions sacrificed to particular gods, and partaken of by

¹ Monier Williams, *Religious Life and Thought in India*, p. 6.

the sacrificers. Each god had a favourite animal dedicated to him, and he was often designated by an epithet indicating his predilection for it.¹ These epithets, such as "goat eater," "dog eater," "cannibal," and the symbols of sacred animals found associated with particular gods, are supposed to indicate something more than the belief that the special animal was an acceptable victim. The favourite bird or beast is alleged to correspond to the stage in which the god was believed to be incorporate in that bird or beast. It is sacrificed to him in polytheism, but in animism he, in the form of that creature, is sacrificed himself, not in spite, but because of his divinity, to the end that his tribal kin might continue vigorous, and that nature might be maintained perennially in her productive power.²

Here perhaps we discover the origin of human sacrifice which has left horrid traces of itself in the most cultured forms of polytheism. Wherever the spirit of vegetation has been personified and deified we may be prepared to find human sacrifices offered to it. Of the sacredness of life in general, and of human life in particular, savage and barbarous peoples have not our estimate. A man is protected simply because he is a kinsman; if he is a stranger his life will be of far less account than that of some animal. In the rudest stages of polytheism human victims were regularly slaughtered to promote the growth and ripening of the

¹ Döllinger's *Heidenthum und Judenthum*, p. 530.

² Hera, designated as *αίγιοφάγος* at Sparta, Pausanias, iii. 15, 9;

Apollo, *δωροφάγος* at Elis, Athenæus, 346; Artemis, *καπροφάγος* in Samos. See *Golden Bough*, i. 328-9 note.

crops. Conceiving of the life of the maize as that of a person passing through the whole course of existence between seedtime and harvest, the Mexicans sacrificed newborn babes when it was sown, children when it sprouted, youths when it eared, and old men when it was fully ripe. In Egypt, in very ancient times, red-haired men, representing the red ripening grain, were burned in harvest, and their ashes were scattered with winnowing fans over the fields. Indeed, from all parts of the barbarous world evidence in abundance could be cited that human victims were thus periodically sacrificed to the spirit of the crop in order to secure its fertility.¹

In some of these instances the ritual is significant of an intention other than that of sacrificing to the spirit of vegetation. As late as 1837 the Pawnees, following a very ancient and uninterrupted custom, were found sacrificing a Sioux girl who had been most carefully tended for months, and kept in ignorance of her doom. On the fatal day, after being gaily attired, she was conducted by the chief round the villages, and presented with a gift from each wigwam. Then, after being tortured by roasting over a fire, she was shot by many arrows. Her heart was torn out and eaten, and her warm flesh, cut in small pieces from the bones, was taken in baskets to the corn gardens, where the blood was squeezed out of them over the mounds in which the grain was being planted. A similar sacrifice of a

¹ Bastian, *Culturländer des alten Amerika*, ii. 630; De Leon's *Travels*, translated by Markham, Hakluyt Society, 1864, p. 203.

young man in the fields at seedtime, designated "the boiling of the corn," prevailed in South Africa; while in India the Khonds are described as having offered to the earth goddess by even crueller rites a youth who had previously been most delicately nourished and treated with reverence. In all these cases the treatment of the victims previous to the sacrifice, the homage paid to them, the blessing expected from them as they were being carried to their torture, and the intrinsic power which their flesh and blood was believed to exercise directly over the growth of the crops, indicate that they were sacrificed because they were believed to be in a peculiar sense divine. There was manifestly a confusion of the victim with the god, and the sacrifice was theanthropic in the thought of the sacrificer.¹

For human sacrifice another origin must be sought than in the cannibalism of the worshipper. It was offered periodically, and in some cases constantly, by some nations to whom cannibalism was an abomination, and by others who were neither savage in their habits nor cruel in their character. The Mexicans were full of tenderness and consideration for the poor, the sick, and the aged, for whose benefit they maintained asylums. During the horrors of famine, when their capital was besieged, though the streets were found by their conquerors literally strewn with corpses, not a token was discovered that the Mexicans in their

¹ Schoolcraft, *Personal Memoirs*, p. 614; James, *Expedition to the Rocky Mountains*, ii. p. 80; Arbousset, *Tour to the N.E. of the*

Cape, p. 58; Campbell, *Wild Tribes of Khondistan*, p. 112; Macpherson, *Memorials of Service in India*, p. 113 seq.

terrible straits had resorted to human flesh for their sustenance. And yet, not only was human sacrifice among them simply frightful in its amount, but they were also in religion cannibals. Upon solemn occasions unless they partook of the flesh of the victim, the sacrifice would have been considered incomplete. The prevalence among them of the horrid custom must therefore have been due to the belief in its peculiarly sacramental efficacy. They sacrificed and partook of the human victim with the same intention which made the savage seek communion in the flesh and blood of his sacred animal for the renewal of his own life, or for the revival of the life of nature.¹

There is a wide gap between human sacrifice offered in this belief and for this purpose, and such sacrifices as are described in the *Iliad* and *Aeneid* as offered to propitiate offended gods. In the phase of humanity reflected in the epics of Homer and Virgil, man's estimate of himself is very considerably superior to that of the savage, and he manifests a stronger sense of responsibility. His religious ideas have been so affected by his moral development that he will only resort to human sacrifice upon solemn and critical occasions. In all serious emergencies man is regarded as the proper victim, for he is the most precious gift the sacrificer can offer, being one in whom he may be said to give himself. In this gap—and it is a wide one—the Mexican religion is found as a specimen of polytheism

¹ Helps, *Spanish Conquest in Conquest of Mexico*, ii. p. 278
America, ii. p. 522; Prescott, *seq.*

superior to, yet having much in common with, the animism of savages. Its axiom that human sacrifices alone were efficacious was not founded upon the belief that man was man's dearest offering, but upon the belief that the offering was in a sense divine. The gods were not conceived of as in the likeness of the beast, they were regarded as so superior to man that magnificent altars were required for their worship, and a vast and complicated hierarchy was maintained for serving at them. The animistic confusion of victim with god, however, still continued, for these were regarded as co-substantial, so that the worshipper in assimilating part of his sacrifice believed that he was uniting himself with the god.

The Mexican victims were thus supposed to be incarnations of the gods, or rather by the peculiar treatment and reverence accorded to them for a year previous to the sacrifice they were transubstantiated into them. They were selected from the bravest and handsomest captives, they were clothed in raiment similar to that with which the idol was decked, and not only were they delicately nurtured, they were even venerated and worshipped. In great sacrifices the fatal day was chosen by themselves, on the understanding that the longer it was delayed the less would they find favour in the abode of the gods. When at last it came, they were taken to the summit of the pyramid, which served more for altar than temple, and fixed not upon the sacrificial stone, as were the victims in ordinary sacrifices, but upon the strong shoulders of a priest.

With one sharp stroke of the obsidian knife, the slaughterer laid open the breast, tore out the quivering heart as the epitome of the victim, threw it into the "eagle's cup," a vessel filled with burning resin before the idol statue, and then the still living body was cast down to be devoured at the great altar's base by the very worshippers who had just left off adoring him. All through the great festivals of their sacred year this ceremony with only a variation of horrors was observed. The victims were sometimes slaughtered in multitudes, and they often consisted of beautiful women and tender little children. At times they were tortured with an ingenuity of cruelty beyond all that a Redskin could inflict, but they were always up to the fatal moment revered as if they were divine. For one sacrifice the victim was called "the wise lord of heaven," and in not a few of them, in consequence of the same belief, the victims were flayed and the priests clothed themselves or the idol with their skins.¹ The motive in all

¹ Sahagun, *Hist. de Nuev. Esp.*, book ii. ch. 21; Torquemada, *Monarquía Indiana*, vol. i. book i.; Diego Daran, *Hist. of the Indians of New Spain*, vol. i. ch. xx.; Bancroft, *Nat. Races of the Pacific*, vol. iii. pp. 297 seq., 354 seq.; Prescott, *Conquest of Mexico*, vol. i. p. 65 seq.

Though the male victims were always captives taken in war, it was considered a point of honour thus to suffer. It was held more desirable to be sacrificed on the altar than to be slain in battle,

for it secured a speedy passage into the society of the gods. As indicating the estimation in which a sacrificial death was held, self-immolation was not unfrequent. The devotee was ushered into a vault filled with the corpses of those who had preceded him, and there he was left to die, offering his body in living sacrifice to please the gods he hoped thereby to join. —Desiré Charnay, *Ancient Cities of the New World*, pp. 68, 66; Stephens, *Travels in Central America; Travels in Yucatan*.

these atrocities, even when the most exquisite tortures were rigorously prescribed in the ritual, was not a cruel one. It was to secure union with the god in the life of the theanthropic victim. The torture was due to the belief of the savage that he profited by the bravery with which his captive endured it. Suffering courageously borne by the immolated indicated spirit, and it was the best of the victim which the worshipper sought to appropriate. The point, however, to be kept in view is the conception which inspired the whole system of Mexican sacrifice, that the victim was more than human. The modifications traceable in some of them even more clearly exhibit this belief. For example, in the spring sacrifice to Quetzalcoatl an image of the idol and equal to it in size, made of edible plants and honey, was sacrificed and divided among the worshippers, to be eaten by them. A similar ceremonial marked the early autumn festival of Uitzilopochtli, and it was even more prominent in the great festival of Tezcatlipoca at the winter solstice. Upon this occasion the function was inaugurated by numerous purifications, blood-lettings, and penances of the worshippers, and also by much burning of incense and by many sacrifices of fowls and of human victims by the priests. At its climax the priest shot an arrow at an image of the idol, which had been composed of various seeds of the earth, kneaded with the blood of sacrificed children. The heart was immediately cut out and eaten by the king—the god's vicegerent on earth—and the body was quartered for each division of the city, and so subdivided that as many as possible

might personally participate in the sacrament of Teo-
quatl, "the god who is eaten." It was just the old
savage rite, though in another form. The god was
sacrificed that he might impart himself to the worship-
pers and gain a new resurrection for nature. In seed
and blood he gave his body to be eaten by his people
at the season when nature was apparently dying, in
order that his life, which, though taken, was not
extinguished, might be secured in another and stronger
manifestation on the return of spring.¹

It seems strange that while the sacrificial rites of
the Mexicans were so revolting, their religion on its
practical side should have been considerably influenced
by moral ideas. Its supreme god "Teotl," the sun, of
which Tezcatlipoca in winter, Quetzalcoatl in spring,
Uitzilopochtli in summer were manifestations—supreme
in a polytheistic sense—was revered as the austere
guardian of law and equity, and as god of providence to
whom prayers were addressed in times of strait and peril.
His favour was also entreated for governors when they
were appointed that they might rule well, and that they
might be removed should they ever abuse their power.
Walking invisibly abroad everywhere among the people,
he was supposed to be fully conversant with all that was
going on in the world, and to be swift in movement
and strong in power to punish wrong. His priests had
authority to receive confessions, appoint penances, and
grant absolution for offences repented of. The Mexicans
thus evidently believed that righteousness in public

¹ Bancroft, *Nat. Races*, iii. p. 312 *seq.*

and virtue in private life were required to secure the favour of the gods. Indeed, if Sahagun, one of their first missionaries and greatest friends, is to be credited, they expressed their religion in prayers, confessions, thanksgivings, and pious exhortations almost biblical in character. It is generally agreed, however, that consciously or without connivance, a considerable amount of adaptation to Christian conceptions has coloured and even shaped his narratives. He read the originals through Christian spectacles, and translated them into what he thought they ought to be. His formulas of confession and absolution, suggesting parallels to the sublime contents of the Hebrew psalms and prophecies, could not possibly consist with religious ceremonies and social habits that were simply horrible and disgusting.¹ For the essential characteristic of the religion was that of a low physical cult, and its creed, even as described by the Spanish fathers, appears to have been unworthy of being called a system. It was a conglomerate of confused fragments of many diverse superstitions, the result of alliance with or conquest of many different peoples. The sun, though dominant in it, was never regarded in Mexican polytheism as it was latterly in the polytheism of Europe or Asia. Mexican theology at its highest may seem to touch the Zeus of the Homeric or Hesiodic mythology, but to the Platonic conception of "*θεος*," the conception expressed

¹ For some of these banquets a slave was killed, and the flesh elaborately dressed was served with delicate sauce and seasoning. —Prescott, *Conquest of Mexico*, vol. i. p. 130.

by "Teotl," which it very slightly resembles in pronunciation, it did not even approach.¹

The civilisation of Peru, which, as far as it can be traced, arose also perfectly independent of foreign influence, was so inspired by another solar religion as hardly to be conceivable without it. Under more favourable conditions, though probably ignorant of each other's existence,² the Peruvians simultaneously developed what the Mexicans never attained to—a great and well consolidated empire. It was dominated by the most complete theocracy which the world has ever seen; for the power of the divine Inca, like that of the sun, his divine father, penetrated in surveillance and administration the poorest home, and was felt by the humblest individual in the land. This most searching of despotisms was humanely exercised by a succession of Incas in the interest of their subjects, with the result of securing for them a marvellous degree of material prosperity. While resembling Mexican civilisation in its extent and height, the Peruvian differed widely from it in its nature and aims. The Mexicans sought to enlarge and secure dominion by military force, signalling every victory by the sacrifice of thousands, and by crushing the survivors into vassalage. The Peruvian wars, on the other hand, were all religious, undertaken to reduce neighbouring tribes into obedience to the

¹ Kingsborough, *Mexican Antiquities*, vol. v. pp. 132 seq., 144 seq.; Tylor, *Primitive Culture*, vol. ii. p. 311; Bancroft, *Native*

Races, vol. iii. pp. 220, 237 seq.

² Prescott, *History of the Conquest of Peru*, vol. i. p. 152.

sovereignty of the sun ; and once the vanquished loyally submitted and conformed to their faith and their laws, they were watched with paternal solicitude. Between the characteristic features of the two religions there was very little resemblance, for the rites of the Incas were pure and simple compared with the revolting cannibal orgies which always outraged humanity in the Mexican ceremonies.¹

Though based upon zoolatry, for several animals were venerated as divine, or as divinely connected, and although fetish figures of wood and stone, always ugly and grotesque, were supposed to embody spirits, and to guard every tribe and every town, the worship of the Incas appears in some points to have touched that of the ancient Aryans. The sun, whose light was the life of men, was sovereign lord of heaven and earth. As derived from him, the worship of the elements, specially of fire, held a prominent place in its complicated system. The symbols of fire, as in India, were stones believed to be indwelt by it, seeing it could be struck out from them, while the nuggets of gold found everywhere in the sides of the mountains, were called "the tears of the sun." Peruvian differed from old Aryan worship in respect that the sacred hearth was not in the home but in the Temple of the Sun, who, unlike Agni, had his idol in a human face raying forth from a golden disk beams of burning splendour. In the worship of the sun the belief prevailed, as in ancient Iran, that fire became polluted, or lost its efficacy, by too long contact with man ; and

¹ Prescott, *History of the Conquest of Peru*, i. pp. 39 seq., 108 seq. ;

Humboldt, *Travels*, pp. 108, 294 ;
Reville, *Hibbert Lecture*, p. 153 seq.

so it had to be renewed every year by a miracle wrought by the chief priest, who cleverly caught it from the sun in a concave mirror, or who, if the day was cloudy and the weather unfavourable, was always able to produce it by friction of the fire sticks.

The worship of Inti, the sun, consisted of offerings of flowers, fruits, vegetables, perfumes, and libations in golden cups, part of which was always sprinkled toward the sun. Bloody sacrifices were represented at the capital by the daily offering of a llama, and of small birds and conies. Before setting out on a war-like expedition, a black llama which had previously been kept starving—that the heart of the foe might faint in his fainting—was sacrificed ; and to secure the good health of the Inca, black dogs had frequently to yield up their lives. All the portions of the sacrifices which were devoted to the gods were consumed by fire for transmission to their ethereal abodes ; and as the offerings were generally of edible materials, the intention of the offerer was manifestly to feed or to please the gods. The eyes of the victim were turned towards the sun, and its blood, after slaughter, was smeared on the idol and the door of his temple ; and what of the carcase was not offered to the idol by burning, was divided among the worshippers and eaten raw. It presented thus very strong resemblances and affinities to the savage rites, though inspired by purer and higher ideas. The custom of human sacrifice, though not encouraged but rather restrained by the Incas, had even under them its place in the ritual. When an Inca was

ill, one of his sons was offered up to the sun as his substitute. At certain festivals an infant was immolated; and when a new Inca was enthroned, children were sacrificed to the powers of the under world. Wives, especially queens, had to be buried alive on the death of their husbands; for, though the sacrifice was not compulsory, public opinion was too severe and pronounced for any faithful widow to escape her fate. As civilisation, however, advanced, the custom in Peru, as everywhere else, appears to have been modified, and little statues of human beings still found in the graves of the dead became the substitute of the living victims formerly buried with them.

The sacred year was of course regulated by the sun, and every month had its appropriate festivals, while four more solemn ones commemorated the great periods of the sun's progress. At one of these the land was purged from its evils, but by rites far less savage than those already described. Blood of sacrifice was, indeed, required for them, but it was the blood of an animal victim, or it was drawn from the veins of children who were not slain. It was mixed with flour, so as to produce cakes, which were solemnly eaten by the people, who, before doing so, rubbed with them their own bodies and the doors of their houses. At sundown the Inca, clad in precious armour and followed by four relatives with lance in hand, traversed the city at full speed, amid the cheers of the people. Surrendering their lances at its outskirts to others, who continued the charge upon the retreating hosts of evils, the chase was

maintained by successive changes of pursuers till the limits of the ancient state of Cuzeo were reached. There the lances were fixed in the ground as talismanic securities against the return of the troubles that vexed them. At the harvest festival an idol constructed of grain was first adored and then partaken of, and a number of sacrificial rites were performed at home by each householder. At the festival of Power, when the god of thunder was worshipped, the young Incas and nobles, after severe testing by fasting and exercise, were invested with the insignia of manhood; and by partaking with him of the sacred bread which had been prepared by the Peruvian vestals, or brides of the sun, they were received into indissoluble union with him.¹

The most magnificent of all their festivals, to which from all quarters the Peruvian nobles flocked, was that of Rayana, the annual imperial celebration of the sun's return. Of nine days devoted to its observance, three were spent in preparatory fasting. On the great day the function began at dawn, when the Inca in royal procession went forth to greet the sun with song and dance, adoring it the moment it appeared by flinging fervent kisses toward it. The Inca then presented from a huge golden vase, a libation of maize and maguey, which, after tasting himself, he dispensed among his royal kindred. Proceeding to the great temple, into which he and his suite alone were admitted, they spent a little time in worship. Then the black llama, or upon rare

¹ Markham, *Rites and Laws of the Incas*; Marmontel, *Les Incas*, vol. i. chaps. i.-iv.

occasions—such as a coronation, a royal birth, or a great victory—a child or beautiful maiden was sacrificed. From the entrails of the sacrifice the priest professed to read the augury of the coming year. The sacred fire was then rekindled, and by it burnt offerings were consumed. Thereafter a vast number of llamas from “the flocks of the sun”—that is, flocks fed at the public expense—were slaughtered and distributed to the people as the banquet of Inti. The sacred cake, prepared by the nuns, the brides of the sun, was thus also placed upon the board. Then followed another libation, after which the cake was distributed, and on this occasion the Inca communicated with not only his suite, but with the whole body of the worshippers, and the protracted ceremonial of the day ended in the dancing and revelry which gave the festival its name.¹

The coincidence of this distribution of consecrated bread and maize among the worshippers in this great ceremony with the Holy Sacrament of the Church, very powerfully impressed and astonished the Spanish missionaries. They were also sorely exercised by some striking resemblances to the sacrament of baptism, and to other Christian ordinances, which they found in the Peruvian religious institutions. It seemed to them that this caricature of their divine faith had been devised by the devil for the deluding of the heathen. Soon after birth, for example, every child was introduced into the community by immersion in water, to exorcise any malign influences to which he was sup-

¹ Prescott, *History of the Conquest of Peru*, vol. i. p. 100 seq.

posed to be subject, and to defend him against evil spirits. A name was also given to him in this ceremony, but it was regarded as only provisional ; for his definitive name was bestowed when, at the age of ten or twelve, he was confirmed, and commended to his guardian spirit by the oblation of his hair and of the parings of his nails to the sun. In order to be continued ever after in the enjoyment of the rights of citizenship, he was required to make regular confession to the priest, and to receive his absolution. The peculiar sanctity attached to virginity, and the responsibilities and immunities with which the Peruvian nuns were invested, also surprised and puzzled the missionaries. The analogies, however, were only external, for the intention of the Peruvian rites was directly opposed to that of the Christian ordinances, and, indeed, they could hardly be said to have any religious significance in the proper sense of the word. They were not means of grace, ordinances to be observed for the saving of the soul, but just so many legislative provisions, designed to bring every home and every private person within the net of imperial administration. The chief end and aim of the whole Peruvian ceremonial was not to promote any moral purpose, but to consolidate and rivet the governing power of the Inca upon every individual in the state. Blasphemy against the sun, malediction of or rebellion against "his child," yea, any violation of the law, was branded as sacrilege, and was miserably punished by death. For all law emanated from the Inca, who was divine, not in virtue of his office

and royal commission, but in respect of his nature. So the priest was more a policeman than a minister of religion, and in "receiving confession and granting absolution, he was exercising on behalf of the state for political ends the very same function which the officers of the Inquisition exercised in the interests of the Church."

Though the resemblances were only external and were essentially opposed to the verities which inspired the ordinances of the Christian religion, they were naturally most confounding to intruders, who, Christian only in name, were really as besotted in superstition as the pagans whom they so easily crushed. We can only speculate now what would have been the fate of these religions had Christianity been presented to the Mexican and the Peruvian as it was first presented in the person and teaching of St. Paul by the polytheists of Western Asia. There was indeed a vast deal to cleanse out from the temple of religion, yea, nearly the whole edifice had to be pulled down, but St. Paul would have found in the foundations solid materials to be used in rearing "the habitation of God through the Spirit."¹ He who could adapt himself—though not his gospel—to the Lycaonians, who would have worshipped him as a god,² and to the Athenians,³ whose own poet he quoted, would surely have addressed some sympathetic entreaty even to Mexicans, to turn from their horrible sacrifices to the true sacrifice by which was divinely secured to them participation in the Divine life. He would as surely have earnestly invited the Peruvians to

¹ Ephesians ii. 22.

² Acts xiv. 11.

³ Acts xvii. 28.

forsake their sacrament for the true sacrament of communion with the Sun of Righteousness, in which the least of "the children of light"¹ are equal with the greatest in the only royal priesthood in the spiritual universe. The Peruvians were nearer the truth than the Mexicans in that instead of laying hold of the gods and sacrificing them for their own advantage, they offered their human sacrifices as substitutes for themselves to the gods, with some feeling of their dependence upon them and some gratitude for life and all its blessings. It is true that their gods were only prominent physical phenomena or forces, and that they had no suspicion that there was any divine personal power behind or above to control them ;² but such as they were, they

¹ 1 Thessalonians v. 5.

² Garcilaso has laboured hard to convince us that at least his royal ancestors the Incas were not nature worshippers like the people they governed, but monotheistic philosophers. It is from him that Prof. M. Müller in *Physical Religion*, pp. 183-4, gets his reference to the scepticism professed in high places in reference to the popular creed and religion. There may be nothing improbable in his traditions of individual unbelief in the general superstition, indeed it would be as natural in the unique civilisation of Peru, as it was among Romans in the times of Augustus, but his conclusion, though firmly and for long believed in, that the Incas attained to the

conception of a supreme Creator and Governor, has not stood the test of critical investigation. It is another of the many instances in which the interpreter translates his own conception into the original ; it is akin to the belief that behind all variety of manifestations the North American Indian worshipped "the Great Spirit." "In most instances," says Dr. Brinton (*Myths of the New World*, p. 52 seq.), "the phrase is of modern origin and has been put into the mouth of the Indians by missionaries, and applied only to the white man's God. Of monotheism, in the Semitic, or even the dim pantheistic sense of the Brahmin, there was not a single instance in the American continents."

were convinced that man could only reach and become one with them through sacrifice. Now in regard to all these things he would have felt warranted in saying to them, "Whom now ye ignorantly worship, Him declare I unto you." And we feel certain that although his revelation that God had established communion with man through sacrifice would have surprised them as that which never entered the mind of man to conceive, it would not have confounded them. Apprehending man's essential religious instinct and apprehended by it, the Gospel would have borne fruit unto holiness in them, as it has done in all the world.