ASSYRIA

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CHAPTER IV. Religion

The earliest form of the Median religion is to be found in those sections of the Zendavesta which have been pronounced on internal evidence to be the most ancient portions of that venerable compilation; as, for instance, the first Fargard of the Vendidad, and the Gathas, or "Songs," which occur here and there in the Yacna, or Book on Sacrifice. In the Gathas, which belong to a very remote era indeed, we seem to have the first beginnings of the Religion. We may indeed go back by their aid to a time anterior to themselves--a time when the Arian race was not yet separated into two branches, and the Easterns and Westerns, the Indians and Iranians, had not yet adopted the conflicting creeds of Zoroastrianism and Brahminism. At that remote period we seem to see prevailing a polytheistic nature-worship--a recognition of various divine beings, called indifferently Asuras (Ahuras) or Devas, each independent of the rest, and all seemingly nature-powers rather than persons, whereof the chief are Indra, Storm or Thunder; Mithra, Sunlight; Aramati (Armaiti), Earth; Vayu, Wind; Agni, Fire; and Soma (Homa), Intoxication. Worship is conducted by priests, who are called _kavi_, "seers;" _karapani_, "sacriflcers," or _ricikhs_, "wise men." It consists of hymns in honor of the gods; sacrifices, bloody and unbloody, some' portion of which is burnt upon an altar; and a peculiar ceremony, called that of Soma, in which an intoxicating liquor is offered to the gods, and then consumed by the priests, who drink till they are drunken.

Such, in outline, is the earliest phase of Arian religion, and it is common to both branches of the stock, and anterior to the rise of the Iranic, Median, or Persian system. That system is a revolt from this sensuous and superficial nature-worship. It begins with a distinct recognition of spiritual intelligences--real persons--with whom alone, and not with powers, religion is concerned. It divides these intelligences into good and bad, pure and impure, benignant and malevolent. To the former it applies the term _Asuras_ (_Ahuras_), "living" or "spiritual beings," in a good sense; to the latter, the term _Devas_, in a bad one. It regards the "powers" hitherto worshipped as chiefly _Devas_; but it excepts from this unfavorable view a certain number, and, recognizing them as _Asuras_, places them above the _Izeds_, or "angels." Thus far it has made two advances, each of great importance, the substitution of real "persons" for "powers," as objects of the religious faculty, and the separation of the persons into good and bad, pure and impure, righteous and wicked. But it does not stop here. It proceeds to assert, in a certain sense, monotheism against polytheism. It boldly declares that, at the head of the good intelligences, is a single great Intelligence, Ahuro-Mazdao, the highest object of adoration, the true Creator, Preserver, and Governor of the universe. This is its great glory. It sets before the soul a single Being as the source of all good and the proper object of the highest worship. Ahuro-Mazdao is "the creator of life, the earthly and the spiritual;" "he has made the celestial bodies, earth, water, and trees, all good creatures," and "all good, true, holy, pure, things." He is "the Holy God, the Holiest, the essence of truth, the father of all truth, the best being of all, the master of purity." He is supremely "happy," possessing every blessing, "health, wealth, virtue, wisdom, immortality." From him comes all good to man; on the pious and the

righteous he bestows not only earthly advantages, but precious spiritual gifts, truth, devotion, "the good mind," and everlasting happiness; and as he rewards the good, so he punishes the bad, though this is an aspect in which he is but seldom represented. It has been said that this conception of Ahura-mazda as the Supreme Being is "_perfectly identical_ with the notion of Elohim, or Jehovah, which we find in the books of the Old Testament." This is, no doubt, an over-statement. Ahura-mazda is less spiritual and less awful than Jehovah. He is less remote from the nature of man. The very ascription to him of health (_haurvat_) is an indication that he is conceived of as possessing a sort of physical nature. Lucidity and brilliancy are assigned to him, not (as it would seem) in a mere metaphorical sense. Again, he is so predominantly the author of good things, the source of blessing and prosperity, that he could scarcely inspire his votaries with any feeling of fear. Still, considering the general failure of unassisted reason to mount up to the true notion of a spiritual God, this doctrine of the early Arians is very remarkable; and its approximation to the truth sufficiently explains at once the favorable light in which its professors are viewed by the Jewish prophets, and the favorable opinion which they form of the Jewish system. Evidently, the Jews and Arians, when they became known to one another, recognized mutually the fact that they were worshippers of the same great Being. Hence the favor of the Persians towards the Jews, and the fidelity of the Jews towards the Persians. The Lord God of the Jews being recognized as identical with Ormazd, a sympathetic feeling united the peoples. The Jews, so impatient generally of a foreign yoke, never revolted from the Persians; and the Persians, so intolerant, for the most part, of religions other than their own, respected and protected Judaism.

The sympathy was increased by the fact that the religion of Ormazd was anti-idolatrous. In the early nature-worship idolatry had been allowed; but the Iranic system pronounced against it from the first. No images of Ahura-mazda, or of the Izeds, profaned the severe simplicity of an Iranic temple. It was only after a long lapse of ages that, in connection with a foreign worship, idolatry crept in. The old Zoroastrianism was in this respect as pure as the religion of the Jews, and thus a double bond of religious sympathy united the Hebrews and the Arians.

Under the supreme God, Ahura-mazda or Ormazd, the ancient Iranic system placed (as has been already observed) a number of angels. Some of these, as _Vohu-mano_, "the Good Mind;" _Mazda_, "the Wise" (?); and _Asha_, "the True," are scarcely distinguishable from attributes of the Divinity. Armaiti, however, the genius of the Earth, and Sraosha or Serosh, an angel, are very clearly and distinctly personified. Sraosha is Ormazd's messenger. He delivers revelations, shows men the paths of happiness, and brings them the blessings which Ormazd has assigned to their share. Another of his functions is to protect the true faith. He is called, in a very special sense, "the friend of Ormazd," and is employed by Ormazd not only to distribute his gifts, but also to conduct to him the souls of the faithful, when this life is over, and they enter on the celestial scene.

Armaiti is at once the genius of the Earth, and the goddess of Piety. The early Ormazd worshippers were agriculturists, and viewed the cultivation of the soil as a religious duty enjoined upon them by God. Hence they connected the notion of piety with earth culture; and it was but a step from this to make a single goddess preside over the two. It is as the angel of Earth that Armaiti has most distinctly a personal character. She is regarded as wandering from spot to spot, and laboring to convert deserts and wildernesses into fruitful fields and gardens. She has the agriculturist under her immediate protection, while she endeavors to persuade the shepherd, who persists in the nomadic life, to

give up his old habits and commence the cultivation of the soil. She is of course the giver of fertility, and rewards her votaries by bestowing upon them abundant harvests. She alone causes all growth. In a certain cense she pervades the whole material creation, mankind included, in whom she is even sometimes said to "reside."

Armaiti, further "tells men the everlasting laws, which no one may abolish"--laws which she has learnt from converse with Ahura-mazda himself. She is thus naturally the second object of worship to the old Zoroastrian; and converts to the religion were required to profess their faith in her in direct succession to Ahura-mazda.

From Armaiti must be carefully distinguished the _geus urva_, or "soul of the earth"--a being who nearly resembles the "anima mundi" of the Greek and Roman philosophers. This spirit dwells in the earth itself, animating it as a man's soul animates his body. In old times, when man first began to plough the soil, _geus urva_ cried aloud, thinking that his life was threatened, and implored the assistance of the archangels. They however were deaf to his entreaties (since Ormazd had decreed that there should be cultivation), and left him to bear his pains as he best could. It is to be hoped that in course of time he became callous to them, and made the discovery that mere scratches, though they may be painful, are not dangerous.

It is uncertain whether in the most ancient form of the Iranic worship the cult of Mithra was included or no. On the one hand, the fact that Mithra is common to both forms of the Arian creed--the Indian and Iranic--would induce the belief that his worship was adopted from the first by the Zoroastrians; on the other, the entire absence of all mention of Mithra from the Gathas would lead us to the conclusion that in the time when they were composed his cult had not yet begun. Perhaps we may distinguish between two forms of early Iranic worship--one that of the more intelligent and spiritual--the leaders of the secession--in whose creed Mithra had no place; the other that of the great mass of followers, a coarser and more material system, in which many points of the old religion were retained, and among them the worship of the Sun-god. This lower and more materialistic school of thought probably conveyed on into the Iranic system other points also common to the Zendavosta with the Vedas, as the recognition of Airyaman (Aryaman) as a genius presiding over marriages, of Vitraha as a very high angel, and the like.

Vayu, "the Wind," seems to have been regarded as a god from the first. He appears, not only in the later portions of the Zenda vesta, like Mithra and Aryaman, but in the Gathas themselves. His name is clearly identical with that of the Vedic Wind-god, Vayu, and is apparently a sister form to the ventus, or wind, of the more western Arians. The root is probably vi, "to go," which may be traced in vis, via, vado, venio, etc.

The ancient Iranians did not adopt into their system either Agni, "Fire" (Lat. _ignis_), or Soma (Homa), "Intoxication." Fire was indeed retained for sacrifice; but it was regarded as a mere material agent, and not as a mysterious Power, the proper object of prayer and worship. The Soma worship, which formed a main element of the old religion, and which was retained in Brahminism, was at the first altogether discarded by the Zoroastrians; indeed, it seems to have been one of the main causes of that disgust which split the Arian body in two, and gave rise to the new religion. A ceremony in which it was implied that the intoxication of their worshippers was pleasing to the gods, and not obscurely hinted that they themselves indulged in similar excesses, was revolting to the religious temper of those who made the Zoaroastrian reformation; and it is plain from the Gathas that the new system was intended at first to be entirely free from the pollution of so disgusting a practice. But the zeal of religious reformers outgoes in most cases the strength

and patience of their people, whose spirit is too gross and earthly to keep pace with the more lofty flights of the purer and higher intelligence. The Iranian section of the Arians could not be weaned wholly from their beloved Soma feasts; and the leaders of the movement were obliged to be content ultimately with so far reforming and refining the ancient ceremony as to render it comparatively innocuous. The portion of the rite which implied that the gods themselves indulged in intoxication was omitted; and for the intoxication of the priests was substituted a moderate use of the liquor, which, instead of giving a religious sanction to drunkenness, merely implied that the Soma juice was a good gift of God, one of the many blessings for which men had to be thankful.

With respect to the evil spirits or intelligences, which, in the Zoroastrian system, stood over against the good ones, the teaching of the early reformers seems to have been less clear. The old divinities, except where adopted into the new creed, were in a general way called Devas, "fiends" or "devils," in contrast with the Ahuras, or "gods." These devas were represented as many in number, as artful, malicious, deceivers and injurers of mankind, more especially of the Zoroastrians or Ormazd-worshippers, as inventors of spells and lovers of the intoxicating Soma draught. Their leading characteristics were "destroying" and "lying." They were seldom or never called by distinct names. No account was given of their creation, nor of the origin of their wickedness. No single superior intelligence, no great Principle of Evil, was placed at their head. Ahriman (Angro-mainyus) does not occur in the Gathas as a proper name. Far less is there any graduated hierarchy of evil, surrounding a Prince of Darkness, with a sort of court, antagonistic to the angelic host of Ormazd, as in the latter portions of the Zendavesta and in the modern Parsee system.

Thus Dualism proper, or a belief in two uncreated and independent principles, one a principle of good and the other a principal of evil, was no part of the original Zoroastrianism. At the same time we find, even in the Gathas, the earliest portions of the Zondavesta, the germ out of which Dualism sprung. The contrast between good and evil is strongly and sharply marked in the Gathas; the writers continually harp upon it, their minds are evidently struck with this sad antithesis which colors the whole moral world to them; they see everywhere a struggle between right and wrong, truth and falsehood, purity and impurity; apparently they are blind to the evidence of harmony and agreement in the universe, discerning nothing anywhere but strife, conflict, antagonism. Nor is this all. They go a step further, and personify the two parties to the struggle. One is a "white" or holy "Spirit" (_cpento mainyus_), and the other a "dark spirit" (_angro mainyus_). But this personification is merely poetical or metaphorical, not real. The "white spirit" is not Ahura-mazda, and the "dark spirit" is not a hostile intelligence. Both resolve themselves on examination into mere figures of speech--phantoms of poetic imagery--abstract notions, clothed by language with an apparent, not a real, personality.

It was natural that, as time went on, Dualism should develop itself out of the primitive Zoroastrianism. Language exercises a tyranny over thought, and abstractions in the ancient world were ever becoming persons. The Iranian mind, moreover, had been strack, when it first turned to contemplate the world, with a certain antagonism; and, having once entered this track, it would be compelled to go on, and seek to discover the origin of the antagonism, the cause (or causes) to which it was to be ascribed. Evil seemed most easily accounted for by the supposition of an evil Person; and the continuance of an equal struggle, without advantage to either side, which was what the Iranians thought they beheld in the world that lay around them, appeared to them to imply the equality of that evil Person with the Being whom they rightly

regarded as the author of all good. Thus Dualism had its birth. The Iranians came to believe in the existence of two co-eternal and co-equal Persons, one good and the other evil, between whom there had been from all eternity a perpetual and never-ceasing conflict, and between whom the same conflict would continue to rage through all coming time.

It is impossible to say how this development took place. We have evidence, however, that at a period considerably anterior to the commencement of the Median Empire, Dualism, not perhaps in its ultimate extravagant form, but certainly in a very decided and positive shape, had already been thought out and become the recognized creed of the Iranians. In the first Fargard, or chapter, of the Vendidad--the historical chapter, in which are traced the only movements of the Iranic peoples, and which from the geographical point whereat it stops must belong to a time when the Arians had not yet reached Media Magna---the Dualistic belief clearly shows itself. The term Angro-mainyus has now become a proper name, and designates the great spirit of evil as definitely and determinately as Ahura-mazda designates the good spirit. The antagonism between Ahura-mazda and Angro-mainyus is depicted in the strongest colors; it is direct, constant and successful. Whatever good work Ahura-mazda in his benevolence creates, Angro-mainyus steps forward to mar and blast it. If Ahura-mazda forms a "delicious spot" in a world previously desert and uninhabitable to become the first home of his favorites, the Arians, Angro-mainyus ruins it by sending into it a poisonous serpent, and at the same time rendering the climate one of the bitterest severity. If Ahura-mazda provides, instead of this blasted region, another charming habitation, "the second best of regions and countries," Angro-mainyus sends there the curse of murrain, fatal to all cattle. To every land which Ahura-mazda creates for his worshippers, Angro-mainyus immediately assigns some plague or other. War, ravages, sickness, fever, poverty, hail, earthquakes, buzzing insects, poisonous plants, unbelief, witchcraft, and other inexpiable sins, are introduced by him into the various happy regions created without any such drawbacks by the good spirit; and a world, which should have been "very good," is by these means converted into a scene of trial and suffering.

The Dualistic principle being thus fully adopted, and the world looked on as the battle-ground between two independent and equal powers engaged in perpetual strife, it was natural that the imagination should complete the picture by ascribing to those superhuman rivals the circumstantials that accompany a great struggle between human adversaries. The two kings required, in the first place, to have their councils, which were accordingly assigned them, and were respectively composed of six councillors. The councillors of Ahura-mazda--called Amesha Spentas, or "Immortal Saints," afterwards corrupted into Amshashpands--wore Vohu-mano (Bahman), Asha-va-hista (Ardibehesht), Khshathra-vairya (Shahravar), Qpenta-Armaiti (Isfand-armat), Haurvatat (Khordad), and Ameretat (Amerdat). Those of Angro-mainyus were Ako-mano, Indra, Qaurva, Naonhaitya, and two others whose names are interpreted as "Darkness" and "Poison."

Vohu-mano (Bahman) means "the Good Mind." Originally a mere attribute of Ahura-mazda, Vohu-mano came to be considered, first as one of the high angels attendant on him, and then formally as one of-his six councillors. He had a distinct sphere or province assigned to him in Ahura-mazda's kingdom, which was the maintenance of life in animals and of goodness in man.

Asha-vahista (Ardibehesht) means "the Highest Truth"--"Voritas optima," or rather perhaps "Veritas lucidissima." He was the "Light" of the universe, subtle, all-pervading, omnipresent. His special business was to maintain the splendor of the various luminaries, and thereby to preserve all those

things whose existence and growth depend on light.

Khshathra-vairya (Shahravar), whose name means simply "possessions," "wealth," was regarded as presiding over metals and as the dispenser of riches.

Qoonta-Armaiti (Isfand-armat)--the "white or holy Ar-maiti," represented the Earth. She had from the first, as we have already seen, a distinct position in the system of the Zoroastrians, where she was at once the Earth goddess and the genius of piety.

Haurvatat (Khordad) means "health"--"sanitas"--and was originally one of the great and precious gifts which Ahura-mazda possessed himself and kindly bestowed on his creatures. When personification, and the needs of the theology, had made Haurvatat an archangel, he, together with Ameretat (Amerdat), "Immortality," took the presidency of the vegetable world, which it was the business of the pair to keep in good condition.

In the council of Angro-mainyus, Ako-mano stands in direct antithesis to Vohu-mano, as "the bad mind," or more literally, "the naught mind"--for the Zoroastrians, like Plato, regarded good and evil as identical with reality and unreality. Ako-mano's special sphere is the mind of man, where he suggests evil thoughts and prompts to bad words and wicked deeds. He holds the first place in the infernal council, as Vohu-mano does in the heavenly one.

Indra, who holds the second place in the infernal council, is evidently the Vedic god whom the Zoroastrians regarded as a powerful demon, and therefore made one of Angro-mainyus's chief councillors. He probably retained his character as the god of the storm and of war, the destroyer of crops and cities, the inspirer of armies and the wielder of the thunder-bolt. The Zoroastrians, however, ascribed to him only destructive actions; while the more logical Hindoos, observing that the same storm which hurt the crops and struck down trees and buildings was also the means of fertilizing the lands and purifying the air, viewed him under a double aspect, as at once terrible in his wrath and the bestower of numerous blessings.

Qaurva, who stands next to Indra, is thought to be the Hindoo Shiva, who has the epithet qarva in one of the Vedas. But the late appearance of Shiva in the Hindoo system makes this highly uncertain.

Naonhaitya, the fourth member of the infernal council, corresponds apparently to the Vedic Nasatyas, a collective name given to the two Aswins, the Dioscuri of Indian mythology. These were favorite gods of the early Hindoos, to whose protection they very mainly ascribed their prosperity. It was natural that the Iranians, in their aversion to their Indian brethren, should give the Aswins a seat at Angro-mainyus's council-table; but it is curious that they should represent the twin deities by only a single councillor.

Taric and Zaric, "Darkness" and "Poison," the occupants of the fifth and sixth places, are evidently personifications made for the occasion, to complete the infernal council to its full complement of six members.

As the two Principles of Good and Evil have their respective councils, so have they likewise their armies. The Good Spirit has created thousands of angelic beings, who everywhere perform his will and fight on his side against the Evil One; and the Evil One has equally on his part called into being thousands of malignant spirits who are his emissaries in the world, doing his work continually, and fighting his battles. These are the Devas or Dives, so famous in Persian fairy mythology. They are "wicked, bad, false, untrue, the originators of mischief, most baneful, destructive, the basest of all beings." The whole universe is full of them. They aim primarily at destroying all the good creations of Ahura-mazda; but if unable to destroy they content themselves with perverting and corrupting. They dog the steps of men, tempting them to sin; and, as soon as sin, obtaining a fearful power over them.

At the head of Ahura-mazda's army is the angel Sraosha (Serosh). Serosh is "the sincere, the beautiful, the victorious, the true, the master of truth." He protects the territories of the Iranians, wounds, and sometimes even slays the demons, and is engaged in a perpetual struggle against them, never slumbering night or day, but guarding the world with his drawn sword, more particularly after sunset, when the demons have the greatest power.

Angro-mainyus appears not to possess any such general-in-chief. Besides the six councillors above mentioned, there are indeed various demons of importance, as Drukhs, "destruction;" Aeshemo, "rapine;" Daivis, "deceit;" Driwis, "poverty," etc.; but no one of these seems to occupy a parallel place in the evil world to that which is assigned to Serosh in the good. Perhaps we have here a recognition of the anarchic character of evil, whose attacks are like those of a huge undisciplined host--casual, fitful, irregular--destitute wholly of that principle of law and order which gives to the resisting power of good a great portion of its efficacy.

To the belief in a spiritual world composed of all these various intelligences--one half of whom were good, and the other half evil--the early Zoroastrians added notions with respect to human duties and human prospects far more enlightened than those which have usually prevailed among heathen nations. In their system truth, purity, piety, and industry were the virtues chiefly valued and inculcated. Evil was traced up to its root in the heart of man; and it was distinctly taught that no virtue deserved the name but such as was co-extensive with the whole sphere of human activity, including the thought, as well as the word and deed. The purity required was inward as well as outward, mental as well as bodily. The industry was to be of a peculiar character. Man was placed upon the earth to preserve the good creation; and this could only be done by careful tilling of the soil, eradication of thorns and weeds, and reclamation of the tracts over which Angro-mainyus had spread the curse of barrenness. To cultivate the soil was thus a religious duty; the whole community was required to be agricultural; and either as proprietor, as farmer, or as laboring man, each Zoroastrian must "further the works of life" by advancing tillage. Piety consisted in the acknowledgment of the One True God, Ahura-mazda, and of his holy angels, the Amesha Spentas or Amshashpands, in the frequent offering of prayers, praises, and thanksgivings, in the recitation of hymns, the performance of the reformed Soma ceremony, and the occasional sacrifice of animals. Of the hymns we have abundant examples in the Gathas of the Zendavesta, and in the Yagna haptanhaiti, or "Yaana of seven chapters," which belongs to the second period of the religion. A specimen from the latter source is subjoined below. The Soma or Homa ceremony consisted in the extraction of the juice of the Homa plant by the priests during the recitation of prayers, the formal presentation of the liquid extracted to the sacrificial fire, the consumption of a small portion of it by one of the officiating priests, and the division of the remainder among the worshippers. As the juice was drunk immediately after extraction and before fermentation had set in, it was not intoxicating. The ceremony seems to have been regarded, in part, as having a mystic force, securing the favor of heaven; in part, as exerting a beneficial influence upon the body of the worshipper through the curative power inherent in the Homa plant.

The sacrifices of the Zoroastrians were never human. The ordinary victim was the horse; and we hear of occasions on which a single individual sacrificed as many as ten of these animals. Mares seem to have been regarded as the most pleasing offerings, probably on account of their superior value; and if it was desired to draw down the special favor of the Deity, those mares were selected which were already heavy in foal. Oxen, sheep, and goats were probably also used as victims. A priest

always performed the sacrifice, slaying the animal, and showing the flesh to the sacred fire by way of consecration, after which it was eaten at a solemn feast by the priest and worshippers.

The Zoroastrians were devout believers in the immortality of the soul and a conscious future existence. They taught that immediately after death the souls of men, both good and bad, proceeded together along an appointed path to "the bridge of the gatherer" (chinvatperetu). This was a narrow road conducting to heaven or paradise, over which the souls of the pious alone could pass, while the wicked fell from it into the gulf below, where they found themselves in the place of punishment. The good soul was assisted across the bridge by the angel Serosh--"the happy, well-formed, swift, tall Serosh"--who met the weary wayfarer and sustained his steps as he effected the difficult passage. The prayers of his friends in this world were of much avail to the deceased, and greatly, helped him on his journey. As he entered, the archangel Vohu-mano or Bahman rose from his throne and greeted him with the words, "How happy art thou who hast come here to us from the mortality to the immortality!" Then the pious soul went joyfully onward to Ahura-mazda, to the immortal saints, to the golden throne, to Paradise. As for the wicked, when they fell into the gulf, they found themselves in outer darkness, in the kingdom of Angro-mainyus, where they were forced to remain and to feed upon poisoned banquets.

It is believed by some that the doctrine of the resurrection of the body was also part of the Zoroastrian creed. Theopompus assigned this doctrine to the Magi; and there is no reason to doubt that it was held by the priestly caste of the Arian nations in his day. We find it plainly stated in portions of the Zendavesta, which, if not among the earliest, are at any rate of very considerable antiquity, as in the eighteenth chapter of the Vendidad. It is argued that even in the Gathas there is an expression used which shows the doctrine to have been already held when they were composed; but the phrase adduced is so obscure that its true meaning must be pronounced in the highest degree uncertain. The absence of any plain allusion to the resurrection from the earlier portions of the sacred volume is a strong argument against its having formed any part of the original Arian creed--an argument which is far from outweighed by the occurrence of a more possible reference to it in a single ambiguous passage.

Around and about this nucleus of religious belief there grew up in course of time a number of legends, some of which possess considerable interest. Like other thoughtful races, the Iranians speculated upon the early condition of mankind, and conceived a golden age, and a king then reigning over a perfectly happy people, whom they called King Yima--Yima-khshaeta--the modern Persian Jemshid. Yima, according to the legend, had dwelt originally in Aryanem vaejo--the primitive seat of the Arians--and had there reigned gloriously and peacefully for awhile; but the evils of winter having come upon his country, he had removed from it with his subjects, and had retired to a secluded spot where he and his people enjoyed uninterrupted happiness. In this place was "neither overbearing nor mean-spiritedness, neither stupidity nor violence, neither poverty nor deceit, neither puniness nor deformity, neither huge teeth nor bodies beyond the usual meassure." The inhabitants suffered no defilement from the evil spirit. They dwelt amid odoriferous trees and golden pillars; their cattle were the largest, best, and most beautiful on the earth; they were themselves a tall and beautiful race; their food was ambrosial, and never failed them. No wonder that time sped fast with them, and that they, not noting its night, thought often that what was really a year had been no more than a single day. Yima was the great hero of the early Iranians. His titles, besides "the king" (khshaeta), are "the brilliant," "the happy," "the greatly wealthy," "the leader of the peoples," "the renowned in

Aryanem vaejo." He is most probably identical with the Yama of the Vedas, who was originally the first man, the progenitor of mankind and the ruler of the blessed in Paradise, but who was afterwards transformed into "the god of death, the inexorable judge of men's doings, and the punisher of the wicked."

Next in importance to Yima among the heroes is Thraetona--the modern Persian Feridun. He was born in Varena--which is perhaps Atropatene, or Azerbijan--and was the son of a distinguished father, Athwyo. His chief exploit was the destruction of Ajis-dahaka (Zohak), who is sometimes represented as a cruel tyrant, the bitter enemy of the Iranian race, sometimes as a monstrous dragon, with three mouths, three tails, six eyes, and a thousand scaly rings, who threatened to ruin the whole of the good creation. The traditional scene of the destruction was the mountain of Demavend, the highest peak of the Elburz range south of the Caspian. Thraetona, like Yima, appears to be also a Vedic hero. He may be recognized in Traitana, who is said in the Rig-Veda to have slain a mighty giant by severing his head from his shoulders.

A third heroic personage known in the early times was Keresaspa, of the noble Sama family. He was the son of Thrita--a distinct personage from Thraetona--and brother of Urvakh-shaya the Just and was bred up in the arid country of Veh-keret (Khorassan). The "glory" which had rested upon Yima so many years became his in his day. He was the mightiest among the mighty, and was guarded from all danger by the fairy (pairika) Enathaiti, who followed him whithersoever he went. He slew Qravara, the queen and venomous serpent, who swallowed up men and horses. He killed Gandarewa with the golden heel, and also Cnavidhaka, who had boasted that, when he grew up, he would make the earth his wheel and heaven his chariot, that he would carry off Ahura-mazda from heaven and Angro-mainyus from hell, and yoke them both as horses to his car. Keresaspa appears as Gershasp in the modern Persian legends, where, however, but little is said of his exploits. In the Hindoo books he appears as Krigagva, the son of Samyama, and is called king of Vaigali, or Bengal!

From these specimens the general character of the early Iranic legends appears sufficiently. Without affording any very close resemblances in particular cases, they present certain general features which are common to the legendary lore of all the Western Arians. They are romantic tales, not allegories; they relate with exaggerations the deeds of men, not the processes of nature. Combining some beauty with a good deal that is bizarre and grotesque, they are lively and graphic, but somewhat childish, having in no case any deep meaning, and rarely teaching a moral lesson. In their earliest shape they appear, so far as we can judge, to have been brief, disconnected, and fragmentary. They owe the full and closely interconnected form which they assume in the Shahna-meh and other modern Persian writings, partly to a gradual accretion during the course of centuries, partly to the inventive genius of Firdausi, who wove the various and often isolated legends into a pseudo-history, and amplified them at his own pleasure. How much of the substance of Firdausi's poems belongs to really primitive myth is uncertain. We find in the Zend texts the names of Gayo-marathan, who corresponds to Kaiomars; of Haoshyanha, or Hosheng; of Yima-shaeta, or Jemshid; of Ajisdahaka, or Zohak; of Athwya, or Abtin; of Thraetona, or Feridun; of Keresaspa, or Gershasp; of Kava Uq, or Kai Kavus; of Kava Hucrava, or Kai Khosroo; and of Kava Vistaspa, or Gushtasp. But we have no mention of Tahomars; of Gava (or Gau) the blacksmith; of Feridua's sons, Selm, Tur, and Irij; of Zal, or Mino'chihr, or Eustem; of Afrasiab, or Kai Kobad; of Sohrab, or Isfendiar. And of the heroic names which actually occur in the Zendavesta, several, as Gayo-marathan, Haoshyariha, Kava Uc, and Kava Hugrava, are met with only in the later

portions, which belong probably to about the fourth century before our era. The only legends which we know to be primitive are those above related, which are found in portions of the Zendavesta, whereto the best critics ascribe a high antiquity. The negative argument is not, however, conclusive; and it is quite possible that a very large proportion of Firdausi's tale may consist of ancient legends dressed up in a garb comparatively modern.

Two phases of the early Iranic religion have been now briefly described; the first a simple and highly spiritual creed, remarkable for its distinct assertion of monotheism, its hatred of idolatry, and the strongly marked antithesis which it maintained between good and evil; the second, a natural corruption of the first, Dualistic, complicated by the importance which it ascribed to angelic beings verging upon polytheism. It remains to give an account of a third phase into which the religion passed in consequence of an influence exercised upon it from without by an alien system.

When the Iranic nations, cramped for space in the countries east and south of the Caspian, began to push themselves further to the west, and then to the south, they were brought into contact with various Scythic tribes inhabiting the mountain regions of Armenia, Azerbijan, Kurdistan, and Luristan, whose religion appears to have been Magism. It was here, in these elevated tracts, where the mountains almost seem to reach the skies, that the most venerated and ancient of the fire-temples were established, some of which remain, seemingly in their primitive condition, at the present day. Here tradition placed the original seat of the fire-worship; and from hence many taught that Zoroaster, whom they regarded as the founder of Magism, had sprung. Magism was, essentially, the worship of the elements, the recognition of fire, air, earth, and water as the only proper objects of human reverence. The Magi held no personal gods, and therefore naturally rejected temples, shrines, and images, as tending to encourage the notion that gods existed of a like nature with man, i.e., possessing personality--living and intelligent beings. Theirs was a nature worship, but a nature worship of a very peculiar kind. They did not place gods over the different parts of nature, like the Greeks; they did not even personify the powers of nature, like the Hindoos; they paid their devotion to the actual material things themselves. Fire, as the most subtle and ethereal principle, and again as the most powerful agent, attracted their highest regards; and on their fire-altars the sacred flame, generally said to have been kindled from heaven, was kept burning uninterruptedly from year to year and from age to age by bands of priests, whose special duty it was to see that the sacred spark was never extinguished. To defile the altar by blowing the flame with one's breath was a capital offence; and to burn a corpse was regarded as an act equally odious. When victims were offered to fire, nothing but a small portion of the fat was consumed in the flame. Next to fire, water was reverenced. Sacrifice was offered to rivers, lakes, and fountains, the victim being brought near to them and then slain, while great care was taken that no drop of their blood should touch the water and pollute it. No refuse was allowed to be cast into a river, nor was it even lawful to wash one's hands in one. Reverence for earth was shown by sacrifice, and by abstention from the usual mode of burying the dead.

The Magian religion was of a highly sacerdotal type. No worshipper could perform any religious act except by the intervention of a priest, or Magus, who stood between him and the divinity as a Mediator. The Magus prepared the victim and slew it, chanted the mystic strain which gave the sacrifice all its force, poured on the ground the propitiatory libation of oil, milk, and honey, held the bundle of thin tamarisk twigs--the Zendic barsom (baregma)--the employment of which was essential to every

sacrificial ceremony. The Magi were a priest-caste, apparently holding their office by hereditary succession. They claimed to possess, not only a sacred and mediatorial character, but also supernatural prophetic powers. They explained omens, expounded dreams, and by means of a certain mysterious manipulation of the barsom, or bundle of twigs, arrived at a knowledge of future events, which they communicated to the pious inquirer.

With such pretensions it was natural that the caste should assume a lofty air, a stately dress, and an entourage of ceremonial magnificence. Clad in white robes, and bearing Upon their heads tall felt caps, with long lappets at the sides, which concealed the jaw and even the lips, each with his barsom in his hand, they marched in procession to their pynetheia, or fire altars, and standing around them performed for an hour at a time their magical incantations. The credulous multitude, impressed by sights of this kind, and imposed on by the claims to supernatural power which the Magi advanced, paid them a willing homage; the kings and chiefs consulted them; and when the Arian tribes, pressing westward, came into contact with the races professing the Magian religion, they found a sacerdotal caste all-powerful in most of the Scythic nations.

The original spirit of Zoroastrianism was fierce and exclusive. The early Iranians looked with contempt and hatred on the creed of their Indian brethren; they abhorred idolatry; and were disinclined to tolerate any religion except that which they had themselves worked out. But with the lapse of ages this spirit became softened. Polytheistic creeds are far less jealous than monotheism; and the development of Zoroastrianism had been in a polytheistic direction. By the time that the Zoroastrians were brought into contact with Magism, the first fervor of their religious zeal had abated, and they were in that intermediate condition of religious faith which at once impresses and is impressed, acts upon other systems, and allows itself to be acted upon in return. The result which supervened upon contact with Magism seems to have been a fusion, an absorption into Zoroastrianism of all the chief points of the Magian belief, and all the more remarkable of the Magian religious usages. This absorption appears to have taken place in Media. It was there that the Arian tribes first associated with themselves, and formally adopted into their body, the priest-caste of the Magi, which thenceforth was recognized as one of the six Median tribes. It is there that Magi are first found acting in the capacity of Arian priests. According to all the accounts which have come down to us, they soon acquired a predominating influence, which they no doubt used to impress their own religious doctrines more and more upon the nation at large, and to thrust into the background, so far as they dared, the peculiar features of the old Arian belief. It is not necessary to suppose that the Medes ever apostatized altogether from the worship of Ormazd, or formally surrendered their Dualistic faith. But, practically, the Magian doctrines and the Magian usages--elemental worship, divination with the sacred rods, dream expounding, incantations at the fire-altars, sacrifices whereat a Magus officiated--seem to have prevailed; the new predominated over the old; backed by the power of an organized hierarchy, Magism over-laid the primitive Arian creed, and, as time went on, tended more and more to become the real religion of the nation.

Among the religious customs introduced by the Magi into Media there are one or two which seem to require especial notice. The attribution of a sacred character to the four so-called elements--earth, air, fire and water--renders it extremely difficult to know what is to be done with the dead. They cannot be burnt, for that is a pollution of fire; or buried, for that is a pollution of earth; or thrown into a river, for that is a defilement of water. If they are deposited in sarcophagi, or exposed, they really pollute the air; but in this case the

guilt of the pollution, it may be argued, does not rest on man, since the dead body is merely left in the element in which nature placed it. The only mode of disposal which completely avoids the defilement of every element is consumption of the dead by living beings; and the worship of the elements leads on naturally to this treatment of corpses. At present the Guebres, or Fire-worshippers, the descendants of the ancient Persians, expose all their dead, with the intention that they shall be devoured by birds of prey. In ancient times, it appears certain that the Magi adopted this practice with respect to their own dead; but, apparently, they did not insist upon having their example followed universally by the laity. Probably a natural instinct made the Arians averse to this coarse and revolting custom; and their spiritual guides, compassionating their weakness, or fearful of losing their own influence over them if they were too stiff in enforcing compliance, winked at the employment by the people of an entirely different practice. The dead bodies were first covered completely with a coating of wax, and were then deposited in the ground. It was held, probably, that the coating of wax prevented the pollution which would have necessarily resulted had the earth come into direct contact with the corpse.

The custom of divining by means of a number of rods appears to have been purely Magian. There is no trace of it in the Gathas, in the Yagna haptanhaiti, or in the older portions of the Vendidad. It was a Scythic practice; and probably the best extant account of it is that which Herodotus gives of the mode wherein it was managed by the Scyths of Europe. "Scythia," he says, "has an abundance of soothsayers, who foretell the future by means of a number of willow wands. A large bundle of these rods is brought and laid on the ground. The soothsayer unties the bundle, and places each wand by itself, at the same time uttering his prophecy: then, while he is still speaking, he gathers the rods together again, and makes them up once more into a bundle." A divine power seems to have been regarded as resting in the wands; and they were supposed to be "consulted" on the matter in hand, both severally and collectively. The bundle of wands thus imbued with supernatural wisdom became naturally part of the regular priestly costume, and was carried by the Magi on all occasions of ceremony. The wands were of different lengths; and the number of wands in the bundle varied. Sometimes there were three, sometimes five, sometimes as many as seven or nine; but in every case, as it would seem, an odd number.

Another implement which the priests commonly bore must be regarded, not as Magian, but as Zoroastrian. This is the khrafgthraghna, or instrument for killing bad animals, frogs, toads, snakes, mice, lizards, flies, etc., which belonged to the bad creation, or that which derived its origin from Angro-mainyus. These it was the general duty of all men, and the more especial duty of the Zoroastrian priests, to put to death, whenever they had the opportunity. The Magi, it appears, adopted this Arian usage, added the khrafgthraghna to the barsom, and were so zealous in their performance of the cruel work expected from them as to excite the attention, and even draw upon themselves the rebuke, of foreigners.

A practice is assigned to the Magi by many classical and ecclesiastical writers, which, if it were truly charged on them, would leave a very dark stain on the character of their ethical system. It is said that they allowed and even practised incest of the most horrible kind--such incest as we are accustomed to associate with the names of Lot, OEdipus, and Herod Agrippa. The charge seems to have been first made either by Xanthus the Lydian, or by Ctesias. It was accepted, probably without much inquiry, by the Greeks generally, and then by the Romans, was repeated by writer after writer as a certain fact, and became finally a stock topic with the early Christian apologists. Whether it had any

real foundation in fact is very uncertain. Herodotus, who collects with so much pains the strange and unusual customs of the various nations whom he visits, is evidently quite ignorant of any such monstrous practice. He regards the Magian religion as established in Persia, yet he holds the incestuous marriage of Cambyses with his sister to have been contrary to existing Persian laws. At the still worst forms of incest of which the Magi and those under their influence are accused, Herodotus does not even glance. No doubt, if Xanthus Lydus really made the statement which Clemens of Alexandria assigns to him, it is an important piece of evidence, though scarcely sufficient to prove the Magi guilty. Xanthus was a man of little judgment, apt to relate extravagant tales; and, as a Lydian, he may have been disinclined to cast an aspersion on the religion of his country's oppressors. The passage in question, however, probably did not come from Xanthus Lydus, but from a much later writer who assumed his name, as has been well shown by a living critic. The true original author of the accusation against the Magi and their co-religionists seems to have been Ctesias, whose authority is far too weak to establish a charge intrinsically so improbable. Its only historical foundation seems to have been the fact that incestuous marriages were occasionally contracted by the Persian kings; not, however, in consequence of any law, or religious usage, but because in the plenitude of their power they could set all law at defiance, and trample upon the most sacred principles of morality and religion.

A minor charge preferred against the Magian morality by Xanthus, or rather by the pseudo-Xanthus, has possibly a more solid foundation. "The Magi," this writer said, "hold their wives in common: at least they often marry the wives of others with the free consent of their husbands." This is really to say that among the Magians divorce was over-facile; that wives were often put away, merely with a view to their forming a fresh marriage, by husbands who understood and approved of the transaction. Judging by the existing practice of the Persians, we must admit that such laxity is in accordance with Iranic notions on the subject of marriage--notions far less strict than those which have commonly prevailed among civilized nations. There is, however, no other evidence, besides this, that divorce was very common where the Magian system prevailed; and the mere assertion of the writer who personated Xanthus Lydus will scarcely justify us in affixing even this stigma on the religion.

Upon the whole, Magism, though less elevated and less pure than the old Zoroastrian creed, must be pronounced to have possessed a certain loftiness and picturesqueness which suited it to become the religion of a great and splendid monarchy. The mysterious fire-altars on the mountain-tops, with their prestige of a remote antiquity--the ever-burning flame believed to have been kindled from on high--the worship in the open air under the blue canopy of heaven--the long troops of Magians in their white robes, with their strange caps, and their mystic wands--the frequent prayers--the abundant sacrifices--the long incantations--the supposed prophetic powers of the priest-caste--all this together constituted an imposing whole at once to the eye and to the mind, and was calculated to give additional grandeur to the civil system that should be allied with it. Pure Zoroastrianism was too spiritual to coalesce readily with Oriental luxury and magnificence, or to lend strength to a government based on the ordinary principles of Asiatic despotism. Magism furnished a hierarchy to support the throne, and add splendor and dignity to the court, while they overawed the subject-class by their supposed possession of supernatural powers, and of the right of mediating between heaven and man. It supplied a picturesque worship which at once gratified the senses and excited the fancy It gave scope to man's passion for the marvellous by its incantations, its divining-rods, its omen-

reading, and its dream-expounding. It gratified the religious scrupulosity which finds a pleasure in making to itself difficulties, by the disallowance of a thousand natural acts, and the imposition of numberless rules for external purity. At the same time it gave no offence to the anti-idolatrous spirit in which the Arians had hitherto gloried, but rather encouraged the iconoclasm which they always upheld and practised. It thus blended easily with the previous creed of the people, awaking no prejudices, clashing with no interests; winning its way by an apparent meekness and unpresumingness, while it was quite prepared, when the fitting time came, to be as fierce and exclusive as if it had never worn the mask of humility and moderation.