offerings, and it was a sign of a plentiful year if they were accepted. So also at Lanuvium, south of Rome, in a grove near the temple of the Argive Hera, sacred maidens descended blindfolded once a year with a barley-cake, and if the serpent took it, it indicated that they were pure and that the husbandmen would be fortunate. On a Greek vase-painting the snake is the vehicle of the wrath of Athene, even as Chryse, another local “ maiden,” had a snake-guardian of a shrine which she sent against Philoctetes.@@1 Similarly Orestes in serpent-form would slay Clytaemnestra (Aeschylus, *Choëphori)∖* the serpent is thus the avenging spirit of the deceased, the embodiment of Vengeance (cf. Acts xxviii. 4).@@2

To these characteristics of serpents and serpent-godlings we must add the control of the weather. This was ascribed to the nāga demi-gods and rajahs of India and to the “ king of snakes ” among North American Indians.@@3 It is significant that in India the widely-distributed Naga- pančami-festival occurs in the rainy season. We have seen how closely the serpent is associated with water generally (§5 seq.), and since we meet with the belief that sources will dry up when the serpent-occupant is killed (Bechuanas, Zulus), or that they will resent impurities thrown into their springs by causing storms (tribes of the Hindu-Kush), it is not surprising to find elaborate precautions for the propitiation of such powerful beings. Now, there are popular stories of springs and waters which could only be used in return for regular human sacrifices.@@4 In a story from the isle of Lesbos the dragon must receive a human victim twice a day. Curiously enough, an old authority tells us that the people of Lesbos were directed to throw a virgin into the sea to Poseidon, and the hero who vainly tried to save her reappeared years later with a wonderful cup of gold (Hartland, in. 43 seq., 79, see Athenaeus xi. 15). In the Chinese annals of Khotan in Cashgar, when a certain stream dried up, a female dragon declared that her husband had died; one of the royal grandees sacrificed himself to meet the want, the water flowed once more, and the “ husband ” of the being became the guardian of the kingdom’s prosperity.@@5 A careful study of all the related traditions suggests that they preserve an unmistakable recollection of human sacrifice to serpents and other spirits of the water, and that the familiar story of the hero who vanquishes the demon and rescues the victim (usually a female, and especially a virgin) testifies to

the suppression of the rite.

An extremely rich dynasty in the Upper Niger was supposed to owe its wealth to a serpent in a well which received yearly a maiden attired as a bride; the cessation of the practice brought drought and sickness (Hartland iii. 57 seq.). In Mexico the half-serpent Ahuizotl dragged into its pool hapless passers-by; however, their souls were supposed to go to the terrestrial paradise—see on this idea, Rohde, ii. 374, n. 2—and the relatives became rich through the unhappy accident (Hartland, 86 seq.). But in India human sacrifice was actually made in the expectation of gaining hidden treasure, and doubtless we have a survival of this when snake-charmers, for a drop of blood from the finger of a first-born, will track the snakes which are guardians of treasure (Crooke ii. 135, 170 seq.). lndian traditions tell how reformers have persuaded the people in the past to stop their human sacrifices to serpent-spirits (Fergusson, 64, Oldham, 101), and a survival may be recognized in parts of the N.W. Provinces when, at the Guruī serpent-festival, women make vicarious offerings by throwing to Nāg Deotā, the river demon, dolls which the village lads beat with long switches (Crooke ii. 139). It is unnecessary to refer more fully to the evidence for former human sacrifice or to the popular stories and grim superstitions which indicate its persistence; the grisly custom of our ancestors has been attested by comparatively recent observation in Mexico. Peru, Fiji and W. Africa.@@6

A conspicuous feature in serpent-cults is the prominence of females. In India, in Behār, during August there is a colourless festival in which women, “ wives of the snake,” go round begging on behalf of the Brahmans and the villages (Crooke ii. 138). Among the Nāyars of Malabar at the ceremonies of the Pambantullel, the household serpent-deities show their benevolence by inspiring with oracles certain women who must be of perfect purity.@@7 In Travancore a serpent-god is the property of a family, the priests of a temple; the eldest female carries the image at the festal processions and must lead a celibate life (Oldham, 153 seq.). Far more noteworthy is the cult of the Python Dañh-gbi of Whydah, which after taking root in Dahomey, became the most remarkable example of a thoroughly organic serpent-cult.@@8 The python-deity is god of wisdom and earthly bliss and the bene- factor of man (cf. § 2): he opened the eyes of the first human pair who were born blind. He is specially invoked on behalf of the king (the nominal head of the priesthood) and the crops, and a very close connexion was supposed to exist between the god’s agency and all agricultural life. Initiated priests, after remaining silent in his temple for seven days, receive a new name and thus become ordained. They possess a knowledge of poisons and antidotes and thereby acquire considerable income (cf. §§ 3, 8). Children who touch or are touched by one of the many temple- snakes are sequestered for a year and learn the songs and dances of the cult. Women who are touched become “ possessed ” by the god. In addition to his ministrant priestesses, the god has numerous “ wives,” who form a complete organization. Neither of these classes may marry, and the latter are specially sought at the season when the crops begin to sprout.@@9 These “wives” take part in licentious rites with the priests and male worshippers, and the python is the reputed father of the offspring (cf. § 7). Every snake of its kind receives the profound venera- tion of the native of Whydah, who salutes it as master, father, mother and benefactor. Such snakes must be treated with every respect, and if they are even accidentally killed, the offending native might be burned alive (cf. § 8). In 1890 a semblance of the penalty was still maintained: the offender being allowed to escape from a burning hut through a crowd of snake-worshippers armed with clubs; if discreet in his bribes, and lucky, he might reach running water and could purify himself there. On the day of public procession—the last took place in 1857 or 1858—naked priests and “ wives” escorted the company with songs and dances; death was the penalty of those caught peering from their houses, and, apart from this, the natives feared loathsome diseases should they gaze upon the sacred scene. It is said that Europeans who violated the prohibition have been poisoned. Occasional human sacrifice in honour of the god is attested (cf. § 11).

While Dahomey furnishes this elaborate example of the modern worship of a god in the embodiment of a serpent, cIse- where we find either less organic types, or the persistence and survival of cults whose original form can only be reconstructed by inference. In the gloomy rites of the Diasia, the Olympian Zeus, as Zeus Meilichios god of wealth, has been imposed upon a chthonic snake-deity who is propitiated by holocausts of pigs and by a ritual of purgation (Harrison, *Prol.* 12-28). In the Thesmophoria, a sowing festival of immemorial antiquity performed by women, cakes and pigs were thrown to serpents kept in caves and sacred to the corn- goddess Demeter, who, like the Bona Dea, was representative

@@@l Sophoc, *Phil.* 1327; Harrison, *Prol.* 301 seq., 306 seq.

@@@2 Compare the snake attributes of the Erinyes; see Harrison, 217 sqq., 233 sqq.

@@@3 Fergusson, 48 seq., 82, 257 seq.; Crooke, ii. 129; Oldham, 49-51, 121, 123, 129, 200; cf. Winternitz, 44 seq., 259 seq.

@@@4 Hartland iii. 2, 4, 10 seq., 14, 28, 30, 74, 87-94; Frazer, *Pans.* v. 45; *Lectures on the Early History of the Kingship* (1905), 183 seq., 192.

@@@5 Hartland iii. 73 seq.; cf. also J. G. R. Forlong, *Faiths of Man* (1906), iii. 268.

@@@6 See Deane, *Serpent Worship,* 245 seq. (Livonia) ; and for more modern evidence, Maclennan, 216, 219; Oldham, 40, 50, 100 seq.; and A. B. Ellis (§12 below). Folk-lore adds to the survivals some of the customs for producing rain, *e.g.* bathing and drenching willing or unwilling victims, dipping holy images in water, and otherwise disturbing springs and fountains (Frazer, *Golden Bough,* i. 95 sqq.,

108, 111 seq., 209 sqq.). Here also are the superstitions which associate rivers or pools with the safety of human life *(e.g* Frazer iii. 318 seq.; Hartland ii. 20, 22 sqq.; G. L. Gomme, *Ethnology in Folklore* [1892], 71 sqq., 77 seq.).

@@@7 F. Fawcett, Madras Gov. Museum, *Bull.* iii. 277. (For the stress laid upon the personal purity of the females, cf. p. 282). For other evidence for the prominence of females, see Fergusson, 82, 257 seq.

@@@8 A. B. Ellis (above, § 6, n. 7), 47 sqq., 140 sqq., cf. Frazer, *Adonis,* 57 sqq. The cult taken by slaves to America is the Vōdu (Vaudoo or Vaudoux) worship of Haiti (Ellis, 29 seq.).

@@@9 On their marriage to the god these devotees are marked with his image (said to be imprinted by the god himself) ; cf. the story that Atia, the mother of Augustus, when touched by the serpent in the temple of Apollo, was marked with a stain like a painted serpent.