

The attention of explorers was at first drawn to initiation rites, mainly because of the horrible sufferings endured by the novices. These sufferings were in part tests of endurance such as are imposed now-a-days by boys when they initiate a new school-fellow. More important and indeed cardinal is the fact that in initiation ceremonies the death of the novice is almost always simulated and sometimes actually caused. This death is followed by a resurrection. All the various mummeries of death and resurrection¹, often bloody and disgusting enough, simulate and therefore to the savage mind stimulate the passage from the old life to the new. But the simulated death has another aim, distinctly social, that is to emphasize the solidarity of the tribe, only by his simulated death can the boy be brought into contact and made one with his ancestors. They it is who instruct him in the tribal secrets, the old men of the tribe who initiate him are often positively disguised as ancestors. Thus we see in Initiation as in the Intichiuma the two elements, commemoration of ancestors as well as magical mimesis.

Initiation, it will be remembered, is of the tribe not of the totem. In initiation the youth is brought into relation with a larger unit, and this larger unit is figured to him by a Great Spirit², a very near approach to what we call a god. If the totem replaces the old Sire so this Great Spirit replaces for the time his peculiar totem and is figured as the father of all the members of different totems who constitute the tribe. Thus among the Euahlayi the Great Spirit is called Baiame and in this tribe it is related that the various totems were only the names given to the different parts of Baiame's body and this is but a simple figurative way of saying that the Great Spirit is the synthesis of all the totems and consequently a sort of presentation of the idea or rather sentiment of tribal unity. These Great Spirits found among so many primitive peoples were, it was at first thought, mere borrowings from Christianity taken over from missionaries. But the fact that the Great Spirit is found uniformly not in totem rites but in tribal initiations shows clearly that the Great Spirit is the outcome and expression of a special social structure. He had his origin in those rites which it was his function to represent.

¹ Frazer, *Golden Bough*, xi. 225, "The Ritual of Death and Resurrection."

² Durkheim, *Elementary Forms*, p. 294 ff.

Initiation was to the savage *the* rite of paramount importance. Other *rites de passage* were performed at the other crises of a man's life but they all paled before the maturity rite. Birth was scarcely accounted an event for religious sanction, marriage followed as a corollary from initiation and death itself was a *rite de passage*, when the dead man passed over to join the dead members of his tribe in another world¹. Moreover death itself is not a crisis so clearly marked as with us, a man dies socially when he ceases to be able to dance his tribal dances. The notion of death as an initiation has left manifest traces in Greek religion. That to die is to be initiated into the "Higher Mysteries" was to the Greek a literal fact. This initiation was consummated by a Sacred Marriage with the Earth Mother. Hence it is not surprising that as Artemidorus² observes: "if sick men dream of marriage it is a foreboding of death," for "all the accompaniments of marriage are exactly the same as those of death," and again, "marriage and death have universally been held by mankind to be 'fulfilments' (τέλη)." The Greek word for *initiation* (τελετή) tells its own tale, it means not entering in, but completion, accomplishment, fulfilment, its cognate (τέλειος) means "grown up." The great Eleusinian mysteries were primarily the rite of man's maturity side by side with rites to promote the maturity of earth's fruits³.

Birth, puberty, marriage, death were to the savage and in large measure to the whole ancient world all crises of life to be attended by rites of initiation, *rites de passage*. He did not formulate their similarity but he felt it and expressed it by the similarity of rites; all were the occasion of rites of expulsion, to free life from evil, and even more of impulsion, to promote life's welfare. But before we pass to the next point we must emphasize the peculiar social structure out of which initiation rites sprang. We have left behind us the old family group with the dominant sire and even the totem group which succeeded it is less prominent. We have advanced to the tribe. The important social feature in tribal initiation is the band of young men confronted by the band of elder men, as initiators. We have an oligarchy rather than an

¹ R. Hertz, "La Représentation Collective de la Mort," in *Année Sociologique*, x. (1905-06) 88.

² *Oneirocr.* II. 49 and 65; for the whole subject of the analogy of death and marriage rites, see J. C. Lawson, *Modern Greek Folk Lore*, 1910, p. 590.

³ Hastings, *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, "Initiation" (Greek).

autocracy. Moreover, whereas totem-rites focus on nutrition, initiation rites focus on sex.

It was long a puzzle in Greek religion why Dionysos should always be attended by a *thiasos*, a band of dancing revellers. Zeus and the other Olympian divinities had no such attendants. The question was only made more complex yet more pressing by the discovery that this band of revellers of young men dancing was closely paralleled in other cults. Greece had not only Satyrs, it had also Kouretes, Korybantes, Titanes, Seilenoi, Bacchoi, Rome had its dancing priests, its Salii, far-off India had its dancing Maruts, half daimon half man¹. The riddle was read for Greece by the discovery in Crete of the Hymn to the Kouretes², a ritual hymn containing very early material; it is sung by a band of armed dancers and they invoke their leader, the Greatest Kouros, to come for the year and to leap for fields of fruit and for fleecy flocks and *for young citizens*. The Kouretes are the young men just come to maturity, just initiated into the fertility dance of their tribe; they invoke their leader as lord of moisture and life, or as they say, "Lord of all that is wet and gleaming." The band of initiate youths are the prototypes of all the Satyrs and Seilenoi, the Salii and Maruts of Europe and Asia, they too are the parents of the still surviving mummers and sword-dancers of village feasts³.

The cult of the Kouretes was at home in Crete and the great central worship of the Mother goddess. In the bridal chamber (*θαλάμειμα*) of Crete the young men, before they might win their earthly brides, were initiated to the Mountain Mother⁴ and became symbolically her consorts or husbands. Marriage is *the* mystery *par excellence*. The ceremony was of prime importance as securing alike her fertility and theirs. Thus it will be seen that the Kouretes reflect a matrilinear social structure, the condition that naturally arises when parentage is precarious and often untraceable. Such a social structure focuses its attention on Mother and Child rather than on Father. The Child grows up into the young initiated man

¹ Hastings, *Encyclopaedia*, "Kouretes and Korybantes"; Leopold v. Schroeder, *Mysterium und Mimus im Rig-Veda*, 1908.

² J. E. Harrison, *Themis*, pp. 1-49.

³ E. K. Chambers, *The Mediaeval Stage*, pp. 182-204.

⁴ A. B. Cook, *Zeus*, 1913, p. 650; Hastings, *Encyclopaedia*, "Mountain Mother."

and the young initiated man becomes the consort of the perennial mother. The Kouretes in the Hymn tend the holy child and this is with magical intent, they marry that the land may be fertile, they tend the child that their own children may be nurtured. Then as the religious instinct develops they project from their own body a leader, a Greatest Kouros, to whom they hand over the functions they themselves performed. But this process will become more clear at a later stage in the argument. In like fashion the religious rites of the Satyrs centre round the Mother Semele, the Phrygo-Thracian Earth goddess, and in like fashion the Satyrs project from their band the arch-satyr Dionysos; the *thiasos* is before the god.

So far we have seen that the social factor which shaped and conditioned religious notions was the *group*, first the totem-group then the tribal-group. We have now to watch the emergence and development of the *individual* as social factor and to mark its influence on ritual and religious thinking. This brings us to our third stage.

(3) THE MEDICINE-MAN AND KING-GOD.

The old Byzantine scholar Tzetzes has bequeathed to a tardily thankful posterity this remarkable statement:

Zeuses the ancients used to call their kings.

He feels it to be noteworthy for, in slightly altered words, he repeats it six several times. Yet for eight centuries it lay, a neglected fossil. Scholars of course were conscious of a doctrine known as the "divine right of kings." They remembered that Dr Johnson was taken to Queen Anne, was touched by Queen Anne for scrofula. Virgil they knew tells how the mad and blasphemous Salmoneus King of Thessaly was blasted because he dared to counterfeit the thunder and lightning. But it occurred to no one¹ that Salmoneus *qua* king was doing his regular business, that in the eyes of his people he *was* Zeus and *had* to make the weather.

What then is this divinity that "doth hedge a king"? How could the notion arise when kings are born and die and sleep and wake and eat and drink like the rest of us? The answer is found

¹ Attention was, I believe, first called to the passage in Tzetzes and the true explanation given by Mr A. B. Cook, *Classical Review*, 1903-1904.

in the origin of the kingship. How did kings come to be? The answer may seem obvious. The king is the strongest man of the tribe. This simple solution like so many obvious answers is wrong or at least not wholly right. It is the answer of what Dr Frazer¹ calls the "armchair philosopher with his feet on the fender," and not of the man who seeks his facts among the savages of to-day in Uganda, in Malay, in Central Australia, in Japan. Here and there a strong man by sheer physical force may enjoy a certain dominance, but mere strength will not suffice for a king, the savage is ruled rather by hope and fear than force, the king must have magic behind him. The personality of king and god alike develop out of the head medicine-man, and the business of the head medicine-man as we have seen is to be food-producer and rain-maker. The king then is the head medicine-man and, delightful corollary, his fetishes are the regalia, the possession of which, as for example among the Southern Celebes, *carries with it the right to the throne*. These regalia may be almost anything, a weapon, a bit of stone or wood, or queer shaped fruit, best of all *a bit of the body of a former king* like the relic of a saint.

In the Australian ceremonies of the Intichiuma, it will be remembered, the ancestors of the tribe were commemorated in pantomime. When the magical functions of the tribe are focused on one individual, the king, the ancestors are not forgotten. Among the Matabeles of South Africa² the king each year offers sacrifices at the festival of the new fruits which ends the annual tribal dances. On these occasions "*he prays to the spirits of his forefathers and to his own spirit*." There is, it will be noted, no god involved, only the forefathers and himself the head medicine-man. In Southern Nigeria³ one of the petty kings gave this account of himself and certainly he does not figure as "the strong man." "The whole town forced me to be head chief. They hanged the big juju (or fetish of the buffalo's horns) round my neck. . . . It is an old custom that the head-chief here shall never leave his compound. I have been shut up ten years, but being an old man I don't miss my freedom. I am the oldest man of the town and they

¹ My instances are all taken from Dr Frazer's *Lectures on the Early History of the Kingship*, 1905.

² Frazer, *op. cit.* p. 32.

³ *Op. cit.* p. 118.

keep me here to look after the jujus and to conduct the rites celebrated when women are about to give birth to children, and other ceremonies of the same kind. By the observance and performance of these ceremonies I bring game to the hunter, cause the young crop to be good, bring fish to the fisherman, and make rain to fall. So they bring me meat, yams, fish. To make rain, I drink water and squirt it out and pray to our big deities. If I were to go outside this compound I should fall down dead on returning to the hut. My wives cut my hair and nails and take great care of the parings." Here the mention of the "big deities" shows the dawn of the priestly go-between, but otherwise we have just an old medicine-man, a centre of tribal sanctities.

These puppet kings though intensely divine are really rather the slaves and tools of their people than their lords. This is shown not only by their tedious trammelled lives hedged round by tabus but in poignant fashion by their tragic deaths¹. In his life he must be what the Greeks called ἀμύμων, "blameless," that is flawless in his physical life, because on his integrity and vitality depended the life of his people and of all those natural things on which that people's life depended. Fertility, flocks and herds, rain and sunshine depended on the king's life, if that life waned pestilence and famine would certainly ensue. So by inexorable savage logic, the king must never be allowed to grow enfeebled, he must, if needs be, be put to death to save his life. Sometimes the king himself is put to death by common consent of the tribe like the ancient Sire, sometimes by proxy it is the king's son, sometimes a sacred beast in whom the king is incarnate—survival of the totem, sometimes a chance stranger regarded as a kind of divine apparition, sometimes merely a representative puppet. In some form or another "it is expedient that one man shall die for the people" and to be efficacious that man must be sacred, divine. Hence all the manifold rites of death and burial of the gods which puzzled the pious Plutarch² so sadly. Rites of "tearing to pieces," "resurrections," "regenerations," of "deaths and dismemberments," rites which he knew took place not only in Egypt or Asia Minor but in connection with his own god Dionysos. Plutarch would fain

¹ Frazer, *Golden Bough*, III. "The Dying God."

² *De Iside et Osiride*, 69-71.

think of his gods as Olympians, serene, beneficent, immortal, but being an honest man he cannot blink facts. He is like some kindly Anglican called upon suddenly on Ash Wednesday to curse his neighbours instead of blessing them.

The sanctity of the king-god's life, the supreme importance of conserving it, survives in the ritual of the Roman Church to-day, in the custom of burning Incense. Ask a Roman priest, or indeed any educated person, what is the significance of Incense¹. He will tell you it is part of the regular ritual of the Mass, that it is a symbol of purification, of consecration—that Incense mounts like prayer to heaven and, what not. All this Incense has come to mean, but the use of Incense dates from the time of the Pharaohs, and to the priest of Pharaoh's time Incense spelt something simpler and more substantial. The Egyptian wanted to keep his king alive. The king had been his benefactor during life, why lose his benefactions by death? To keep the king alive the Egyptian mummified the corpse, and also made portrait statues of exact and marvellous similitude. But something was wanting. The statue lacked the moisture, the juices of life, the aroma, the smell of the living man—a smell of which the Egyptian with his liberal use of unguents and perfumes was vividly conscious. To supply the deficiency of moisture he poured out libations, to give the aroma he burnt Incense and his custom spread well nigh over the whole civilized world.

It may seem at first sight to be of little consequence whether magical functions were distributed among a group of initiated men or focused in the "person of a single king." Possibly even the transition might seem a loss. For the dominance of a democratic body of full grown men we substitute a single autocrat. History has however shown everywhere that real freedom begins with the emergence of the gifted individual, the democracy of the whole tribe is but a democracy in name, it is really the tyranny of a gerontocracy, of the old men who initiate the young men and forcibly impose the tradition of the tribe. With the medicine-king arose a certain though very limited scope for the forces of personality and also, as the medicine-man was the depository of such experimental science as the tribe possessed, his elevation to the

¹ G. Elliot Smith, *The Evolution of the Dragon*. Manchester University Press.

kingship was in some sense the first beginning of "endowment" of research.

But for religion the momentous step taken by the institution of the kingship was that henceforward sanctities tended to become personalities. The notions of tabu and sanctity became incarnate in a person—the king as incarnate tabu and magic is undoubtedly the father of the pagan god. We shall later see that our modern notion of divinity, though owing much of its anthropomorphism to pagan gods, has also other roots. This notion that the sacred, the divine, was human-shaped is perhaps the most momentous step, for better for worse, that the religious imagination has ever taken. How such a step came to be taken, that is how the god developed out of the human king, will be best seen when we examine our last stage or stratum, the Fertility Play or Year Drama.

(4) THE FERTILITY PLAY OR YEAR DRAMA.

At Viza, the ancient Bizue in Thrace, some eight hours to the North of Salmydessus on the Black Sea, may still be seen¹ a folk-play which by its very simplicity and even baldness makes singularly clear its original magical intent. The masqueraders assemble early in the morning. They are two men wearing masks, goat-skin caps and bells, one of them sometimes differentiated by a blackened face, two boys disguised as girls, an old woman carrying a baby in a basket and a sort of chorus of gipsies and gendarmes. The masqueraders after the fashion of mummers in England and elsewhere go from house to house demanding food and money and singing songs of blessing on the generous householders. One of them carries a phallos with which he knocks at the doors. All the characters dance together, some brandishing drawn swords, and an obscene pantomime is acted on straw heaps in front of the house by two men, one disguised as a woman. Then follows a sort of preliminary act, the mock forging of a ploughshare by the "smith" and his wife, the yoking of the plough which is drawn round the village square and the sowing of seed.

Next comes the play proper. The old woman Babo comes in

¹ It was seen by Mr R. M. Dawkins in 1906; see "The Modern Carnival in Thrace and the Cult of Dionysos," *J.H.S.* xxvi. (1906) 191, and A. J. B. Wace, "North Greek Festivals," *B.S.A.* xvi. (1909-1910) 232.