

## (1) TOTEM, TABU AND EXOGAMY.

The word *totem*<sup>1</sup> means not plant or animal but simply family, group or tribe. It is important to grasp this clearly as the supposed kinship of man with various plants and animals is a fact so odd that it has arrested undue attention and tended to obscure the real significance of the totem. Besides the idea of family or group the word totem is also used for a family mark. Thus the primal notion of a totem is a group distinguished by a common label or badge. The totem animal is always a group of animals not an individual animal, the totem relation is always the relation of a group of men to a group of animals or plants, the primary gist of totemism is the *distinction of groups*.

How this distinction of groups came to be of such intense religious significance we shall see in a moment. For the present it is interesting to note that as the totem animal—the tribal animal—long precedes the animal god, so in Greek religion *Moirapartition*<sup>2</sup> preceded and overruled the whole Olympian system.

Totemism is then mainly and primarily an affirmation of group unity. Primitive man thinks or rather feels in terms of his group: the group is his universe. So much perhaps our latter-day parochialism or patriotism might teach us. Totems are not worshipped, they are not definite deities propitiated with prayer and sacrifice, but it is easy to see that from the focus of attention on the totem animal or plant they may be the stuff of which pagan divinity is made. The “making of a god” is a stage at which we have not yet arrived. It is enough to note for the present that the totem is the collective symbol, the badge of distinction, the representa-

<sup>1</sup> For the whole subject of Totemism see Dr Frazer's *Totemism*, 1887, and his *Totemism and Exogamy*, 4 vols., 1910; E. Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*; S. Freud, *Totem und Tabu*, 1913. Dr Frazer holds that exogamy arose independently of totemism and that totemism is the earlier of the two; he gives up the hope of discovering the origin of exogamy and believes he has caught the secret of totemism. Dr Durkheim holds that totemism and exogamy are inextricably intertwined: that the one cannot exist save as an unmeaning survival without the other. He stresses here as elsewhere the group aspect. Dr Freud adopts mainly the same position as Dr Durkheim, stressing and more fully explaining the *tabu* element. The view here expressed is based on Durkheim and Freud.

<sup>2</sup> For *Moirai* in relation to social organization see F. M. Cornford, *From Religion to Philosophy*.

tion of a family or group unity as distinct from other unities, a totem marks out, separates, differentiates. That such a badge or mark may become an intense emotional focus is self-evident; we have only to think of the passionate devotion inspired to-day by the colours. Once chosen and set up, such a badge is an emotional focus but we are left with the further question, where was the need of such a badge, the vital necessity of distinction, separation. Primitive man has no *natural* need for social order, for division and classification; what made him invent a totem and elaborate its attendant irksome system of tabus? The need must have been intense, imperative, essential to the conservation of life. To find this need we must go back to the beginning of society.

Human society with all its civilization is based on the family, the "promiscuous herd" as starting point is a theorist's dream. This primal family consisted of an adult male, one or more females and their children. This same primal family is observable even among the higher quadrupeds. With gorillas one adult male only is observable in each band. So long as the children are young all is well, and if all the children were females no difficulty would arise. The father simply marries his daughters as he married their mother. There is no "natural" instinct of repulsion against incest. Primitive man has no hygienic conscience for the next generation. Indeed, be the stock healthy, no need for such conscience exists. It is when the young male offspring grow up to maturity that trouble begins. The single oldest or strongest dominant male is confronted by his own sons as rivals<sup>1</sup>. He may not, probably does not, know them to be his sons, knowledge of the fact of fatherhood is comparatively late, but they are young males, inevitable rivals. If he is to keep his wives to himself he must kill these rivals or expel them. His rule is—no other male to touch the females of his camp, the result—expulsion of adolescent sons, i.e. exogamy.

It seems an *impasse*. Perpetual reiterated expulsion of all the young forces of the family. In time it is true the young males may and do conquer, the old father grows old and weak, the sons band together and slay him, but it is only themselves to retell

<sup>1</sup> Andrew Lang, "The Family," in *Custom and Myth*, 1884, p. 245. Darwin, *Descent of Man*, II. 362.

the old hideous story of sexual jealousy. Advance in civilization is forbidden for cooperation is impossible.

But there were other forces at work. The mother counted for something, the young males were to her not merely as to their father, young males, they were sons. The higher quadrupeds have longer infancy and this would foster affection even in the father. The eldest son not very much younger than his father would have little chance, he would be surely killed or expelled, but the youngest born when his father's passions were ebbing might have better luck. Moreover man is a social animal and his brain is highly developed, he must have vaguely hungered after peace and consequent plenty, killing your sons would pall after a time. The next step, the crucial step, the beginning of all our morality was taken—man began to impose tabus, and thereby arrived at a sort of social contract.

*Tabu* is never an artificial strengthening of an instinctive repulsion, it cuts clean across individual desire. It is easy to see what was the nature of the first tabu. It was made in the interests of the Father. Weary at last of the expulsion and slaying of sons, conscious that the day would come when they would in turn slay or disable him, he made terms with them on the basis of a tabu. You may stay at home on condition that you do not touch my wives or at least certain of my wives, your mother and your sisters or some of them are to you tabu. And if tabu they must be marked as such, they must carry on their bodies a totem badge or mark of avoidance. This system of distinction once started branched out of course into endless complexities with which we are not concerned. The primal cardinal fact is that totemism consists in group distinction, that it functions through tabu and that it takes its rise in perhaps the strongest or at least the fiercest of human impulses in sex jealousy. Here, as so often elsewhere, the fabric of Church and State<sup>1</sup> rests on a basis of savage animal impulse, crossed by the dawns of a social impulse.

The tabus of the primal family have left their traces in the curious survivals among savages known as Avoidance<sup>2</sup>. It seems

<sup>1</sup> See J. G. Frazer, *Psyche's Task*, passim.

<sup>2</sup> See J. J. Atkinson, *Primal Law*, 1903. The theory of the origin of exogamy in the jealousy of the Sire is due to Mr Atkinson, but he does not connect this with totemism.

odd and inexplicable to us that a brother may not speak to or even see his sister. The arrangement is, among the houseless nomads of Australia, inconvenient and to our thinking absolutely senseless. But in the light of the primal tabu on all sisters it is clear enough. The sister if she catch sight of her brother by accident in the bush is well advised to fall flat on her face.

Moreover, and this is an interesting point, we find the echo of the old savage primal family in Greek mythology. Before Zeus reigned there was an older dynasty—that of Kronos, and before Kronos was Ouranos the Heaven, mated to Gaia the Earth. Ouranos hated his children and slew them, but Kronos the *youngest* son conspired against his father and emasculated him and reigned in his stead. The story repeats itself in varying form from generation to generation. Kronos in his turn devours his own children as fast as they are born, knowing that he was fated to be deprived of his kingdom by one of them. Rhea the mother devised a plan by which she might save her *youngest born* Zeus, who reigned thereafter in his father's stead. In these stories it is the kingship that is emphasized, but it is clear that behind lies the jealousy of the Sire.

This explanation of the totem as essentially a group badge adopted to mark exclusions and facilitate tabus made necessary by the Sire's jealousy clears up much that has long been mysterious. The totem animal once chosen may as a rule not be killed and eaten, but on certain solemn occasions by common consent he is killed and he is eaten. From that solemn slaying is traceable all the long series of sacrifices and sacraments. Just so the father—for whom indeed the totem animal is in a sense surrogate—cannot and may not be slain. But in the old family system, as we have seen, by common consent and insurrection of the brothers he was slain. This slaying, at first an inevitable outrage, may well have crystallized into a custom. Whether the old Sire was ever eaten by way of incorporating his exceptional powers may remain uncertain. But in the slaying of the father we have at least the germ of the later sacrifice of the king-god.

Further, light is thrown by this explanation on the curious attitude of mind towards the totem, which Freud<sup>1</sup> has called *Ambivalenz*, the attitude that is of mingled attraction and repul-

<sup>1</sup> *Op. cit.*, the term was originated by Bleuler.

sion, desire and shrinking, which is the very gist and marrow of tabu. This *Ambivalenz* is characteristic of the feeling of the son to the father, and of all savages towards tabued objects. It is the attitude of obedience to a non-natural prohibition, the desire remaining while the prohibition holds. It disappears when the rationality of a prohibition is fully recognized, but it survives in diseased neurotic consciences charged with the atmosphere of repressed desire. Tabu is the first categorical imperative and is the parent of sanctity, that sanctity which long preceded divinity. Holiness has just this character of *Ambivalenz*; the thing that is *sacer* as Robertson Smith long ago recognized is impure as well as pure, a danger as well as a safeguard, it attracts and repels. Now-a-days we think of things holy as things divine, either gods themselves or things especially associated with divinity, but sanctity to primitive man meant something quite other, it meant the thing tabued, whether person or plant or animal, the tabu being imposed by the group protecting itself against the individual. Sin, sanctity, repentance, purification, all the notions we feel to be so intensely and characteristically religious took their rise at least in tabu.

Especially does this conjoint notion of tabu and totemism explain the sanctity of animals and plants and the rise of plant and animal gods. On any other showing it is not easy to understand why a man should worship the plant or animal which he can any time kill and eat. He might admire it, and feel curiosity as to its wondrous ways, he might if it were fierce and strong feel fear of it, but he would not feel that special blend of awe and attraction which we call worship. But given that an animal or plant has been chosen as a totem, all becomes simple. It may have been quite accidentally that the thing chosen was plant or animal. The choice was natural as man's attention is much engaged by plants and animals but it was not essential, as is shown by the fact that almost any natural object may become a totem, and even some objects that are artificial. Given then that an animal or plant is chosen as a totem, it becomes the sign manual of tabu, it is hedged round with prohibitions, it becomes a thing apart, marked by the group with sanctity, remote from daily use. It is not the plant or animal that is useful to him or that feeds him that the savage



will tend to worship. It is the plant or animal tabued. From the tabued animal or plant to the sacred animal or plant and from the sacred to the divine the steps are easy.

Moreover plants and animals are of high, indeed the highest importance in totemistic rites. So high is this importance that it has led some observers to see in these plant and animal rites the actual origin of the sanctity of the totem. This we believe to be mistaken, sanctity arises primarily in tabu.

Turning to totemistic rites their object is clear enough. They are uniformly what we have called *impulsive* or inductive. Their object is to produce and enhance life, the multiplication of such totem plants and animals as are good for food. The ceremonies are known among some Australians as *Intichiuma*<sup>1</sup> and this name has become current. They are also known as *mbatgalkatiuma*, which means "to fecundate" or to "put in good condition." The *Intichiuma* are celebrated just before the rainy season. The rain is important because the savage has grasped the all important fact that life depends on moisture. This life-giving moisture will be sought and found in various ways according to physical conditions. In Egypt religious ceremonial will centre not on rain-making but on the Nile. In Greece we shall have rain-making ceremonies and the cult of springs and small rivers. In Australia as soon as the rains arrive, vegetation springs up as though by magic and animals multiply. It is the great religious season of the year.

The rites celebrated are mainly mimetic dances. All over the world, in the magico-religious stage, primitive man dances where we should pray or praise. This is inevitable though at first surprising. He cannot pray, he knows of no one to pray to. He must *act* directly—try to get what he wants by doing it. His dances are in the main, in so far as they are not merely the outlet of pent up emotion, *mimetic*. He does in pantomime what he wishes done. He wants to multiply his totem, so he imitates the actions of this totem—he jumps like a kangaroo, he screeches like a bat, he croaks like a frog, he imitates the birth of a Witchetty grub. Only a kangaroo man can cause kangaroos to multiply and though

<sup>1</sup> The best summary and analysis of the *Intichiuma* rites is found in Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, p. 326, based of course on Spencer and Gillen and Strehlow's investigations.

he may not, save in solemn sacrament, eat kangaroo himself, he performs the kangaroo ceremonies that other totem groups may eat and they will do the like for him. Rain is often imitated and caused by the sprinkling of drops of blood or the shaking of white down to simulate clouds.

And here a point of great importance must be noted. These pantomimic rites have all one object, the promotion of life by means of food, but they are separable into two groups, the one purely imitative, just described, the other imitative but also commemorative. The one looks forward, the other back<sup>1</sup>. The commemorative rite looks back to the ancestors of the tribe and re-enacts their doings, it represents the mythical history of the tribe. The past is made to live again by means of a veritable dramatic representation. Now here the intent is manifestly not the direct impulsion of fertility but the strengthening of solidarity. So important however is the *indirect* action of this strengthening of solidarity that to omit the performance of the ancestor rites would inevitably bring bad luck. There could be no better instance of the intense religious importance of the group. No group can function with its full force unless it invokes tradition. Here in these commemorative ancestor rites we have the dawn of true religious notions of high importance, the idea of immortality, the idea of group immortality as preceding individual immortality, the idea of ancestor worship which springs straight out of ancestor commemoration and is a powerful factor in the making of the anthropomorphic god.

Totemism and tabu have given us in embryo our main religious conceptions, the ideas of sanctity, of sacrament, of sin, of sacrifice, of animal and plant worship, of immortality and ancestor worship. We have seen them emerge in close conjunction with social structure, and this no longer surprises us. If religious impulse be the impulse to the conservation and promotion of the group life, and that life depends for its conservation on some sort of social contract, the dependence of religion on social structure is inherent and

<sup>1</sup> For the detailed psychological analysis of rites both commemorative and anticipative, see J. E. Harrison, *Themis*, chapter II, "On the Dithyramb, the *δρῶμενον* and the Drama," and more simply, *Ancient Art and Ritual*, chapter II, "Pantomime Dances."

essential. Rites not only procure the means of life but they are the means whereby the social group periodically reaffirms itself.

To watch the further development of these embryo notions we pass to our second head.

## (2) INITIATION CEREMONIES.

Initiation ceremonies are but a specialized form of the fertility ceremonies described under the name Intichiuma. When the novices are initiated a series of ceremonies are performed before them which reproduce even in minute particulars the rites of the Intichiuma. The mechanism of the rites is often identical, but the initiation rites are marked off by two peculiarities which it is all important to note. These are (1) the initiation rite is into the tribe, it is of far wider import than the totem ceremony; (2) the initiation rite is concerned with the human element in the tribe, it has not for its direct object the fertilization of either animal or plant. Its object is, as the savage himself frequently says, "to make or manufacture a man."

The detailed ceremonies of initiation are variable and cannot be discussed here<sup>1</sup>. We can only emphasize the main gist of the rite and this has been well summed up in the formulary *rite de passage*, rite of transition from one stage to another. It has been ably observed<sup>2</sup> that all ceremonies concerned directly with the welfare of man have this transition character, ceremonies of birth, of puberty, of marriage and of death are all alike in mechanism, they all facilitate the passage from one state to another, they are all of expulsion and impulsion, they ward off the dangers of the transit and enhance its benefits. The *rite de passage* on which primitive man focussed his attention was emphatically the rite of puberty or maturity, his transit from childhood when he was a useless encumbrance to manhood when he took upon himself the two main duties of savage maturity, he became a warrior and a father, he defended the present generation and engendered the next.

<sup>1</sup> A collection convenient for the general reader will be found in Hutton Webster, *Secret Societies*, 1908, and see the article "Initiation," by Goblet d'Alviella in Hastings, *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, and H. Schurtz, *Altersklassen und Männerbunde*, 1902.

<sup>2</sup> Van Gennep, *Rites de passage*, 1909.