

## INTRODUCTION

THE title of this book and its relation to my *Prolegomena* may call for a word of explanation.

In the *Prolegomena* I was chiefly concerned to show that the religion of Homer was no more primitive than his language. The Olympian gods—that is, the anthropomorphic gods of Homer and Pheidias and the mythographers—seemed to me like a bouquet of cut-flowers whose bloom is brief, because they have been severed from their roots. To find those roots we must burrow deep into a lower stratum of thought, into those chthonic cults which underlay their life and from which sprang all their brilliant blossoming.

So swift has been the advance in science or rather in historical imagination, so complete the shift of standpoint, that it has become difficult to conceive that, in 1903, any such protest was needed. Since the appearance of Professor Murray's *Rise of the Greek Epic* we realize how late and how enlightened was the compromise represented by these Olympians. We can even picture to ourselves the process by which their divinity was shorn of each and every 'mystical or monstrous' attribute.

When in 1907 a second edition of my book was called for, its theories seemed to me already belated. My sense of the superficiality of Homer's gods had deepened to a conviction that these Olympians were not only non-primitive, but positively in a sense non-religious. If they were not, for religion, starting-points, they were certainly not satisfactory goals. On the other hand, the cultus of Dionysos and Orpheus seemed to me, whatever its errors and licenses, essentially religious. I was therefore compelled reluctantly to face the question, what meaning did I attach to the word *religion*? My instinct was to condemn the Olympians as non-religious, because really the products of art and literature

though posing as divinities. Could this instinct stand the test of examination, or was it merely a temperamental prejudice masquerading as a reasoned principle?

The problem might have continued ineffectively to haunt me, and probably to paralyse my investigations, had not light come rather suddenly from unexpected quarters, from philosophy and social psychology. To France I owe a double debt, indirect but profound, and first and foremost to Professor Henri Bergson.

It is characteristic always of a work of genius that it casts, as it were, a great search light into dark places far beyond its own immediate province. Things unseen before or insignificant shine out in luminous projection. The sudden flash may dazzle, the focus be misleading or even false; but the light is real. New tracks open out before us, and we must needs set forth through the long uncharted shadows.

It is no part of Professor Bergson's present programme, so far as I understand it, to analyse and define the nature and function of religion. But when, four years ago, I first read his *L'Évolution Créatrice*, I saw, dimly at first, but with ever increasing clearness, how deep was the gulf between Dionysos the mystery-god and that Olympus he might never really enter. I knew the reason of my own profound discontent. I saw in a word that Dionysos, with every other mystery-god, was an instinctive attempt to express what Professor Bergson calls *durée*, that life which is one, indivisible and yet ceaselessly changing. I saw on the other hand that the Olympians, amid all their atmosphere of romance and all their redeeming vices, were really creations of what Professor William James called 'monarchical deism.' Such deities are not an instinctive expression, but a late and conscious representation, a work of analysis, of reflection and intelligence. Primitive religion was not, as I had drifted into thinking, a tissue of errors leading to mistaken conduct; rather it was a web of practices emphasizing particular parts of life, issuing necessarily in representations and ultimately dying out into abstract conceptions. A statement like this when condensed is necessarily somewhat cryptic. In the concrete instances to be adduced from Greek religion, it will become I hope abundantly clear. I may add that, save perhaps for a few sentences in the last two chapters, every word of my

book is, I hope, intelligible without any understanding of Professor Bergson's philosophy.

My second debt is to a thinker whose temperament, manner and method are markedly different, and whose philosophy is, I believe, in France, accounted as alien to that of Professor Bergson, Professor Émile Durkheim.

In the light of *L'Évolution Créatrice, Matière et Mémoire* and *Les Données Immédiates de la Conscience* I had come to see the real distinction between the mystery-god Dionysos and the Olympians. In the light of Professor Durkheim's *De la Définition des Phénomènes Religieux, Représentations Individuelles et Représentations Collectives* and *Sociologie Religieuse et Théorie de la Connaissance*, I saw why Dionysos, the mystery-god, who is the expression and representation of *durée*, is, alone among Greek divinities, constantly attended by a thiasos, a matter cardinal for the understanding of his nature. The mystery-god arises out of those instincts, emotions, desires which attend and express life; but these emotions, desires, instincts, in so far as they are religious, are at the outset rather of a group than of individual consciousness. The whole history of epistemology is the history of the evolution of clear, individual, rational thought, out of the haze of collective and sometimes contradictory representations. It is a necessary and most important corollary to this doctrine, that the form taken by the divinity reflects the social structure of the group to which the divinity belongs. Dionysos is the Son of his Mother because he issues from a matrilinear-group.

These two ideas, (1) that the mystery-god and the Olympian express respectively, the one *durée*, life, and the other the action of conscious intelligence which reflects on and analyses life, and (2) that, among primitive peoples, religion reflects *collective* feeling and *collective* thinking, underlie my whole argument and were indeed the cause and impulse of my book. I felt that these two principles had altered my whole outlook on my own subject, and that, in the light of them, I must needs reexamine the whole material—a task at present only partially achieved.

I am however no philosopher and still more no sociologist.

All this intellectual stir and ferment might for me have remained sterile or at least have taken no definite form, but for an archaeological discovery, the finding at Palaikastro of the *Hymn of the Kouretes*. In commenting on this Hymn, discovered in the temple of Diktaean Zeus, I found to my delight that we had in it a text that embodied this very group-thinking, or rather group-emotion towards life, which I had begun to see must underlie all primitive religious representations. The Hymn sung by the Kouretes invoked a daimon, the greatest Kouros, who was clearly the projection of a thiasos of his worshippers. It accompanied a magical dance and was the vehicle of a primitive sacramental cult. In the detailed analysis of the Hymn we should come, I felt, to understand the essence of a mystery-religion and incidentally the reason also why the Olympians failed to satisfy the religious instinct. The Hymn of the Kouretes furnished for my book its natural and necessary plot.

In the pages that follow, subjects apparently unconnected will come in for discussion. We shall have to consider, for example, magic, *mana*, *tabu*, the Olympic games, the Drama, Sacramentalism, Carnivals, Hero-worship, Initiation Ceremonies and the Platonic doctrine of Anamnesis. All these matters, seemingly so disparate, in reality cluster round the Hymn, and can really only be understood in connection with the two principles already laid down. If the reader will be good enough to hold these two clues firmly in his hand, the windings of the labyrinth will be to him no perplexity. The course is plain before us as follows.

Chapter I is devoted to the analysis of the Hymn. The Kouretes are found to represent the initiated young men of a matrilinear group. The Daimon they invoke is, not the Father of Gods and Men, but the Greatest Kouros. He springs from the social emphasis of the rite of initiation, the central ceremony of which was a *dromenon* or enactment of the New Birth into the tribe. Among primitive peoples the child, by his first natural birth, belongs to his mother, his life is of her life. By his Second Birth at Initiation, he is made one with the life of his group, his 'soul is congregationalized,' he is received into his church, his thiasos. The new life emphasized is group life. The unity of the group is represented by the figure of the Daimon. The Kouros stands



for the unity of the Kouretes, the Bacchos for the thiasos of Bacchoi.

Since the religious conception of a Daimon arises from a *dromenon*, it is of the first importance to be clear as to what a *dromenon* is. The second chapter is devoted to its psychological analysis. The *dromenon* in its sacral sense is, not merely a thing done, but a thing *re-done*, or *pre-done* with magical intent. The magical dance of the Kouretes is a primitive form of *dromenon*, it commemorates or anticipates, in order magically to induce, a New Birth. The Dithyramb, from which the drama arose, was also a *dromenon* of the New Birth. In the drama then we may expect to find survivals of a ritual akin to that of the Kouretes. Further, the *dromenon* is a thing which, like the drama, is collectively performed. Its basis or kernel is a *thiasos* or *choros*.

So far attention has been concentrated on Professor Durkheim's principle that religious representation arises from *collective* action and emotion. This emotion necessarily has its objects, and they prove to be such as occur in other primitive societies. I have studied especially two rites: (1) the Rite of the *Thunders* and (2) the *Omophagia* (Chapters III, IV, and V). The Thunder-Rite emphasizes man's reaction towards, and, in a sense, his desire for union with, the most striking manifestation of force in the universe around him. The emotions that arise out of similar reactions are expressed in such savage terms and conceptions as *Mana*, *Orenda*, *Wa-kon'-da*. In Greek religion this stage, owing to the Greek tendency to swift impersonation, is much obscured, but traces of it survive in such conceptions as *Kratos* and *Bia*, *Styx*, *Horkos*, *μένος*, *θυμός* and the like. Such sanctities, such *foci* of attention precede divinities and even daimones, and it is the manipulation of such sanctities that issues in the notions and practices of magic and *tabu* discussed in Chapter IV.

Magic, it is seen, though it may imply a large amount of mistaken science, arises primarily from a *dromenon*, a rite which emphasizes, and aims at inducing, man's collective desire for union with or dominion over outside powers. The kernel and essence of magic is best seen in the second Kouretic rite of initiation, the sacramental feast of the *Omophagia*. Sacraments lie at the heart

of religion and sacraments can only be understood in the light of totemistic thinking, which may long survive any definite totemistic social structure. To the meaning of the word *sacrament* Chapter V is devoted.

Totemism, it is found, is the utterance of two kinds of unity and solidarity, that of man with his group of fellow men, and that of the human group with some group of plants or animals. Sacramentalism stands for the absorption by man of the *mana* of non-man. Gift-sacrifice implies the severance of man from that outside *mana* which man has externalized, objectified into a god. Totemistic thinking knows no god; it creates sanctities but not divinities. These animal and plant group-sanctities live on in the plant and animal forms the mystery-god can assume at will.

The Omophagia was a *dais* or communal meal. Since food is the main source or at least support of life, sacraments among primitive peoples tend to take the form of meals, though other means of contact, such as rubbing and washing, are in use. As food was primitive man's main focus of interest, it was soon observed that most food-supplies were seasonal and therefore recurrent. Hence arose the seasonal *dromenon* with its attendant sacrifice. In Greece the chief seasonal *dromenon* seems to have been in the spring; its object, the magical inducement of fresh life, for man, for other animals and for plants. A particular form of this spring rite was the Dithyramb. In Chapter VI this is discussed in connection with the famous Hagia Triada sarcophagos.

From the spring *dromenon* with its magical intent of the renewal of the year, arose two of the main factors in Greek religious life and indeed in Greek civilization: (1) the *agones* or athletic contests, and (2) that other contest significantly bearing the same name, the *agon* of the drama. Different though they seem, and different as in fact they became, they arose from the same root, the spring *dromenon* conceived of as a conflict, a dramatic setting forth of the natural happening of the spring. This *drama* might with equal appropriateness be represented as a Death followed by a Rebirth or as a contest followed by a victory. Chapter VII, by Mr Cornford, deals with the greatest of the athletic *agones* of Greece, the Olympic Games, as arising from a race of the Kouretes. The victor in the race became the

daimon of the year, or, to give him a Greek name, the Eniautos-Daimon. In the victor is incarnate at once the daimon of the group and the 'luck' of the year. It is this *δαίμων γέννης* who is the real object of commemoration in Pindar's *Odes*; hence the prominence of mythical elements. The particular hero is commemorated rather as functionary than as individual personality.

And here I owe to the reader an apology, or at least an explanation, for the introduction of a new term. I am well aware that no such conjunction as Eniautos-Daimon exists in Greek. I did not set out to invent any such word, nor did I even foresee its employment; it simply grew on my hands from sheer necessity. Dr Frazer, following Mannhardt, gave us 'Tree-Spirit, Corn-Spirit, Vegetation Spirit,' and the use of these terms has incalculably enlarged our outlook. My own debt to Dr Frazer is immeasurable. But even 'Vegetation Spirit' is inadequate. A word was wanted that should include not only vegetation, but the whole world-process of decay, death, renewal. I prefer 'Eniautos' to 'year' because to us 'year' means something definitely chronological, a precise segment as it were of spatialized time; whereas *Eniautos*, as contrasted with *etos*, means a *period* in the etymological sense, a cycle of waxing and waning. This notion is, I believe, implicitly though not always explicitly, a cardinal factor in Greek religion. Beyond it, to anything like our modern notion of non-recurrent evolution, the Greek never advanced. I prefer the word *daimon* to 'spirit' because, as I try to show (in Chapter VIII), *daimon* has connotations unknown to our English 'spirit.'

At this point, before passing to the second great development from the spring-festival, the drama, recent controversy compelled a halt. Euhemerists of all dates, and quite recently Professor Ridgeway, have maintained that agonistic festivals and drama alike take their rise, not in magical ceremonial nor in the worship of a god or daimon, but in funeral ceremonies at the grave of some historical individual, a dead hero or chieftain. Totemism, vegetation spirits and the like are, according to Professor Ridgeway, secondary phenomena; the primary principle is the existence of the individual soul after death and the necessity for placating it. Now it is indisputable that, at agonistic festivals and in the drama,

*heroes* are commemorated. For his emphasis of this fact and its relations to the *origines* of drama we all owe a deep debt to Professor Ridgeway. But the analysis of the term *hero* goes to show that the main factor in a hero is that very being whom Professor Ridgeway would reject or ignore, the Eniautos-Daimon himself. Chapter VIII is devoted to the analysis of the term *hero*, with results as follows.

The *hero* on examination turns out to be, not a historical great man who happens to be dead, but a dead ancestor performing his due functions as such, who may in particular cases happen to have been a historical great man. As hero he is a functionary; he wears the mask and absorbs the ritual of an Eniautos-Daimon. The myths of the *heroes* of Athens, from Cecrops to Theseus, show them as kings, that is as functionaries, and, in primitive times, these functionaries assume snake-form. The daimon-functionary represents the permanent life of the group. The individual dies, but the group and its incarnation the king survive. *Le roi est mort, vive le roi*. From these two facts, of group permanency and individual death, arose the notion of reincarnation, *palingenesis*. Moreover, since the group included plants and animals as well as human members, and these were linked by a common life, the rebirth of ancestors and the renewed fertility of the earth went on *pari passu*. Hence the *Intichiuma* ceremonies of Central Australians, hence the Revocation of ghosts at the Athenian *Anthesteria*. Gradually, as the group focussed on its king, the daimones of fertility, the collective ancestors, focussed on to an Agathos Daimon, a spirit of fertility, again figured as a snake.

The later Attic heroes Ion and Theseus, unlike the earlier Cecrops and Erechtheus, do not assume snake-form. None the less they are functionaries rather than individual personalities—Ion a mere eponym, a group projection of the Ionians, and Theseus a *hero* because, as his mythology makes manifest, he took on the ritual and functions of the Eniautos-Daimon. This is clearly evidenced by his festival the Oschophoria, which can be reconstructed, partly from the recorded *mythos*, partly from the *dromena*. The principal factors are the *agon* or contest, the *pathos* a defeat or death, the triumphant reappearance or rebirth, the Epiphany. In a word the ritual of the Eniautos-Daimon is substantially the



same as the ceremony of death and resurrection enacted as a rite of tribal initiation. This ritual with its attendant *mythos* lives on in the Mummers' Play and Carnival festivals still performed at spring time all over modern Europe. At Athens, reinvigorated by the Homeric saga, it issued in the splendid human diversity of the Attic drama.

What then is the relation between the Homeric saga, which furnishes obviously the plots of Attic dramas, and the ancient ritual of the Eniautos-Daimon as embodied in the Dithyramb or Spring-Dance? The answer is given in Prof. Murray's Excursus. A detailed examination of the plays and fragments extant shows that, while the content of the plots comes from the saga, the ritual forms in which that content is cast derive straight from the *dromena* of the Eniautos-Daimon. Such forms are the Prologue, the Agon, the Pathos, the Messenger's Speech, the Threnos, the Anagnorisis and the final Theophany. Certain of these ritual forms also survive in shadowy fashion in the Games, but here they are well-nigh submerged by a growing athleticism. In the drama literary art by some blind yet happy instinct felt their value and held to them tenaciously.

Thus the ritual of the Eniautos-Daimon, who was at once the representation of the life of the group and the life of nature, issued in agonistic festivals and in the drama. We have now to watch another process, by which the daimon is transformed into a god and finally, for the Greeks, into that form of godhead which we call Olympian. To an analysis of this process the three concluding chapters are devoted.

In Chapter IX the case of Herakles who tried and failed to be a god is examined. The reason of his failure is found to be instructive. Spite of all efforts to make him *athanatos* he remains an Eniautos-Daimon, doomed by function and attributes to a yearly death and resurrection. He is also doomed to eternally recurrent Labours and cannot join the Olympians who 'dwell at ease.' He remains, like Asklepios, the typical half human *Saviour*. Asklepios, from the extraordinary spread of his cult, took rank as a god, but his snake-form enshrines his old daimon nature and prevents his becoming an Olympian. His younger form, Telesphoros, marks him clearly as Eniautos-Daimon.

Having seen how and why two daimones failed to become Olympians we have next to watch the transformation of one who succeeded, Apollo.

In the evolution of the Eniautos-Daimon we noted the influence of periodicity; the succession of the seasons was always important because they brought food to man. So far man's eyes are bent on earth as the food-giver. In his social structure the important features are Mother and Son, and, projecting his own emotions into nature round him, he sees in the earth the Mother as food-giver, and in the fruits of the earth her Son, her Kouros, his symbol the blossoming branch of a tree. The first divinity in the sequence of cults at Delphi is Gaia.

But before long he notices that Sky as well as Earth influences his food supply. At first he notes the 'weather,' rain and wind and storm. Next he finds out that the moon measures seasons, and to her he attributes all growth, all waxing and waning. Then his goddess is Phoibe. When later he discovers that the Sun really dominates his food supply, Phoibe gives place to Phoibos, the Moon to the Sun. The shift of attention, of religious focus, from Earth to Sky, tended to remove the gods from man; they were purged but at the price of remoteness. Apollo begins on earth as Agueius and ends in heaven as Phoibos.

Ritual at Delphi, as elsewhere, lagged behind myth and theology. Of the three great Ennaeteric Festivals, two, the *Charila* and the *Herois*, are concerned with the death and resurrection, the Kathodos and Anodos, of the Earth; they are essentially Eniautos Festivals. The third festival, the *Stepterion*, speaks still more clearly. It is the death of the Old Year envisaged as a snake, followed by the birth of the New as a Kouros carrying a branch. The same Kouros, representing Apollo in the *Daphnephoria*, carries a pole from which are hung the moon and sun. The God is thus manifestly a year-daimon. As the Son of his Father and as the god to whom the *epheboi* offered the first-fruits of their hair, he is also the Greatest Kouros. But unlike Dionysos, the other Greatest Kouros, he is a complete Olympian. Wherein lies the difference? An answer is attempted in Chapter X.

It is characteristic of an Olympian, as contrasted with a mystery-god like Dionysos, that his form is rigidly fixed and always

human. The Zeus of Pheidias or of Homer cannot readily shift his shape and become a bird, a bull, a snake, a tree. The Olympian has come out from the natural facts that begot him, and has become 'idealized.' The mystery-god was called a bull because he really was a bull—a bull full of vital *mana*, eaten at a communal feast. He died and was re-born, because the world of life which he embodies really dies and is re-born. But as the reflecting worshipper began to idealize his god, it seemed a degradation, if not an absurdity, to suppose that the god was a beast with the brute vitality of a beast. He must have human form and the most beautiful human form; human intellect and the highest human intellect. He must not suffer and fail and die; he must be ever blessed, ageless and deathless. It is only a step further to the conscious philosophy which will deny to God any human frailties, any emotions, any wrath or jealousy, and ultimately any character whatever except dead, unmeaning perfection, incapable of movement or change.

Then at last we know these gods for what they are, intellectual conceptions merely, things of thought bearing but slight relation to life lived. Broadly speaking, these Olympians represent that tendency in thought which is towards reflection, differentiation, clearness, while the Eniautos-Daimon represents that other tendency in religion towards emotion, union, indivisibility. It might almost be said that the Olympians stand for articulate consciousness, the Eniautos-Daimon for the sub-conscious.

Chapter XI brings us back to the Hymn. Whatever the difference between the religion of the Eniautos-Daimon and that of the Olympians, the forms of both these religions depend on, or rather express and represent, the social structure of the worshippers. Above the gods, supreme, eternally dominant, stands the figure of Themis. She is social ordinance, the collective conscience projected, the Law or Custom that is Right.

Una superstitio superis quae reddita divis.

The social structure represented by the Olympians is the same as that of the modern family, it is patrilinear. The figure of Dionysos, his thiasos, and his relation to his mother and the

Maenads, is only to be understood by reference to an earlier social structure, that known as matrilinear. But the all-important point is not *which* particular structure is represented, but the general principle that social structure and the collective conscience which utters itself in social structure, underlie all religion. Themis conditions not only our social relations, but also our whole relation with the outside world. The Kouretes bid their daimon come 'for the Year'; they also bid him, that crops and flocks may prosper, 'leap for fair Themis.'

Ancient faith held, and in part modern religion still holds, that moral excellence and material prosperity must go together, that man by obeying Themis, the Right, can control the Way of Nature. This strange faith, daily disproved by reason, is in part the survival of the old conviction, best seen in totemism, that man and nature form one indivisible whole. A breach of Themis would offend your neighbours and produce quarrels; quite equally it would offend the river or the earth and produce floods or famine. His emotion towards this unity the Greek uttered at first in the vague shape of a daimon, later, more intellectually, in the clear-cut figure of an Olympian god. But behind Gaia the Mother, and above even Zeus the Father, stands always the figure of Themis.

Such in brief is the argument. And here it would be perhaps discreet to pause. I have neither desire nor aptitude for confessional controversy. As my main object is to elucidate Greek religion, it would be both safe and easy to shelter myself behind the adjective 'primitive' and say that with modern religion I have no concern. But I abhor obscurantism. It is to me among the deadliest of spiritual sins. Moreover, the human mind is not made in water-tight compartments. What we think about Greek religion affects what we think about everything else. So I cannot end a book on Greek religion without saying simply how the writing of it has modified my own views.

I have come to see in the religious impulse a new value. It is, I believe, an attempt, instinctive and unconscious, to do what Professor Bergson bids modern philosophy do consciously and with the whole apparatus of science behind it, namely to apprehend life as one, as indivisible, yet as perennial movement and change.



But, profoundly as I also feel the value of the religious impulse, so keenly do I feel the danger and almost necessary disaster of each and every creed and dogma. For the material of religion is essentially the uncharted, the ungrasped, as Herbert Spencer would say, though with a somewhat different connotation, the 'unknowable.' Further, every religious dogma errs in two ways. First, it is a confident statement about something unknown and therefore practically always untrustworthy; secondly, if it were right and based on real knowledge, then its subject-matter would no longer belong to the realm of religion; it would belong to science or philosophy. To win new realms for knowledge out of the unknown is part of the normal current of human effort; but to force intellectual dogma upon material which belongs only to the realm of dim aspiration is to steer for a backwater of death. In that backwater lies stranded many an ancient galley, haunted by fair figures of serene Olympians, and even, it must be said, by the phantom of Him—the Desire of all nations—who is the same yesterday, to-day and for ever. The stream of life flows on, a saecular mystery; but these, the *eidola* of man's market-place, are dead men, hollow ghosts.

As to religious ritual, we may by degrees find forms that are free from intellectual error. The only intelligible meaning that ritual has for me, is the keeping open of the individual soul—that bit of the general life which life itself has fenced in by a separate organism—to other souls, other separate lives, and to the apprehension of other forms of life. The avenues are never closed. Life itself, physical and spiritual, is the keeping of them open. Whether any systematized attempt to remind man, by ritual, of that whole of life of which he is a specialized fragment can be made fruitful or not, I am uncertain.

My other debts are many.

To Dr Verrall, who in a single sentence gave me material for my second chapter. The reader will probably feel more grateful for his single sentence—an inspired bit of translation—than for the commentary that attends it.

To Mr Arthur Bernard Cook, who has spared time from his own valuable work to read through the greater part of my proofs. He has also, with a generosity as rare as it is characteristic, allowed