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The Worship of Creative Energy
as symbolized by the
Serpent.

A Dissertation presented to the New
York University for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

By

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- p. 16, note. Wilkin should be Wilkins.
- p. 20, fourth paragraph. scared should be sacred.
- p. 29, note 3. should r e a d Smith's Chaldean
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- p. 42, note. nags should be naga.
- p. 53, note 2. before the word "derived" add
"and is."
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"race."

Chapter I

Introduction.

The study of serpent worship is indeed a most interesting and at the same time a most perplexing subject. The serpent symbol stands for so many apparently unrelated and even opposite ideas that it is very difficult to be sure as to its basic and original meaning.

One must, therefore, exercise the greatest care in determining the primitive character of the worship and the later additions. Our ancestors were great borrowers of religious ideas and symbols; then having borrowed some symbol, they modified it to suit their own environment. They borrowed from Egypt, Babylonia and Persia; and in turn, Israel suggested religious conceptions to others. It is probable, for example, that the picture of Krishna, the incarnation of Vishnu, treading on the head of a serpent is originally a Hebrew conception. We are reminded by Sayce that many of the Egyptian serpent stories are priestly inventions made to gratify the popular fancy; for the people had a great many serpent fables of their own that came down to them from the greatest antiquity.

There is also a demand for great sanity in the study of the serpent as the subject is a delicate one. A distinction must be made between the simple, honest purpose of primitive man in his worship and the debasing character of the worship in later times. Serpent worship is a study where the mind sees as it brings with it the desire to see. There is abundant literature on the subject and you can take your choice according to the purpose you have in the study.

The largeness of the theme has led investigators to devote attention to some particular part of it and the result has been a very imperfect conception of the worship. One man studies the serpent in its relation to the sun, and he is so dazzled that he can see no other relation. Another views it as a river symbol and fails to see it related to the sun, another investigator is certain that he has found the original serpent in the lighting, the suddenness of the flash,

its death-dealing blow seemed serpent-like and originated the thought of serpent worship. These all are but partial views of its meaning. The true view is a composite of all these. We shall discover later how these are all rooted in one idea.

Again, the honest investigator must not confine his attention to one particular country or one particular time. He must endeavor to trace the worship to its source to discover its primal meaning. The study is about as elusive as the serpent itself; but it is alike fascinating and worth while.

We may say at the outset that the mental status of the primitive man defined his worship, and that no theory of serpent worship will be satisfactory which regards him as a perfect creature intellectually and spiritually. Dr. South in one of his sermons maintained that the first man was an intellectual giant, and that Aristotle was but the ruins of an Adam. This is similar to the theory of the country preacher who believed that the first man was made the depository of all the information that men have since been able to learn by invention and discovery, and that the fall caused the loss of all this knowledge; further, that these lost attainments were afterwards regarded as the lost arts, and that man is only gradually recovering this knowledge which he lost in Adam.

We are not, however, to expect such intellectual precocity in our ancestors of long ago. It is more natural to believe that primitive man began at a lower scale intellectually and religiously, and that he grew in wisdom and knowledge; his religious conceptions could not have been loftier than his civilization, his religious sense was awakened by the mysterious phenomena of nature, and he worshipped the mysterious power in and behind the phenomena. In his primitive simplicity we cannot think of him as having very spiritual conceptions; we believe that he had the possibility, but it was an undeveloped possibility for great spirituality. So the great mysteries around him made him think of the mysterious divinity, that was the source of his blessing or his destruction. The great drama of life was a mystery to him and he worshipped as best he could.

Chapter II

The dominant thought in serpent worship.

Man in the earliest ages worshipped the serpent because in some mysterious way the serpent symbolized the creative forces in nature; these forces were not worshipped because they were feared, but rather because they were the source of his blessing. I do not mean to convey the idea that there was no fear in his worship; but it does not seem the proper expression for the primitive man's thought.

Man was conscious of his own dependence and limitation in the midst of these great powers of nature. He believed that the movements of the great bodies in nature were caused by a power similar to his own. He of his own volition produced effects in the external world. In the mighty energies of nature he felt the presence of a divinity exercising his volitional power. It is part of man's inheritance to believe in divinity or divinities behind all nature's manifestations. It is not correct to say that he deified the powers of nature. It is correct to say that when man looked upon these mighty powers, he felt his own weakness and felt also the "divinity in these energies." Pfeiderer remarks; "that the imagination of the childlike man ensouls all nature, that is, treats it, especially the phenomena of motion, after the analogy of human or animal life between which he does not discriminate; thus he sees in every process the effect of a conscious and voluntarily acting soul."¹

Ulrici speaks to the same effect; when he says that the manifold nature religions do "not deify the mere powers and objects of nature" but rather manifest a "perception of the divine, though dim and undefined, of a power working behind the phenomena of nature."²

1 Pfeiderer. *Religions philosophie* pp. 277, 278.

2 Ulrici. *Gott und der Mensch* vol. I. p. 697.

Trumbull. *The Threshold Covenant*. p. 223. "The distinguishing attribute of man, as distinct from the lower animals at their best, is the capacity to conceive of spiritual facts and forces. Even at his lowest state, man is never without an apprehension of immaterial and supernatural personalities."

There is a great deal of force in the definition of religion as Schleiermacher has presented it; to him, religion is the consciousness of absolute dependence upon that which, though it determines us, we cannot determine in turn. The definition of Teichmuller, quoted by Max Muller, carries out the thought of Schleiermacher. Teichmuller says in part; Religion consists "of personal feelings of fear, of complete dependence on unknown powers, which form a motive leading man to seek comfort in a view of the world not supported by experience." This thought of absolute dependence may not be a complete definition; but we may be sure that in the religious conception of primitive man, this thought was a predominant one. It is perfectly natural to think that in the earliest ages his religion was very simple and childlike. When he was a child he spake as a child and thought as a child, when he became a man other elements of religious thought entered his soul.

When Spinoza says that religion is the "love of God founded on a knowledge of his divine perfections", we feel that this notion is not at all related to the religious faith of primitive peoples. In man's religious development, I think we may be sure that the sense of absolute dependence on unknown powers was the first thought awakened in his religious consciousness. This dependence was not a very highly developed and spiritual sense of need; but a real consciousness that there were powers without him and above him that could satisfy his needs. These forces above him would never have stirred him to worship unless there had been born in him the instinct to worship. The same forces are about the animal world; they give evidence that they fear these powers of nature, but that fear does not develop worshipful tendencies.

It was Hume's idea that as long as there is order in the world, man is not inspired to worship. The worshipful spirit is only aroused by the abnormal things in man's experience. The startling events in life have created religion. It is true that such experiences have awakened the religious sense; but that sense would never have been awakened unless it had been part of man's original endowment. Bereavement, danger, or some unexpected event

has awakened this religious susceptibility. A shipwreck impeded Volney to pray. The death of Hume's mother brought out this confession that his speculations were for the purpose of entertaining a "learned and metaphysical world"; yet in other things he confessed that he did "not think differently from the rest of the world."¹

The religious nature of man is based on his sense of need. Fear cannot be the ground of religion; it may and does have much to do with its beginnings, but the ground of man's religion is his religious nature; otherwise stock and stone would be nothing more than stock and stone to him. His worship therefore is the endeavor to find satisfaction for that nature. There must be what Bowne calls "a germ of religious impulse in the soul in order to make religious development possible."² That religious impulse in our primitive ancestors had to do mainly with his simple and immediate material desires. The thought of immortality was an undeveloped thought. In the very early history of man we cannot imagine that he made any provision for the future. He therefore was constantly dependent on the great forces of nature to supply his physical need. And so he worshipped the forces of nature not simply because he feared them. There was something more positive in his thought; his prayer was not that these powers would let him alone but that they would feed him. He needed food. The powers of nature could help him or hinder him in the quest.³ The sun could help the plants to grow or wither them, so he prayed that the great nature forces might be a blessing instead of a curse. He believed that the great nature forces were under the control of certain divinities and to them he addressed his prayers.

1. Harris. Philosophical Basis of Theism, p. 352.
2. Bowne. Philosophy of Theism. p. 3.
3. Pfleiderer. Philosophy of Religion, vol. III p. 19.

Hegel is not perfectly fair in his criticism of Schleiermacher's definition of religion. Hegel remarks that according to Schleiermacher a dog would possess more religion than man for the sense of dependence is fully developed in the dog, but Schleiermacher adds, that "religion is an inclination and determination of our sentiments etc." In other words religion is an inclination to God. Schleiermacher, *Christliche Glaubenslehre* p. 3.

Tylor gives us this prayer of the Khonds to the earth goddess, which was made when offering a human sacrifice to her: "By our cattle, our flocks, our pigs, and our grain, we procured a victim and offered a sacrifice. Do you enrich us. Let our herds be so numerous that they cannot be housed.....We are ignorant what it is good to ask for. You know what is good for us. Give it to us."¹ He prayed to the gods of nature because he believed that the gods founded the laws of nature and that nature must obey the commands of the gods.² For some reason that is not perfectly clear, man selected the serpent to symbolize these forces, for the serpent stands for a great many things. It represents the energy of the sun, the fertility of the river and the rain; it stands for healing and wisdom, and also for very opposite thoughts, such as destruction and darkness.

The worship of the serpent may be said to be almost the first effort on the part of man to grasp the power not himself.³ Trace back the history of almost any people to its legendary sources and you will find serpents in the legends. It is certainly very strange that such a creature as the serpent should have had such a hold on the thought of primitive peoples. We can readily understand why they worshipped the sun, the moon, the trees and the rain;—but why the serpent? And yet the fact is, that serpent worship was as important as the worship of the sun; more than that, it was the worship of the sun. It symbolized the life-giving power of the sun as well as the life-giving power of the other great natural forces.

Hannibal, in his oath before the deities of Carthage and Greece, spoke emphatically of the "powers of the sun, the moon, the earth, the rivers, the meadows and the waters." These were the great deities, and the serpent was associated with them all, representing their energy. The worship of animals had a local significance, but the worship

1. Tylor. *Anthropology*. p. 365.

2. Max Muller. *Origin and Growth of Religion*. p. 243.

3. Ferguson. *Tree and Serpent Worship*. p. 1. "Serpent worship is the oldest and most prevalent of all those forms of worship through which man ever attempted to reach or propitiate the divinity."

of the serpent is a symbolical worship of the active forces of life and is most deeply rooted in the religious history of mankind.¹

So prominent is this thought and so deeply rooted in the popular mind that it persists in spite of priestly effort to overthrow it. To these deities the people pray in time of trouble, when they want rain for their crops. This is true for India. It is not to the great gods of the Brahmans that the people pray. It is true for Egypt likewise.²

1. Polybius. VII, 4.

2. A. H. Sayce. Serpent worship in Ancient and Modern Egypt.
Contemporary Review. Oct. 1893.

A. H. Sayce. The Religions of Ancient Egypt and Babylon.



Chapter III

The radical meaning of the serpent symbol.

The serpent symbol has also a radical meaning: although sometimes it seems to possess very opposite meanings. In one place it is in intimate relation with tree worship, in another place with sun worship; but throughout, the root idea seems to be the creative power of nature, or as Squier has defined it, "It (the serpent) is always symbolical of the invigorating or active energy of nature." In man, the serpent stands for *desire*. In India, the creative idea is seen in the figure of Buddha seated upon a serpent, representing the thought that Buddha has conquered *desire*. It is also seen in the serpent that stood above the heads of the Kings of Egypt, symbolizing the mystery of life, *i. e.* the monarch's power in giving or taking away life. The same thought is illustrated in the picture of Vishnu seated on an immense serpent as the giver of life.

Trumbull says, "There are, indeed, reasons for supposing that the very earliest form of a primitive temple, or sanctuary, or place of worship, was a rude doorway, as covering or as localizing the threshold altar."¹

Primitive peoples regarded the threshold as sacred because it symbolized the beginnings of life. The superstitious reverence for the threshold in later times points to this interpretation. The intimate relation between the serpent and the threshold is seen in such inscriptions as those of Nebuchadrezzar II.² These inscriptions relate to the building of the walls of Babylon; they refer to the foundations, the thresholds and the guardians of the thresholds. He

1. Trumbull. Threshold Covenant, p. 102.

2. Trumbull. Threshold Covenant, pp. 109, 110.

Wilkins. Hindu Mythology, p. 97.

T. quotes from Rawlinson's Cuneiform Inscriptions of Western Asia, vol. I. p. 65.

says; "on the threshold of the gates I set up mighty bulls of bronze, and mighty snakes standing upright."

There is a close relation between the Hebrew words *miphthan* (threshold) and *pethen* (asp), which shows that that, which is symbolized by the threshold, is likewise symbolized by the serpent.¹ Leland, in his *Etruscan Roman Remains*, speaks of the worship of Janus,—the solar deity of the door and guardian of the sacred mysteries,—as connected with the worship of the serpent.² It is very evident from the facts presented in his book that the worship of the serpent was but another phase of the worship of the threshold.

Medusa, the most fearful of the three Gorgons, was once a beautiful maiden, but Athena changed her beauty into something fearful to look upon; her hair having been changed into serpents, because she became by "Poseidon, the mother of Chrysaor and Pegasus in one of Athena's temples."³

Layard speaks of a service he saw in the temple of the Yezidis, near Ancient Nineveh. Those who engaged in the worship, when prayers were ended, marched in procession, and as they passed the right side of the doorway leading to the temple, they kissed the door where was figured a serpent.⁴

I think we may be sure of this fact, that with all the elusiveness there is in the serpent symbol, the root idea is this, "the invigorating, active energy of nature." It represented the mystery of life and it symbolized the various forces of nature as they bestowed life and fertility.

1. Trumbull. *Threshold Covenant*, p. 233 note 3.
2. Leland. *Etruscan Roman Remains*, p. 132.
3. Smith. *Classical Dictionary Art. Gorgo and Gorgones*.
Trumbull says the hair of serpents was given to her because she violated the threshold covenant.
4. Layard. *Nineveh and Babylon*, pp. 302, 311.

Chapter IV

The serpent and the sun.

An emblem that one may see in India today is the figure of a man's head with serpents issuing from it.¹ The head stands for the solar disc and the serpents for the rays. This is one of the symbols of the naga worshippers. These naga people of India think of their ancestors as deified sun serpents. They are the "celestial serpents belonging to Surya." Man has a number of symbols for the sun; e. g. the disc, globe, eagle, goat, horse, hawk, horns, lotus, ram, rosette, scarab, wheel, cock, trisele, as well as the serpent.² They all in their own way show forth the glory and power of the sun. Frequently these symbols are combined, so as to illustrate in one single figure the many characteristics of the sun. The representation of the sun with the serpentine rays noted above is very suggestive. The serpent as the symbol of the sun is therefore the active, outgoing, invigorating energy of the sun.

In Egypt, the asp—Uraeus—stood for sovereignty and was placed on Pharaoh's crown.³ It was regarded as the protector of home and individuals. This serpent figure was not alone on the monarch's crown but was associated with the sun disc, sometimes there were added to it horns and feathers, the whole figure picturing the king's mysterious power over life. The figure of the serpent with the solar disc is frequently seen over a hawk-headed figure. Hawk-headed figures are always solar deities. The hawk, probably, had the same meaning in Egypt that it had in Greece, for Homer relates the hawk to the sun and calls it the "swift messenger of Phoebus." This Uraeus serpent of Egypt not only possessed power but mysterious power, the power of vomiting forth flames that destroyed the king's enemies.

1. Oldham. *The Sun and the Serpent*. p. 39.
Paraskara Grihya Sutra II. 19, 9.
2. D'Alviella. *The Migration of Symbols*, pp. 177-203.
3. Wiederman. *The Religion of the Ancient Egyptians*, p. 252.
Maspero. *The Dawn of Civilization*, p. 265.

The serpent Apep represented to the Egyptians the very opposite thought.¹ The asp was allied to the thought of life and light. Solar and regal emblems were associated with it, but Apep was the sign of darkness,—a form of Typhon, the enemy of the sun. In the Hymn to Amen Ra, we have a picture of Ra passing through the underworld.² When he reaches the seventh compartment, the serpent Mehen, the enfolder, is coiled around the cabin of Ra. Then comes the sharpest part of the conflict,—the battle against the Apep Serpent. The serpent is finally conquered and pierced with knives. This is the serpent of darkness. There are asp-like serpents also in the underworld. In the ninth compartment, according to the same hymn, there are fire-spitting serpents,—Uraei. These light serpents illuminate the path of Ra. In the twelfth compartment, too, they are represented as spitting out light.

The following is from the Hymn to Amen Ra; picturing the two serpents,—

“Lord of the everlasting, maker of eternity,
 Lord of adorations, dwelling in Thebes,
 Lord of the Uraeus crown, exalted by the two feathers,
 Beautiful of diadem, (exalted one) of the white crown
 of upper Egypt,
 The kingly land and the two Uraei are his (?)

The opposite of this conception of the serpent follows:

“Lord of rays, making light,
 The gods give praises unto him.
 His two hands give gifts to him that loveth him,
 He casteth down his enemies by flames of fire.
 His eye it is that overthroweth the wicked,
 It casteth its lance at the devourer of Nu,³
 It causeth the serpent to spit forth what it hath eaten.”

1. Squier. The serpent Symbol, p. 169.
2. Wiederman. The Religion of the Ancient Egyptians,
 pp. 90, 91, 111-113.
3. To the Egyptians Nu was the mighty deep.
 Nut was the sky.
 From this mighty deep all things are produced.
 See for this A. Smythe Palmer
 Babylonian Influence on the Bible.

Here we have the other serpent which symbolizes evil and darkness, the serpent Apep. In the Book of the Dead, chapter 15, we read;—

“Hail to thee who destroyest thy foes,
And annihilatest the Apep serpent (darkness).”

We readily see that the serpent stands for two things in Egypt; it symbolizes the good; it symbolizes the evil; the predominant thought, however, in Egypt is that the serpent is an agathodaemon. In this poem the thought is similar to the thought in the Avesta,—the conflict of light with darkness.

The Vedas likewise tell of a conflict between Indra and Vritra (Ahi). Vritra was the serpent power of darkness. The account in the Veda is this: “With his vast destroying thunderbolt, Indra struck the dark mutilating Vritra; as the trunks of trees felled by the axe so lies Ahi prostrate on the earth.”¹ Again the Veda says: “Thy thunderbolt struck off the head of Vritra, the obstructor of heaven and earth.”

The Russians have a similar story,—the conflict between Byellog, the light god, and Chernobog, the god of darkness.²

In India, the naga or cobra is regarded as the ^{SACRED} scared snake.³ The poison of the cobra de capello is most deadly, yet the Hindu will never kill one because of its sacred character, and strange to say, this most deadly serpent is regarded as a protector. This hooded serpent symbolizes the sun. “The Ahi of the Rig Veda and the Azi of the Avesta represent chiefs of the sun-worshipping people of India whose emblem is the many-headed serpent.”⁴ Surya, the sun god of the Hindoos, is pictured with a canopy over his head formed of the hood of the seven headed naga.⁵

There is at Abury, Wiltshire, England, a serpent temple that is evidently a representation of the serpent with

1. Rig Veda I. XXXII. 8. XXXVII. 8.
2. A. S. Palmer *Babylonian Influence* etc. p. 22.
3. Oldham. *Sun and Serpent Worship*, p. 29.
4. Oldham. *Sun and Serpent Worship*, p. 41.
5. Oldham. *Sun and Serpent Worship*, p. 47.

serpents are represented on either side of the circle instead of passing out of it. In China, on the arches of Peking, there is frequently seen the picture of a sacred ring between two serpents. In Persia, the sun god Mithras is represented as circled by a serpent. The compound symbol of the sun, serpent and wings, was upon every temple and almost every monument in Egypt. The passage of the sun through the Signs of the Zodiac, being an oblique path, seemed to the vivid imagination of the ancients like the trail of a serpent. The ancient mind saw the serpent form in almost every energy of nature, whether good or evil.

In the Hermetic philosophy, the three fold symbol of the circle, serpent, and wings was regarded as an emblem of consecration. The circle stood for the simple essence of God; the serpent for the vivifying power of God; and the wings for the penetrating power of God; in other words it represented a trinity of Father, Word, and Love, or the Supreme Being as Creator and Preserver.

According to Rawlinson, the Assyrians thought of the circle as the emblem of eternity, the wings as expressing omnipotence and the figure of a man as symbolizing wisdom.¹ The Assyrians and Persians modified the original Egyptian symbol by substituting the figure of a man in the place of the serpent.

It is probable that the winged globe was the work of Egyptian Priests. An inscription at Edfu says it was Toth himself who caused it to be placed above the entrances to all the temples in order to commemorate the victory won by Horus over Set, *i. e.* by the principle of light and good over that of darkness and evil.

The Phoenicians probably obtained their idea of the winged globe from Egypt, and it became a very great symbol to them.² They placed it on coins, gems, bowls, bas-reliefs, and on the lintels of temples. They modified it so that the Phoenician symbol can be readily distinguished

1. G. Rawlinson. The Five Great Monarchies, II. p. 231.
2. D'Alviella. The Migration of Symbols, p. 208.

from the Egyptian original. In the Phoenician symbol the heads of the serpents appear at the lower part of the globe; while the tails appear at the top and have the appearance of horns.

These winged discs are found also in Assyria and Babylonia.¹ D'Alviella says they certainly originated in the valley of the Nile for "it is there alone that they can be traced back to their simple and intelligible elements; the Disc, sparrow-hawk, the goat, and the uraeus serpents. Moreover—whilst in Egypt the Winged Globe is met with on monuments dating from the sixth dynasty onwards—it would be vainly sought for in Mesopotamia under the first Chaldean Empire and even under the first Assyrian Empire."

The Persians probably received the figure from the Babylonians when Cyrus overthrew the Second Babylonian Empire in 538 B. C. and Ahura Mazda himself took the place of the serpent in the midst of the winged circle, but one sees still the vestige of the serpent in the little streamers that fall from the circle.²

1. D'Alviella. *The Migration of Symbols*, p. 214.

2. D'Alviella. *The Migration of Symbols*, Figure 121, p. 219.



the solar disc. This temple consists of first, a circle of upright stones, equally distant from each other; then from the circle two avenues in opposite directions, one leading to the head, the other to the tail of the serpent. From the circle to the head there are one hundred stones, and from the circle to the tail one hundred stones. In all, this temple covers an area of twenty-eight acres and is a mile long. It is, therefore, like a monster serpent creeping over hill and valley.¹ Another similar structure in England is at Stanton. This temple is not as large as the one at Abury. A temple that was probably seven miles long in its original condition is found at Westmoreland.

England is not alone in the possession of these temple remains. There are evidences of similar temple ruins in Ohio and Iowa. The greatest of these is to be found in Brittany,—in the temple of Karnac,—which structure can be traced for eleven miles.² Deane estimates that there must have been ten thousand stones in the original structure. The general direction of the temple, though crooked, is from east to west. Near this serpent there is a slight elevation,—as is the case also with the one near Abury, England,—commanding a view of the serpent, where the sacred fire was kindled to the solar deity.

The primitive worship of Britain was that of the Druids. They worshipped the sun as symbolized by the serpent. The Druid's title was:

“I am a Druid, I am an architect,
I am a prophet, I am a serpent.”³

In the mythology of the Druids, there is a story of a goddess, Cerdiwen,—probably the Grecian Ceres,—whose car was drawn by serpents. Possibly Stonehenge was the scene of serpent rites. Deane thinks that the work of St. Patrick in Ireland was the driving out of serpent worshippers.

Serpent worship seems to have had a great following on the East coast of Scotland. There is a great number of

1. Deane. The Worship of the Serpent, p. 330.
Squier. The Serpent Symbol, p. 232.
2. Squier. The Serpent Symbol, p. 137.
3. Deane. The Worship of the Serpent, pp. 241, 242.

megalithic monuments there, on many of which is carved a serpent. So prominent is this figure, with others, that we can scarcely doubt that it was an object of worship.¹ There are some twenty-three representations of the serpent on these stones. As the monuments are similar to those in England, there is no doubt that the worship was that of the solar deity.

The principal deity of the Aztec Pantheon was the sun serpent, Tezcatlepoça.² He was the great Creator, and sustained the same relation to the Aztec faith, as Brahma did to the Hindu. His wife was Cihuacohuatli, "the great mother" of gods and men. In their worship, the Mexicans divided their thought of the sun. The sun in the fair season was Uitzilopochtli, whom they worshipped in May at the beginning of vegetation, in August when vegetation was at its fulness, and in December when the god of the fair season died; then Tezcatlepoça, the god of winter, took his place. Uitzilopochtli, which means "Humming bird to the left," was the divine messenger of spring. He was born of a serpent mother, Caoutlicue, who lived near Coat-epec, the "mountain of serpents." Caoutlicue meant to them the creeping of spring vegetation. The sun was the great god of the Mexicans, and to the present day it is said that the people in secluded parts of Mexico, throw a kiss to the sun before they enter the church.

The hierogram of Egypt is a striking illustration of the relation of the sun to the serpent.³ The sun is represented in this figure, as a circle associated with a serpent and wings. The verse in the Book of Malachi:—"The Sun of Righteousness shall arise with healing in his wings," is probably founded on this figure. It is a significant fact that the hierogram is not only the thought of one people, but is found among the Druids, the Persians, and the Chinese, as well as among the Egyptians, Greeks and Romans. In China, it does not present exactly the same form. The

1. Ferguson. *Tree and Serpent Worship*, p. 31.
2. Reville. *Native Religions of Mexico and Peru*,—Lecture II, pp. 49-59.
3. Deane. *The Worship of the Serpent*, p. 51.
Bryant. *Antient Mythology*,—Vol. II.
Squier. *Serpent Symbol*, p. 247.

Chapter V

The serpent and the egg.

Another conception of the ancient world was the mundane egg and the serpent. In ancient mythological thought, the egg stood for primitive chaos, the condition of all things before creation.¹ In the mundane egg was the essence of all things. The serpent was associated with the egg because it represented creative energy.

In Egypt, Cneph, the creator of all things, was pictured as the serpent, holding the egg in his mouth. It was from this egg that Phtha, the creator, came forth. Cneph was represented as a serpent with a ram's head. Phtha was to the Egyptians what Brahma was to the Hindus.

The Hindus believe that Brahm, desiring to produce creatures by an emanation from his own essence, produced a golden egg, blazing like a thousand stars, in which was born Brahma, the great parent of all rational beings.

Protagones, the father of the Greeks, likewise issued from the mundane egg. In Hindu thought, the egg was an emanation from Brahm, in Greek thought, the egg proceeded from Cronos, before whom there existed no being. He is represented in Orphic mythology by the serpent symbol.

The egg figures in the mythology of Japan, but it is associated with the bull rather than with the serpent; of course with practically the same symbolic meaning.

On the island of Cyprus, there is a stone vase thirty feet in circumference which is shaped like an egg, but on its side there is the figure of a bull instead of a serpent.²

1. Squier. *The Serpent Symbol*, p. 150.
2. D'Alviella, *The Migration of Symbols*, p. 209. This vase was found at Citium, in the island of Cyprus by General Cesnola.

Chapter VI

The serpent and the river.

Those who see in the serpent only a sun serpent, could study with great profit the river serpent; for the serpent, representing as it does, the invigorating power in nature, symbolizes the fertilizing power of the river quite as much as the life-giving power of the sun. We have already noted the basic thought in the symbol,—the creative, invigorating energy of nature. The serpent represents that energy wherever that energy is manifested, and in our study, we must keep that thought continually in mind. I personally believe that the river suggested the symbol, and that long before it marked the sun's energy, it stood for the fertility of the river.

The imaginative mind of man in his childhood could see the serpentine form in the river as easily as he could see it in the Milky Way. Keary in his "Outlines of Primitive Belief" claims that the river suggested the serpent symbol. He goes so far as to say that in almost every case the serpent stands for the river, and he presents very strong evidence which shows he is, in the main, correct.¹ The Greeks and Romans believed in Oceanus, which was to them the earth-encircling river. The whole Indo-European family had a similar thought regarding this river. The difference between a river and an ocean lies in this, that the river is continually flowing, and the ocean is not. This difference was easily remedied by the unscientific and imaginative minds of our early ancestors. The ocean-river flowed into itself. The Scandinavian Jormungandr serpent represents this idea, for in the mythology of this people he is said to rest at the bottom of the Midgard sea with his tail in his mouth. What is this serpent but the all-encircling river flowing into itself? The river is pictured as flowing through all time.

1. Keary. *Outlines of Primitive Belief*, pp. 71 ff.
Keary. *Mythology of the Eddas*, pp. 17 ff.

“Free shall it run, all ages through,
On it no ice shall be.”

So also the Greek Oceanus was thought to flow on forever. In the cosmogony of Egypt, Chaldea, Greece, and India, the earth was believed to be surrounded by an ocean or celestial river, whose circular course was compared to a serpent.

In the contest of Apollo with the python, the difficulty arose because the fountain goddess, Telephusa, was jealous of the sun god, and as a result, the python was destroyed by him. This is the most plausible explanation,—the waters at Delphi were dried up by the heat of the sun, and the drying up of the water was the death of the serpent. Ovid says that the python was born after the deluge of Deucalion. The python again is pictured as devouring rivers. What is this but the tributaries of the rivers that he devours?

We can with this interpretation see how serpent worship was associated with the worship of the tree. The tree and the river symbolized the reciprocal principles of nature. It is very natural to think of the primitive man as worshipping the tree because of the greatness of the primeval forests.¹ The serpentine river was the cause of the fertility of the primeval forests, and naturally both became objects of reverence, and from the worship of the river, the serpent was used as a symbol of it.

“I cannot pretend to account for their (serpents) primitive worship,” says Keary, “only I take it for certain, that at a very early time, rivers became, through symbolism, confounded with serpents.”²

There is, then, an intimate relation between the worship of the tree and the serpent in primitive thought; an individual tree or a grove of trees was an object of worship quite as much as the serpent, the tree being regarded as the symbol of the feminine.³ In Egypt, the worship of the serpent is associated with sun worship, but the tree has not

1. W. Robertson Smith. Religion of the Semites, p. 169.
2. Keary. Outlines of Primitive Beliefs, p. 75.
3. Trumbull. Threshold Covenant, p. 230.

been lost sight of. In Thebes, in the tomb of Ra-zeser-seneb, a peasant is represented as making his morning prayer to the sycamore tree, the sycamore tree was on the borders of his corn field.¹ This was not a state religion but a popular religion. Tree and serpent worship seemed to be part of the religious inheritance of the people.

“The state religion,” says Sayce, “was forced to embody this faith (of serpents) as Christianity to legalize the old worship of springs.”

At Qurna, in Egypt, in the quarries, there is a figure of a cow and a cobra facing each other with a table between them upon which are offerings. The worshipper is represented at the side. The cobra has horns, but more than that, he has a solar disc over his head, and behind him is the branch of a tree. It is very evident therefore that, behind the animal worship in Egypt, there was a deeply rooted nature worship symbolized by the tree, the serpent, and the sun.

The relation of the serpent to the Nile is seen in the primitive thought of the Egyptians, that the Nile god inhabited a chamber which had the form of a serpent. In this chamber, there was a small opening at the end through which he sent forth the river.

It is probable, however, that the thought of the serpent as the symbol of good and evil was a borrowed conception from Babylonia.² In Babylon, Tiamat was the great dragon of the deep, who aimed to destroy the gods, but Marduk (Merodach), the son of Ea, the good god, championed the gods, gained the victory, and the dragon, Tiamat, was slain. What was the meaning of Tiamat? The Persian Gulf once reached to Central Babylonia.³ The land was so low there, that the Euphrates frequently over-flowed its banks, which meant great destruction. The great deep was not then a source of blessing, but an evil, and was represented by Tiamat. The myth of Tiamat afterwards became abstract, and was generally applied to

1. Sayce. Religion of Ancient Egypt and Babylonia, p. 206.
2. Murison. Mythical Serpents of Hebrew Literature, p. 7, note.
3. Murison. The Mythical Serpents of Hebrew Literature, p. 7.

evil. So much for the origin of the story. In time, it was appropriated by other peoples and was applied to sun myths.

The Hebrews regarded the ocean as a serpent monster, —probably a borrowed conception from Babylonia. The sea seemed to them an unregenerate, disobedient serpent monster. The heavens were obedient but not so the sea. (Jer. 5:22. Job 9:8. Job 38:8.)

The Egyptians probably borrowed this Babylonian myth, and adapted it to their needs, so the desert became Tiamat to them. Tiamat was also a good principle to Babylonia. The overflow of the river was a benefit as well as a disaster;—it gave new soil, and therefore meant fertility.¹

Ea was another conception of the great deep. He was symbolized by the seven-headed serpent. Merodach, the sun god, the creator, was the son of Ea; for he arose out of the great deep,—the first born of the deep.² To the Chaldean mind, the world was “balanced on the bosom of the eternal waters.” Ea, therefore, was the sovereign of the waters. The same deity was the god of wisdom and gave warning of the flood to the Chaldean Noah. (Adrakhasis.)³

As in the case of India, Greece and Palestine, springs were sacred to serpents, or the jinns manifested themselves as serpents.

There are other theories which attempt to account for the serpent cult. There is the attempt of Schwarz who believes that the lightning must have suggested the serpent as a symbol.⁴ We shall speak of this theory later. Then there is the theory that the symbol was suggested by the character of the serpent itself. Certain facts regarding the serpent are considered as supporting the theory; for example, serpents are found everywhere, they are stealthy in movement, their bite is deadly, they possess neither arms nor legs, nor any of the usual appliances of locomotion and yet

1. Cox. Aryan Mythology, vol. 11. p. 351.
2. Oldham. Sun and Serpent Worship, p. 185.
3. Chaldean. Account of Genesis, p. 279.
4. Brinton. Myths of the New World, pp. 117, 125.

they move with singular celerity.¹ It is likewise suggested that as the serpent is the most mysterious being in nature, it very naturally became the symbol of the most mysterious things in life. The fact that the serpent can exist for an indefinite time without food, his ability to spring and instantaneously embrace his foe, his dreaded poison, his power to renew his youth, all these features conspired to make him an object of dread and worship.

This theory maintains that serpent worship originated in the fear the ancients had of these creatures, but the basic idea in serpent worship is not fear: the serpent is a symbol of fertility, and the ancients worshipped it for that reason and not because they feared it.² The serpent is a symbol of evil as well as good but the root idea in serpent worship is fertility and therefore the serpent at the very start was a symbol of blessing. The cause of the fertility of the land were the rivers, the torrents, and the rain clouds; and they all were symbolized by the serpent. The great river seemed like a living thing to these uncivilized peoples and its sinuous course seemed like a great serpent. This great serpent river fertilized the trees along its bank and therefore was worshipped as a great benefactor to man.

1. Testimony of Sanchoniathon quoted by Eusebius, *Praeparatio Evangelica*, p. 40.

2. Ferguson. *Tree and Serpent Worship*, p. 3.



Chapter VII

The serpent and the torrent.

To primitive people the mountain torrent seemed like a great serpent or dragon and so they called it. In Russian folk songs, the serpent stood for the mountain spring torrent.¹ Norka was the great, winged, many-headed serpent that inhabited caverns.

There is a legend of a cooper of Lucerne who fell into a pit, and spent the winter there in company with two dragons. They took flight as the winter passed, which meant that the torrents began to flow again after the winter.

Colossae was delivered from an inundation by the action of the Archangel Michael who conquered the dragon and opened a chasm for the waters.²

The fountain at Delphi, which was represented by the Python, was a rapid torrent.³

The Lernean hydra which Hercules overcame was probably the torrent serpent, and the Hebrew Tannin, or Leviathan of the Psalms, a waterspout.

A torrent, in Switzerland, is called a drach (dragon); and in the traditions of the people, dragons inhabited the mountains; these dragons were the mountain torrents.

Wild torrents of water were symbolized as dragons in ancient Babylonia; and, as A. S. Palmer says, this "dragon serpent or destructive monster has analogies far and wide in the folklore of other nations."

1. Ralston. *Russian Folk Tales*, pp. 65, 66, 115.
2. Lightfoot. *Appendix to Epistle to the Colossians*, p. 68, note 2.
p. 70, note 3.
3. A. Smythe Palmer. *Babylonian Influence on the Bible*, pp. 18, 89.
See also Keary's *Outlines*, p. 74.

The Ojibiways, the Algonkins, and the Iroquois of America had the same thought in their legends of the lake serpent. To them the storms of the lake were caused by this serpent.

Lake serpents are familiar figures in Irish folk-lore. In Thibet, rivers, springs and lakes are guarded by serpents.¹

Robertson Smith speaks of the superstitious reverence the Semite has for woods and running water, "the fountain and the tree were not simply the place which the deity frequents but the living embodiments of the divine presence."² The Arabs regard medicinal springs as guarded by jinn, and these were generally of serpent form. The movement of the fountain and the little wriggling streams about it probably suggested the serpent idea.

1. A. S. Palmer. *Babylonian Influence on the Bible*, p. 91.
Brinton. *Myths of the New World*, p. 113.
See for Thibet. Oldham. *Sun and Serpent Worship*, p. 203.
2. W. Robertson Smith. *The Religion of the Semites*, p. 153.



Chapter VIII

The serpent and the cloud.

It is a primitive conception that the serpent has great power over rain. Not only was this a thought of the people of the past, but uncultivated races of the world today believe certain snake ceremonies will bring the wished-for rain.

On this feature of serpent worship, Keary, speaking of Ahi and Vritra, says, that in the Vedic Hymns, they seem to be, symbolically, clouds, but that originally they were rivers before they became clouds, and afterwards they were transferred from earth to heaven.¹ It would seem that the rivers and the torrents suggested the symbolism of the serpent, and that at a very early time, rivers became through symbolism confounded with serpents.

The primitive man first saw the serpent in the river, and then saw the celestial serpent in the clouds, as in the case of Persia, where the sky is described under the form of a serpent.² Then the Egyptians thought of the universe under the form of a serpent with his tail in his mouth, the scales representing the stars. The eclipse of the sun, to the Chinese, is caused by the dragon, and they indulge in all sorts of noises to frighten him away. The rainbow, in Persia, was believed to be the serpent blowing from underground.³ But back of all this symbolism, is the basic thought that the active energy of nature is that which is symbolized by the serpent,—and the basis of that thought is the river.

The serpent, therefore, is worshipped as the giver of rain. The Chinese so regard their dragon. Martin speaks of witnessing “a long procession of country people enter the courtyard of the city prefect,—‘What is the object of the

1. Keary. *Outlines of Primitive Beliefs*, p. 75.
2. Eusebius. *Praeparatio Evangelica*,
Squier. *The Serpent Symbol*, p. 156.
3. Crooke. *The Folk Lore of India II*, p. 144.

procession?' he asked. 'We are praying for rain,' they replied. 'We have caught the dragon king and are bringing him to receive the worship of the magistrates. There he is in the palanquin. You can see him for yourself.'"¹ And he was, sure enough, in an earthen vessel,—a water lizard, four inches long. It was the avatar of the dragon king, and the prefect knelt and worshipped.

Rain in the East is almost like the gift of the gods, and therefore the dragon in China is worshipped because it is the giver of rain. In times of drought, special offerings are made to it. The general time for such petitions is in the spring and fall.

In India, the serpent is regarded as the giver of rain and so is worshipped. In the Vedic period, the watery atmosphere was personified under the name of Indra.² It was the deified physical force that was the most favored object of adoration because of the longings that the Indian agriculturist had for rain. Cox thus represents the battle of Indra with the great throttling serpent; "Whenever the rain is shut up in the clouds the dark power is in revolt against Dyaus and Indra. In the rumblings of the thunder, while the drought still sucks out the life in the earth, are heard the mutterings of their hateful enemy. In the lightning flashes, which precede the outburst of the pent-up waters, are seen the irresistible spears of the god, who is attacking the throttling serpent in his den, and in the serene heavens which shone out when the deluging clouds are passed away, men behold the face of the mighty deity who was their friend."³ The serpent therefore had the power over the clouds,—sometimes he was the giver of rain, sometimes simply the storer of rain. Vritra or Ahi was the throttling serpent that hid away the rain clouds, Indra throttled him and thus gave to the land the beneficent rain. The Veda says in the conflict of Indra with Vritra (the serpent) that "neither the lightning nor the thunder (of Vritra), nor the rain which he showered, nor the thunderbolt harmed Indra when he and Ahi (the serpent) con-

1. W. A. P. Martin. *Cycle of Cathay*, pp. 83, 313.

2. M. Monier Williams. *Indian Wisdom*, p. 13.

3. Wake. *Serpent Worship and Other Essays*, p. 85.

tended.”¹ India, at the present day, especially northern India, has great faith in the power of the nagas (serpents) to send rain. They are therefore propitiated to send it or to check it if it rains in excess.²

Chinese Buddhists tell the story of a naga king whom Buddha visited. The serpent King instead of being converted to his teachings sent a terrible rain storm.

There is a weird and horrible ceremony held every two years by the Moki Indians of Arizona in which serpents are handled and danced with because of their power over the rain.³ This section of Arizona is more or less arid, and this snake dance is thought to have some persuasive power over the elements. It is difficult to find a cause for such a conception unless it be this; that the river first suggested the thought of the serpent and that afterwards the serpent became the symbol for fertility.

The serpents themselves must have added other ideas not found in the river. The hissing of the serpent probably suggested the serpent's power over the wind, and it might naturally be concluded that the wind was really the hissing of the great Father Serpent.

Hough tells us of a Wolpi farmer who was bitten by a rattle-snake while in his corn field.⁴ After a great deal of suffering, and after heroic efforts on the part of the Indian doctors and the white people, he recovered. Then it was that the snake society told him that he must become a snake priest, because the snake had favored him. These people call themselves Hopis, though the name Moki, applied by outsiders, seems to cling to them. They are a primitive people, and primitive people have, universally, a high regard for the serpent. They are good people, and this is really worship to them. They live in a semi-desert, and the Spaniards of the sixteenth century did not trouble them. “The snake dance is an elaborate prayer for rain.”

1. Rig Veda I. 37, 13
2. Oldham. Sun and Serpent Worship, p. 52.
3. Hough. The Moki Snake Dance, pp. 18, 19.
Fewkes. Journal of American Ethnology and Archeology, vol. IV.
4. Hough. The Moqui Snake Dance, p. 18.

The place is not prolific in serpents, therefore a great hunt is made for them. The prayers of the people are addressed to the serpents, the serpents are then given their liberty so that they may bear the petitions of the people to the rain divinities, who can bring rain to the arid soil of the Hopis.

The worship of the Indians in Arizona varies. In some of the tribes, the worship of the sun is the main worship; in other tribes, it is the corn spirit; in others, the serpent. In all, it is the worship of nature's forces, not because they fear these forces, but because they would petition these nature divinities to send the fertilizing rain.

The power of the serpent gods over rain is a world-wide belief. You find it a dominant thought today in India, China, Korea, Mexico, and Peru.



Chapter IX

The serpent and the wind.

The serpent was symbolical of the wind that was destructive, and also of the wind that was beneficent.

Typhon, to the Egyptians and Phoenicians, was a destructive wind and is related to the Hindu Vritra and the Latin *Cacus*.¹ *Cacus* was not an ordinary wind, but one associated with clouds, and Typhon was a similar wind that the Egyptians and Phoenicians feared; not only was Typhon associated with the desolating wind, but the Egyptians made him symbolical of the ocean storm, and also of evil in general. Typhon was the dark, disturbing wind cloud that obscured the light of day, but that dark cloud was likewise the cloud of rain; as in the Hindu myth, which speaks of Vritra, the dark serpent who held the waters from the earth, he was not a beneficent deity, for while he controlled the waters of the sky, he was loth to let these waters refresh the earth; so Indra, the god of the watery atmosphere, contended with the serpent Vritra who held the waters back in the clouds; the outcome of the contest was that Indra was victorious, and down came the showers. In the *Mahabharata*, Rudra is regarded as the "destroyer of serpents," for he is the god of storms; but Rudra is also, as Mahadeva, the "king of serpents", and Mahadeva is represented as having "a girdle of serpents, ear-rings of serpents, a sacrificial cord of serpents, and an outer garment of serpent's skin."

Quetzalcoatl, "the feathered serpent" or "the serpent bird" to the Mexican, was symbolical of the beneficent wind; he was the gentle, fertilizing east wind from the Gulf that brought moisture to the arid lands of Mexico.² Tezcatlepoça was the serpent god of the north, and symbolized the dry season. It was this god that battled with the feathered serpent.

1. Wake. *Serpent Worship*, pp. 71-85.
2. Reville. *Native Religions of Mexico and Peru*, p. 57.

The Spaniards, when they saw a cross in Yucatan, immediately presumed that St. Thomas had visited the place and preached the Gospel, and that this cross was the evidence of his presence; but the cross was, more probably, a sign indicating the points from which the great winds of Mexico came.¹

It is a suggestive fact that, to the ancient mind, the symbols of good were also symbols of evil. Under certain conditions, that which is really a good becomes an evil, and the ancients had no hesitation in using the same figure for both conceptions. The serpent stands for the noblest things in life and nature. It stands also for that which is the very opposite of these noble conceptions. In this particular case, the serpent stood for the destructiveness of the wind as well as for its invigorating power. Vritra and Typhon represented it in its destructiveness,—Quetzalcoatl in its gentle, fertilizing energy.

We have a similar contrast in the Hindu god Rudra, the “king of storms”, a really beneficent god, most helpful in his ministrations to humanity.² It is this god that controls the serpent for man’s good. He it is who aims to have righteousness done in the earth; but “Rudra is also a robber, cheat, deceiver, and master thief.”³ He is the same as Hermes, who can be as a gentle breeze, or a destructive hurricane.

1. That which Indra uses to bring on the rain is called in the Veda “the stone with four points.” Rig Veda 4, 22, 1-2. This vajra of Indra had, probably, the form of St. Andrew’s cross. See on this D’Alviella p. 98, ff. Note also that the cross is the sign of the wind in India and Mexico.
2. Menzies. History of Religion, p. 326.
3. Wake. Serpent Worship, p. 85.

Chapter X

The serpent as atmospheric phenomena.

The serpent also symbolizes the various forms of atmospheric phenomena, and is related to the cloud and wind serpents.

Baring-Gould maintains that "the dragon of popular mythology is nothing else than the thunder storm rising at the horizon, rushing with expanding, winnowing, black pinions across the sky, darting out its forked, fiery tongue and belching fire."¹ The storm cloud as Baring-Gould has presented it was a dragon of popular mythology but not the only dragon the people saw in nature: the Chinese have, for example, nine dragons, and they do not all represent the thunder storm. Popular mythology had its torrent dragons as we have noted in a previous chapter. Mixcoatl to the Mexicans was the cloud serpent and Istac-Mixcoatl the gleaming cloud serpent, possibly the tornado.

Brinton believes that Schwarz is right with regard to the paramount meaning of the serpent in Greek and German mythology.² Schwarz's theory is that lightning is the original serpent, and that men first learned to worship the serpent because they saw it in the lightning. Brinton follows Schwarz in the main, but believes him to have been a little too extravagant in saying that the lightning first led man to venerate the serpent. Brinton applies the lightning theory of Schwarz to the serpent myths of America, for he believes that the lightning is the basic thought of these myths.

It would seem as if the originals of the cherubim and seraphim in the Old Testament were "dragon-like storm

1. Baring-Gould. *Book of Werewolves*, p. 172.
A. S. Palmer. *Babylonian Influence on the Bible, etc.*, p. 92.
Brinton. *Myths of the New World*, pp. 117, 125.
2. Brinton. *Myths of the New World*, pp. 117, 118.

clouds and serpentine lightnings.”¹ Scripture has many references to show the influence of the serpentine figure on the mind of Israel.² There are the fiery flying serpents of Isaiah 14: 29; the flying serpent of Isaiah 27: 1, Job 26: 13; the tortuous serpent of Isaiah 27: 1. These all picture the serpent of the sky. They represent the storm cloud and the eclipse. The root meaning of the word “leviathan” is to “coil” or to “bind”. Whatever this strange monster was, it had a serpentine form.

1. W. Robertson Smith. *Prophets of Israel*, p. 218.
Cheyne. *Isaiah*, 1:37.
Ewald. *Prophets of the Old Test*, II. 70.
A. S. Palmer, *B. I.*, p. 93.
2. Murison. *The Mythical Serpents of Hebrew Literature*, p. 5.



Chapter XI

The serpent as guardian.

The serpent as the guardian of the soil was one of the leading ideas of primitive times: as guardian of the soil we can readily understand how likewise he became the symbol of wealth, for he was also the guardian of the treasures of the soil. The dragons of China have to do with the treasuring and the sending of the rain, the guarding of the rivers and streams and likewise the guarding of the treasures of the soil.

The Acropolis of Athens was the home of the serpent that was the chief protector of the city.¹ It was Minerva, so tradition says, who created the olive and planted it on the Acropolis, and then entrusted it to the care of the serpent god Erechthonius, who is pictured as half serpent, half man. Herodotus tells us that when the Persians approached the city, the Greeks did not lose hope until the serpent god refused his food, then the Persians destroyed this serpent temple. The Erectheum was afterwards built on the same site. In this temple, "the tree," says Ferguson, "occupied the caryatid portico, the serpent the lower cell adjoining where the well of Neptune seems to have been situated."² Here again we have the association of the serpent with the spring.

The apples of Hesperides were protected by a dragon, which was probably the river or a spring which protected

1. Herodotus. I, 8. VIII, 41.

2. Ferguson. *Tree and Serpent Worship*, p. 14.

"The Athenians say that they have in their Acropolis, a huge serpent, which lives in the temple and is the guardian of the whole place, nor do they only say this, but as if the serpent dwelt there, every month they lay out its food, which consists of a honey cake: up to this time, the honey cake had been consumed, but now it remained untouched, whereupon they left Athens all the more readily since they believed the goddess had already abandoned the citadel."

Rawlinson's Herodotus, Book VIII, 41.

Vol. IV, pp. 250-251.

them from the withering power of the sun's rays. It would seem, therefore, that the serpent came to be thought of as guardian because of the protective character of the river. The river is the guardian of the soil. It is the river then, and the clouds that protect the land from the withering power of the sun's rays; and so, in later times, actual serpents came to be regarded as the protectors of temples and homes.

The Teutons and Celts had guardian snakes.

"In the Panjab hills today each household has an image of a ^{snake} nags or a harmless snake." Crooke p. 144.

The picture that Crooke presents though is that of a hooded cobra.



Chapter XII

The serpent as the ancestor of men.

The study of the family tree is very interesting to those who are able to discover the facts. Perhaps it would not be such an entertaining investigation if we could go back to the very beginning and discover a snake at the root of the tree. The fact is that the legendary history of almost all peoples speaks of the serpent as the ancestor or ancestress of mankind, or that the founder of their race was a serpent.

The legendary history of Greece, Rome, Phoenicia and Egypt is filled with stories of their serpentine ancestry. When Cadmus destroyed the dragon who killed his men, he sowed dragon's teeth and these produced an army of men who fought until only five remained. These five built Thebes; one of the five was Ophion, the serpent god of the Phoenicians. The legend goes on to say that Cadmus and his wife were changed into serpents instead of dying.

When Aeneas was about to worship at the tomb of Anchises, his father, on the anniversary of his father's death, a serpent appeared and glided among the altars, tasted the food Aeneas had placed there and then departed.¹ It is said that Aeneas did not know whether it was the genius locii or his father's spirit. The mother of the Scythians was a creature half serpent, and half woman. The first king of the Abyssinians was the serpent Arwe who, according to the story, reigned four hundred years. We have the statement of Pausanias that the fathers of Aratus, Alexander the Great, and Scipio the Great, were serpents.² The Kaffirs of Africa will not kill a serpent for fear that one of their ancestors has concealed himself under this form. The Prince of the deities of the Aztecs was Tezcatlepoça, the sun serpent, and Cihuacohuatl was his wife.³ Among the Indians of Arizona the serpent is regarded as kin to the

1. Virgil. *Aeneid* V. line 84.

2. Pausanias IV. 14.

3. Reville. *Nature Religions of Mexico and Peru*, pp. 51-53.
Brinton. *Myths of the New World*, p. 196.

priests. The Snake Society there has a snake ancestress.¹ Totemism is the keynote of the snake ceremony for "human and reptilian beings are supposed to have a common ancestress."

In India, the naga (snake) demigods are supposed to be the ancestors of the naga peoples, so the serpent is the totem of the people who believed they were descended from the sun.² The solar deities to which these naga tribes pray for rain are deified human beings,—demigods rather than gods; the naga demigods in heaven are the deified ancestors of the naga people on earth; these naga worshippers belong to a late period in Hindu history.³ The serpents (nagas) which Indra fought were the deities of the aborigines of India; these deities were the enemies of the Aryans. Serpent worship then, in India, was the worship of the people who preceded the Aryans, and therefore cannot be regarded as the orthodox worship of India; but these nagas were the ancestors of the aborigines of India. The orthodox Brahman considers these ancestor deities as demons. The asuras and serpas of the Rig Veda, the asuras and nagas of Manu and of the Mahabharata, and the asuras or demons of the Brahmans are the serpent deities who opposed the Aryan invasion.

The Kojiki, which is the record of the original belief of Japan, speaks of the early characters in such a way that one hardly knows whether the character was a man or a snake, or "whether the mother after delivering her child will or will not glide into the marsh, or slide into the sea leaving behind a trail of slime"⁴.

As in Greece and Egypt, the great temples of Japan were built on sites that once were the abode of some serpent god. Dragons that according to Griffis are "three fourths serpent" are the prominent deities of the Kojiki, and of these dragons there are nine varieties; one is the celestial dragon which guards the mansions of the gods lest they

1. Fewkes. *American Anthropologist*, vol. II, p. 108.
Winter solstice ceremony at Wolpi.
2. Satapata Brahmana I; 2, 3, 2.
Mahabharata. Udyoga, Sainyodyoga p. XVI.
3. Oldham. *The Sun and the Serpent*, p. 31.
4. Griffis. *The Religions of Japan*, p. 31.

fall; another is the spiritual dragon of the wind and rain; another, the earth dragon that has charge of the course of the rivers and streams; a fourth dragon looks after the hidden treasures, and guards the wealth of the earth which he has hidden from men, and so on.

The serpent is regarded as the progenitress of the Mikado, and Japan has therefore great reverence for the symbol. The primitive people of Japan, the Ainos, have still a regard for the serpent together with reverence for rivers and trees. The great natural beauty of Japan must have been a stimulus to the worship of nature. Shintoism, the religion of old Japan, is a nature religion.¹ Griffis states that to know Japan you must know Shinto, and the serpent figures prominently in the Shinto cult.

The Hindus, the Kaffirs, and the North American Indians believe that the danger of killing a serpent consists in this, that it may stir up the enmity of the serpent's kindred.² The snake is grandfather to all of the people.

The serpent as the ancestor or ancestress of man is a very natural thought, inasmuch as the serpent symbolized the beginning of life or creative energy.

1. Edmund Buckley. Pamphlet. Phallicism in Japan.
2. Wake. Serpent Worship, p. 95.



Chapter XIII

The serpent as wisdom.

The serpent as emblematical of wisdom is likewise a universal thought.

The dragon in China is esteemed as a creature of great intelligence. In Egypt, Kneph, the creator of the world, had a serpent with a ram's head for his symbol.¹ Kneph was also the god of wisdom. In an ancient representation of Pandora, the artist pictures her at the mouth of a grotto, one hand is on a jar which contains hope; over the jar is a serpent to indicate the wisdom which will enable her to preserve hope while she is gazing into the future for deliverance. In India, the serpent is symbolical of every kind of learning. The Upanishads refer to the wisdom of the serpents.²

There is a Buddhistic legend which speaks of the serpents "who occupy a place superior to man and are regarded as the protectors of the law of Buddha." These serpents are said in the legend to reside under Mount Meru, and in the waters of the terrestrial world. It is probable that this legend refers to the serpent worshippers who were the first converts to Buddhism.

The Phoenicians likewise regarded the serpent as the emblem of wisdom. It was the serpent god, Thoth, who invented the Phoenician characters whose image is seen in the ninth letter of the alphabet—theta, the coiled serpent. Philo's testimony is to the same point, that the Phoenician alphabet was formed by means of serpents.³

In the folk-lore of Scotland and Germany, it is said that "the white snake, when boiled, has the faculty of conferring medicinal wisdom." The Gnostics used the serpent on their gems to denote wisdom.⁴ The serpent was a sym-

1. Squier. The Serpent Symbol, p. 169.
2. Wake. Serpent Worship.
3. Wake. Serpent Worship, pp. 90, 92.
4. Oldham. Sun and Serpent Worship, p. 194.
"The Gnostics actually worshipped the serpent."

bol of wisdom in Mexico. Squier remarks that the writings of Hernandez, which relate to the plants of New Spain, speak of a snake herb,—the plant of wisdom,—which the priests ate in order to come into communion with the deities.¹

The serpent as the oldest inhabitant of the soil and therefore the guardian of the soil, suggested originally the conception of the serpent as the symbol of wisdom. The river was the first serpent and protected the fruits of the earth. The noiseless movement and cunning of the real serpent, as suggesting wisdom, was probably a later addition. The underlying truth was this,—the wisdom seen in the serpent as the guardian of the treasures of the soil.

The Ophites, or Serpentinians, who regarded themselves as Christians, looked upon the serpent as a good principle, and the god of wisdom.² It was the serpent, they said, that gave to Eve the true knowledge of the world. Jaldabaoth, the deity of the Ophites, after the creation of man became jealous of his work and gave a command in order that he might disobey and fall. The Ophites thought of Jesus and Christ as two persons; Jesus was born of the Virgin,—Christ was the serpent whose spirit entered Jesus. This was in the second century. In the third century, the theory was revived by the Persian Manes, who held that Christ was the incarnation of the great serpent that glided over the cradle of the Virgin Mary when she was sleeping.

1. Squier. The Serpent Symbol, p. 155 note.
Brinton. Myths of the New World, p. 292.
2. Deane. The Worship of the Serpent, pp. 86-90.
Tertullian De Praescript. Haeret, c. XLVII.

The Manicheans used the serpent as a type of the Lord, probably because of the reference in the New Testament to the brazen serpent. Our Lord used the serpent as a type of Himself, as He also used the shepherd.

Tertullian regards it as a permissible emblem.

On Idolatry chapter V.

Ambrose speaks of it in De Spiritu Sancto, lib. III, c. 9.

“Imago enim crucis aureus serpens est; qui proprius erat typus corporis Christi ut quicumque in eum aspiceret, non periret.”

Smith and Checham. Dictionary of Christian Antiquities,
art. Serpents.

Chapter XIV

The serpent - the symbol of healing.

The serpent as a symbol of healing was associated with the worship of Aesculapius and Hygeia.¹ There are represented on Egyptian temples, young princesses nursed by serpent-headed women. In India, the hair of a child when it is past teething is frequently dedicated to the serpent. The attribute of Aesculapius was a staff with a serpent coiled about it. His temple was in Epidaurus. Here serpents were kept and fed down to the time of Pausanias, some of these serpents reaching an immense size. The serpent symbol was the attribute to Aesculapius because he was the healing deity. Probably the reason the serpent was selected as the symbol of healing, was because of the earlier recognition of it as the symbol of life. The serpent was the guardian of life, and therefore was the healer. The worship of the serpent as a healing deity continues in Egypt today. Sayce says, "In the valley of the Nile, serpent worship still holds undiminished sway."²

Pilgrimages are annually made to the festival of Shekh, —sailors being among the principal worshippers. Shekh Haredi is not a saint, but simply a serpent. This serpent has the power, according to the belief of the people, of breathing out flames upon the irreverent; but to the sincere worshipper he bestows healing, which fact is admitted by both Mahometans and Christians. What is this worship, but simply the continuation of the prehistoric worship of the serpent? Probably the old Neolithic population of the desert worshipped the same serpent.

The official religions of Egypt have passed away, the old prehistoric superstitions of the people have remained.

1. Pausanias II. Ovid. *Metamorphoses* XV. 5.
Ferguson. *Tree and Serpent Worship*, p. 14.
2. Sayce. *Contemporary Review*, Oct. 1893.
Sayce quotes Paul Lucas who lived in the days of Louis XIV. L. travelled as far as Assouan. He said that this serpent angel had cured a woman who had been paralytic for eight years.

So strong was the worship of the serpent in Egypt, that rationalizing priests of a later period created artificial legends about the serpent; one such legend is that of Isis, kneading and moulding the saliva that flowed from the mouth of Ra with the dust, into a sacred serpent.¹ Ra was afterwards bitten by the serpent. The healing power of the serpent is a belief that we find all over Egypt. It is easy to see the relation of the serpent as healer to the serpent as representing the active, invigorating energy of nature,—the healing serpent gave new life and vigor to those who needed it.

1. In the *Hibbert Lectures* pp. 213, 214, Sayce speaks of the continued worship of the serpent in the valley of the Nile. Each house has its guardian serpent which is fed with milk and eggs.
See also an article on this in the *Cont. Rev.* pp. 523-530. *Smith's Classical Dictionary* Art. *Aesculapius*.



Chapter XV

The serpent as symbol of good and evil.

In all great nature worship, we discern this fact that what under certain conditions is considered a good, is under other conditions considered an evil;—the great deep to Babylonia was Ea, and Ea was regarded as the first legislator, the creator of civilized society, but Tiamat was also the great deep and the principle of evil. Ea was the symbol of the beneficent deep. His son Marduk fought with the serpent or dragon Tiamat, the destructive deep, which caused the flood and desolation. The original conception was the river;—the river in its productive capacity was symbolized by Ea, in its destructive capacity by Tiamat.¹ When the river overflowed its banks and flooded the homes of primitive man, the river would naturally be regarded as evil. In India, for example, the rivers breed marshes.

Miasmatic exhalations, in the Middle Ages were typified by dragons.² In Greece, Apollo, son of Zeus, destroyed the serpent at Delphi; yet, when the serpent was conquered, it became a means of life. This carries out the thought of Trumbull when he says; “Every possibility of good has a corresponding possibility of evil. Good perverted becomes evil,” so to the ancient mind the serpent Ea was the deep in its normal character, a blessing to the soil; Tiamat, the deep in its abnormal character, which created pestilence and destruction.

The double character of symbols is again seen in the representation of Rudra; Rudra was a most beneficent deity to the Hindus and was therefore interested that righteousness should reign in the earth, but Rudra again was a robber and a cheat. We can never be sure that these great nature deities were always good. The beneficent sun—the sun of the fair season in Mexico, Uitzilpochtli or the “Humming bird to the left,” was greatly revered by the Mexicans, but

1. Trumbull. Threshold Covenant, p. 228.
2. A. S. Palmer. Babylonian Influence on the Bible, p. 91.

Tezcatlepoça, the god of the cold, sterile season,—the serpent sun—was not only stern in judgment but was regarded as cruel in his subtlety.

The brazen serpent in the Scriptures was a good principle over against the serpent as an evil principle. I think Trumbull's view of the two thoughts represented by the serpent in the Scriptures is the correct one when he says, "that which is a holy instinct becomes through its perversion a source of evil."



Chapter XVI

The serpent and the Bible.

There is no doubt but that this view of the serpent as the symbol of creative energy will shed light on the story of Eden's tree and serpent. Trumbull says, "Desire, as indicated by the serpent, prompted to an untimely partaking of the fruit of the forbidden tree and the consequences of sin followed."¹ Not only does this change our conception of the first chapter of Genesis; but it is in harmony with the later history of Israel in her weaknesses. She lived in an environment of the basest nature worship. The Canaanite was not an inspiring companion. There is no sin so grievous in the Old Testament teaching as the sin of Canaan. The serpent and the tree figure prominently in the opening narrative of the Bible, and also in the closing section. The dragon, the old serpent, is represented as shut out from the Holy City, but blessedness belongs to those who wash their robes; these have "right to come to the tree of life and enter in through the gates into the city."²

There is a suggestion in Cox's *Mythology of the Aryan Nations* which illustrates the contention of Trumbull, when he says, that "the eating of the lotus is the eating of the forbidden fruit, and the Lotophagoi of the *Odyssey* are an example of unrestrained sensuality, and a warning to all who came for higher things not to imitate their selfish pleasures and so forget their children and their homes."³

Trumbull interprets the Edenic narrative in this way; "That which was primarily a holy instinct became, in its perversion, a source of evil and a cause of dread, hence the serpent became a representation of evil itself."

It is easy thus to understand why the serpent is the

1. Trumbull. *The Threshold Covenant*, p. 238.
"The consequences upon Eve's act of disobedience in eating the forbidden fruit was that she would bear children in sorrow."
Wake. *Serpent Worship*, p. 16.
2. Rev. 20; 1, 2. 22; 14, 15.
3. Cox. *Mythology of the Aryan Nations*, p. 356.

symbol of evil and the symbol of good also,—of darkness and light. Philo Judaeus gives a similar interpretation to the narrative in Genesis.¹ He conceives of Moses speaking in an allegorical way; of Moses intimating that wisdom and moderation, by means of which things contrary in their nature to one another are distinguished.

When the children of Israel were in the Sinaitic wilderness the people were bitten by fiery serpents. Moses prayed to Jehovah and he was directed to make a fiery serpent and place it on a pole in sight of all the people, so that when the people should gaze on it they might live. One can hardly resist the temptation of thinking that the whole story is intensely symbolical. The serpent was, and is, the emblem that in its root meaning is symbolical of life. It may have been that the people of Israel had grossly violated the sacredness of the threshold, and the brazen serpent was symbolical of a nobler conception of life. That emblem was kept all the days of Samuel, Saul, and David and during this time did not seem to be displeasing to Jehovah.² It was only as it was regarded as an idol, and the ideal it symbolized was lost, that it was ordered to be destroyed.

I have no doubt that there were debasing tendencies in the wilderness that led to the erection of the brazen serpent. It gives point to the narrative if we think of it as illustrating the coming of Jehovah down to the level of Israel's thought, and raising them to a diviner conception of life. The brazen serpent meant a divine conception,—the uplifting of the primitive impulse.

1. Philo Judaeus I. No. 54, ff. Bohn's trans. p. 45.
2. Trumbull says; "the curse resting on the serpent in consequence of the first sin of incontinence was the degradation of the primitive impulse, (Gen. 3; 14, 15.) unless uplifted again by divine inspiration."

T. 259.

II Kings 18; 14.

John 3; 14, 15.

Nehustan was the name of the serpent of Moses, ^{AND IS} derived from vulva or at all events related to this word.

Fritz Hommel note Trumbull's T. C. p. 335.

The words, tree, fruit, knowledge, serpent were expressions we would have appreciated when the Bible account was first given.

Trumbull. Threshold covenant p. 238.

It is true that the serpent has been regarded by Christians and Mahometans as in the main a symbol of evil. The Moslem looks upon the serpent with extreme aversion. He will not have anything to do with whatever bears the slightest resemblance to it. A hair that falls from his beard, he will break in two for fear it might, in some marvelous way, turn into a serpent.¹ When the Spaniards saw so many serpent carvings in Mexico, and temples with doors representing the jaws of one of these reptiles, they concluded that the Mexicans were devil worshippers.² To the Mexican, however, the serpent stood for the divinity in nature which was favorable to their welfare. Yet the early Christians in times of persecution when they were not permitted to use the Cross as a symbol, used the emblem of a serpent as well as the emblem of the lamb and the Good Shepherd, for John interprets the serpent of Moses as the symbol of eternal life; an eternal life which is not only a life hereafter but a possible present possession. Christ presents himself to Nicodemus as the great antitype of the brazen serpent.³

The thought presented therefore in the serpent is that of creative energy. That seems to have been the great thought of all religions; such worship may lead to great abominations, but these arose as a corruption of the primitive worship. The serpent in the Scriptures, while mainly a symbol of evil, is likewise a symbol of good. It stands for a holy instinct which had been perverted,—but the brazen serpent symbolized a holy life in Christ.

1. Wilkinson. *Ancient Egyptains*, p. 338.
2. Brinton. *Myths of the New World*, p. 124.
Brinton says that the serpent in Mexico expresses atmospheric phenomena. p. 127.
3. John 3; 14, 15. "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up; that whosoever believeth ~~may~~ in Him should have eternal life."



Chapter XVII

The debasing character of serpent worship in later times.

The serpent figures in the degrading worship of India today,—for it is creative energy that is worshipped. In Siva worship, there is not only the thought of destruction but of re-creation, and in one of his forms he is garlanded with serpents. He is also pictured as consisting of two halves,—the one half representing the masculine principle and the other the feminine principle. Thus the thought of re-creation following dissolution is presented in this worship. It is easy therefore to see how such a worship could degenerate.

Missionaries testify that the practical effect of the teachings of the Puranas and Tantras upon the people is “spiritually degrading”.¹ Bishop Thoburn testifies that the worship of Siva is most debasing and immoral,—but the worship today in India and the orgies of Bacchus in ancient times, when serpents were carried in the arms of the votaries, do not give a correct idea of the worship of primitive man, and his interpretation of these serpent rites.² The serpent stood as the symbol of his blessing.

Kurz, in his *History of the Old Covenant*, has wisely said that “every error, however dangerous, is based on some truth misunderstood, and every aberration, however grievous, has started from a device for real good, which has not attained its goal because the latter was sought neither by the right way nor by the right means.”³ Apply this to serpent worship:—it originated in a desire for real good, even though in India, today, it is a most degrading and immoral worship. We have the testimony of Monier Williams that the doctrines of the Indian Tantras “though in some cases these lapsed into a degrading system of impurity and licen-

1. Jones. *India's Problem*, p. 105.
2. Thoburn. *Conquest of India*, p. 114.
3. Kurz. *History of the Old Covenant III*, 348.

tiousness; nevertheless, the original Tantra books, which simply inculcate the worship of the active energizing principle of the deity,—full as they are of doubtful symbolism, strange mysticism, and even of directions for witchcraft and every kind of superstitious rite,—are not necessarily in themselves impure; on the contrary, the best of them are believed to be free from gross allusions, however questionable may be the tendency of their teachings.”¹

It is the tendency of the teaching that the missionary notes, but the great thought is the worship of the creative force. The great mystery of life and its transmission has always impressed simple people with wonder, and led them in their simple way to worship the creator of that power; and there is no doubt that this impressed them before they endeavored to understand the movements of the winds or the heavenly bodies.² The enigma of existence is a problem, for “Men show themselves conscious of the thought in the rudest forms of religion.”³

Griffis speaks of the original innocent use of the now prohibited symbols in Japan, and yet before the prohibition in 1872, the extent of phallic worship was so great that it would tax the credibility of the western mind. He further states that a critical student, who has lived among these people, recognizes their sincerity, innocence and devoutness in the use of the symbols, and he never had any reason to doubt the sincerity of the worshipper, “The mystery of fatherhood is, to primitive man, the mystery of creation also. To him, neither the thought nor the word was at hand to put difference and transcendental separation between them (*i. e.* the symbols) and what he worshipped as a god.”⁴

This is the interpretation of serpent worship—man at his lowest level struggling for the power that is above him and on which he depends. “With the exception of man,” says Schopenhauer, “no being wonders at his own existence and surroundings.”⁵ Primitive man’s religion was a religion of the mystery of life, and an attempt to solve the enigma

1. Monier Williams. Indian Wisdom. The Puranas and Tantras.
2. Trumbull. Threshold Covenant, p. 324.
3. Frazer. Philosophy of Theism, I. p. 9.
4. Griffis. Religions of Japan, p. 29.
5. Frazer. Philosophy of Theism, p. 9.

of life. What Griffis says of the Japanese, as to the innocent and devout use of the symbols, may be said generally of the pure character of the primitive man's faith.

We may therefore confidently affirm that whatever may have been the cause for the selection of the serpent as a symbol, it was a symbol of good at the beginning. Ferguson explains it in this way, that the worship "may have originated in fear but long before we became practically acquainted with it, it had passed to the opposite extreme among its votaries."¹ Then he says, "Love and admiration more than fear or dread seem to be the main features of the faith;" but this explanation is simply theory. The actual primitive worship, from his extended investigations, leads him to this conclusion that the serpent was originally an agathodaemon and the "bringer of health and good fortune." The monuments of Assyria testify to the fact that the serpent was worshipped as a good principle; and in the mythology of the Aryan nations it was the symbol of life and love.²

Squier says, "Long before Lucan apostrophized, 'You also harmless deities, dragons sparkling with golden lustre, who glide over the earth,' the reason for the superstitious regard in which the serpent was held had been forgotten and the reptile had become an arbitrary symbol of consecration." It was Persius who said, "Paint two snakes and the place is sacred."³ A picture found at Herculaneum represents this thought. A serpent is seen in the picture twined about an altar and eating the offerings that have been placed upon it; a naked boy is pictured standing in front of the altar. The snake on the altar represents the genius of the place.⁴

The serpent therefore at the beginning of our knowledge of it stood for that which is good. Trumbull maintains that threshold worship was the pure primitive worship of man and the serpent cult is a similar worship.

1. Ferguson. *Tree and Serpent Worship*, pp. 2, 3.
Cox. *M. A. N.*, p. 238.
2. Layard. *Nineveh*, II. p. 354.
3. Persius. II. p. 113 quoted by Squier.
Squier. *Serpent Symbol*, p. 246.
4. Smith. *Classical Dictionary*, art. *Genius*.

To say, that because the serpent was an object of fear, man worshipped it, is by no means satisfactory; for fear does not seem to be the root idea of the serpent symbol. The root idea of religion as represented in the serpent, is "awe at the mysterious and unknown." The Hopi Indian of Arizona certainly does not worship the serpent because he fears it, but because he believes that the serpent has some mysterious power over the rain.¹ Something more than fear must account for man's religion; an animal possesses fear, but he gives no intimation of worshipful tendencies. Man possesses something more than fear, for there is associated with this fear, a sense of wonderment and awe at the mysteries of life. When Mr. Huxley says that there is no "absolute structural line of demarcation that is very great between the animals that immediately precede us and ourselves," he adds, "yet no one is more strongly convinced than I am of the vastness of the gulf between civilized man and the brutes, whether from them or not, he is assuredly not of them."

The great forces of nature did not create his faith; they awakened it; but there was a faith to be awakened. The ground of man's religion is not to be found in fear but in the constitution the Almighty gave him at the start. Man is religious because he has a religious nature. He started as a child; had simple childlike conceptions; but he recognized that there was behind all this mystery of life, a divinity which he imperfectly apprehended, but which he symbolized by the forces of nature that he knew were the causes of his blessing.

The aim of men from the very beginning then, has been to solve the great mystery of life. This, too, has been the aim of philosophy, "to solve the mystery of life and the universe in which we live; our origin; our destiny; and the relations of the finite to the infinite."² We may say that this, though in a very limited way, was the problem of primitive man. In the days of his simplicity and crudeness, he was awed by the great mystery of life and the my-

1. Hough. The Moqui Snake Dance.
Fewkes. Journal of American Ethnology and Archeology, vol. IV.
2. Dr. Ellinwood. Philosophy of Religion.

stery of the universe. "The root of all religion," says Wake, "is awe at the mysterious and unknown." It was because he was awed by the mysteries of life, that he worshipped. He worshipped creative energy wherever he saw its manifestation.

It has been the purpose of this dissertation to give an outline of the many things that are symbolized by the serpent, and to show how these many things are rooted in one idea; for serpent worship, wherever we find it, is, at its root, a worship of the invigorating, fertilizing power of nature. Man worshipped the sun not simply because of its light or its heat, but because of its life giving energy, which to the ancient mind was a most important feature of the sun. We have a great example of this reverence in the Gayatri of the Rig Veda. This Gayatri is the most sacred text of the Vedas and must be used daily by the Brahman in his devotions.¹ It is a prayer to the sun as a creator or generator. The prayer is as follows; "Let us meditate on the excellent glory of the divine Vivifier. May he enlighten our understandings."² The serpent to the ancient mind symbolized this life-giving power of the sun. Man saw, however, the same invigorating energy in the river, the torrent, the clouds and the wind and he symbolized creative energy wherever he saw it by the serpent symbol.

1. Oldham. Sun and Serpent Worship, pp. 206, 207.
2. Rig Veda, III, 62, 10.



Appendix.

Did the worship of the serpent spring from a common center?

That the worship of the serpent has its source in a common center certainly seems possible for there are features about serpent worship wherever we find it that suggest a common origin. We have noticed in the early history of mankind how one people has borrowed a symbol from another people and then has modified it to suit its environment and ideas and yet the borrowed symbol has retained so much of its original character that we can trace its origin; for example, the winged circle originated in Egypt but it found its way to Phoenicia, Babylon and Persia and with slight modifications became a symbol to these peoples. The worship of the serpent has extended to all parts of the world and with practically the same meaning.

Squier concludes his work on the serpent symbol by saying, "It is a fact that most of its applications (serpent symbol) seem essentially arbitrary, which gives peculiar interest to the circumstance of its great predominance on this continent, particularly in Mexico and Central America, where it had a symbolical significance, closely corresponding if not absolutely identical with that which it possessed in the early mythologies of the east. This fact also tends to establish a community of origin or intercourse of some kind between the primitive nations of the two continents, for it can hardly be supposed that a strictly arbitrary symbol should accidentally be chosen to express the same ideas and combination of ideas by nations of diverse origins and totally disconnected."¹

To the same effect, Oldham remarks; "It seems in the highest degree improbable that the close connection between the sun and the serpent could have originated independently in countries so far apart as China and the west of Africa, or India and Peru;—and it seems scarcely possible that, in addition to this, the same forms of worship of these two

1. Squier. *The Serpent Symbol*, p. 254.

deities, and the same ritual, could have risen spontaneously amongst each of these far distant peoples. The alternative appears to be that the combined worship of the sun and the serpent gods must have spread from a common centre by the migration of or communication with the people who claimed solar descent.”¹

The conflict between the sun and the clouds has been pictured in ancient story as the conflict between an eagle and a serpent. This was true in the Homeric ages; then the serpent was a symbol of victory. The story is told in the *Iliad* that the Trojans lost heart when they saw an eagle “which held a serpent in its claws, take flight, being wounded by its prey.” This is very similar to the thought of the Aztecs, for Mexico was founded according to the Aztec tradition when the founders saw an apparition of “an eagle which, perched upon an agave, and with wings outstretched towards the rising sun, held a serpent in its talons.” D’Alviella goes on to say that “the first conquerors of Mexico saw therein an emblem of future greatness, and to the present day this emblem figures in the arms of the capital. Yet it is unlikely that the Aztecs had read Homer.”²

It is perfectly natural for man to worship the sun, whether he lives in Asia, America, or the isles of the sea,—but serpent worship with practically the same thought in regard to it is strongly suggestive of a common center for the race. *W. O. R. S. - 10*

1. Oldham. Sun and Serpent Worship, pp. 183, 184.
2. D’Alviella. Migration of Symbols, p. 17.



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