

Why Pagan Symbolism is indestructible?



Abstract¹

The degree of genius exhibited in works of fiction by the most renowned novelists, largely depends upon and is proportionate to the intensity and interest felt by them in their days of childhood for nursery tales. Also, the older a man becomes, the stronger he clings to and the clearer he seems to see the events of his early childhood.

The Greeks of the days of Pericles — they who euhemerized a whole pantheon of gods and goddesses, and from whom Phidias had immortalized the Olympian Jupiter and Athena Promachos, could have no other descendants but those they actually have — the Virgin and Saint worshipping Hellenes.

Thus we may believe that the form of worship depends more on the respective idiosyncrasies of races than on their powers of reasoning; and that the natural sympathies or antipathies of the forefathers will always be reflected more or less in the future generations. For it is but names and forms that change, ideas remain the same; and the older a faith, the stronger it clings to the relics of its youth.



¹ Frontispiece by James White, NeoWave Series

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The Manuscript of this essay in H.P. Blavatsky's handwriting exists in the Adyar Archives. It has been originally published in *The Theosophist*, Vol. LXXVII, June 1956. — *Boris de Zirkoff*.

IT IS SOME YEARS ALREADY that Professor Max Müller gained a decided victory over the two extreme parties which denied the possibility of a scientific treatment of religions, over those, he says, with whom “religion seems too sacred a subject for scientific treatment,” and those others, with whom “it stands on a level with alchemy and astrology — far beneath the notice of the man of science.”

We have not the impertinent presumption of going over grounds already so well explored by this great pioneer of free enquiry. But since he has obtained for all the rare privilege of treating the Christian religion with at least as much impartiality as is shown by the Europeans in the treatment of other people's religions, we do no more than avail ourselves of our right. And, it will be no fault of ours, if we are unable to avoid conflict with deep-rooted prejudices and convictions of partisan sectarianism, for — we seek it not. Ours is but the duty of analysing and examining all creeds alike impartially. Neither is it our intention to handle roughly that which Professor W. Wordsworth so opulently styles “the golden kernel of the Galilean teaching.” In our unceasing search for truth we simply gather in every available information capable of throwing light upon the dark nooks and corners of the various faiths of humanity, and store in as much material for comparison as we can. Out of the gigantic heap of pagan Symbols, we mean to choose for this publication none but those which are liable to throw the light we are so much in need of. Desiring to fathom all things, and above all — that which seems most inherent to the heart of men, and with which he parts the most reluctantly — Religion, we necessarily have to turn to the symbols which have been found — at least partially — the keys to every faith. Many of them we find alive now, as in the days of old, and notwithstanding the fanatical persecution of the youngest of the world's religions, having passed part and parcel in the Christian creeds.

But of them we will discuss later on. Our object now is to analyse that feeling which, surviving common sense and reason, makes people cling to the so-called “superstitions” of long vanished generations of their forefathers. In relation to this symbolism of ancient pagan thought, a curious psycho-physiological phenomenon may partially account for it. We have often thought that the degree of genius exhibited in works of

fiction by the most renowned novelists, largely depended upon and was proportionate to the intensity and interest felt by them in their days of childhood for nursery tales, and it has been also remarked that the older a man becomes, the stronger he clings to and the clearer he seems to see the events of his early childhood. Often to our dying day, we carry in our hearts lingering remembrances of heroes and heroines, the recital of whose deeds had struck our youthful imagination. We may forget acquaintances, and even the images of our dear friends, when separated for long years, may fade away and gradually disappear; the memory of the unfortunate Princess, to whom we vowed all our young sympathy, and her wicked persecutor, the hunch-backed old Fairy, whose malicious frown has often haunted our dreams — can never be obliterated.

It is to be observed that in this direction the masses of the uneducated people are no better than children. With their mind but half awake, it often remains unconscious in later years of the emptiness of the fiction. Everything illogical in the tale disappears, perverted images and ideas associated with such arbitrary images alone remain, and even to the majority of more civilized people, Eginhardus' *Charlemagne* will never present the same attraction as *Carlos Magnus* and his twelve legendary peers, as found in the Carlovingian Cycle, and the stern image of the hero will have to make room for the phantastic form of the other, as described by the popular bards and the chivalric romances. While poetical fiction in her gorgeous robes of borrowed plumes finds always an eager audience, sober reality is left a beggar, to take care of itself the best it can.

The same with nations and their early faiths. Much as ancient mythology was vilified, perverted, corrupted by the intolerance of early Christianity; however much every trace of it might have been thought obliterated, yet, once that it got hold of the popular imagination it will never die out. The nearest generations of converts may have shunned the faith of their forefathers; those following immediately after will gradually and unconsciously return if not to it — then, at least to many of its most striking symbols and conceptions. Poets will return to them and thus help to revive the popular feeling. And whole nations, like men in their old age, will be often influenced by that lingering, undying feeling of love — aye, veneration sometimes for that which they had worshipped and believed in during their early days — albeit made to laugh at and often curse it in after life. The once mighty gods of the Western nations have departed, but the impression is still there, infused into the very blood of the descendants of those who, for long generations had gradually evolved them out of their own imagination, then developed into living and thinking entities, to finally end by worshipping the children of their own fictions.

So true is it, that we can trace this hereditary law with hardly a single exception in the modern divisions of the Roman Catholic, Greek and Protestant nations.

The Greeks of the days of Pericles — they who euhemerized a whole pantheon of gods and goddesses, and from whom Phidias had immortalized the Olympian Jupiter and Athena Promachos — could have no other descendants but those they actually have — the Virgin and Saint worshipping Hellenes. Nor is it less natural to find the Anglo-Saxons and the greatest portion of Germany splitting violently from the image wor-

shipping Roman Catholics, if we have to believe that which Tacitus said of their forefathers 18 centuries ago, *viz.*, that

. . . they believe it unworthy the greatness of the gods to confine them within walls, or to represent celestial beings under a human likeness; they consecrate woods and groves as temples: and they apply names of the gods to that mysterious Presence which they behold solely in the spirit of devotion.¹

Thus we may believe that the form of worship depends more on the respective idiosyncrasies of races than on their powers of reasoning; and that the natural sympathies or antipathies of the forefathers will always be reflected more or less in the future generations. The Romans parted with their Jupiter under the condition to worship him under the mask of St. Peter. If they renounced Jove the father of gods, it was but to help him emigrate from Olympus to Eden, with his name — elongated with the help of the Masoretic vowel points, though not transformed beyond *all* recognition. True, we find him giving birth to Pallas-Athena in full armour no more, but it is because another mode of procreation has been chosen for him. We can meet him still on sundry windows of French mediaeval cathedrals — proceeding under the garb of a Pope in full canonicals to create Eve out of the rib of sleeping Adam, as shown by Didron.² The same for the Greek Zeus. Having renounced to preside at the banquets of the merry old gods, he now rests on clouds surrounded by a choir of philharmonic young cherubs. By some inscrutable means, managing to get out of the boundless and limitless Space, the Eternal has gathered it into a ball representing the Universe, and now we see Him, on numerous *icons* of the Eastern and Western churches, sitting outside of this Space, but holding it in one of His holy hands under the shape of a globe.

So has Athena of Parthenon, the Virgin Goddess, vanished under the iconoclastic hands of Lachares, who despoiled her of her golden dress weighing 50 talents. But there remained Isis with her Son Horus, slumbering on her virginal bosom, and Mylitta the Babylonian, identical with the Cyprian Venus — the “mother of Grace and Mercy,” the *Mediatrix* — hence called “Aphrodite,” the subduer of Jove’s wrath, she whom the old Athenians honoured as “Amarusia” or the “Mother of gracious acceptance and help,” who as Mylitta sits with her Divine Infant Son Tammuz in her arms. In her turn she made room for the *Immaculate Virgin*, the last of the Dynasty. This one is also with her Son, one of whose names was *Adonai* or Lord, as Tammuz was called Adon or Adonis, and who, the same as Mithras, is worshipped as Mediator. With her actual wardrobe of gold, and silver, and of precious jewels, the modern Queen of Heaven may well look in scorn and pity upon the later ancient Athena. What was the poor chryselephantine statue with its plates of ivory and gold in comparison with the diamond and ruby covered Italian Madonnas and Russian virgins representing a dead capital sufficient to purchase a kingdom!

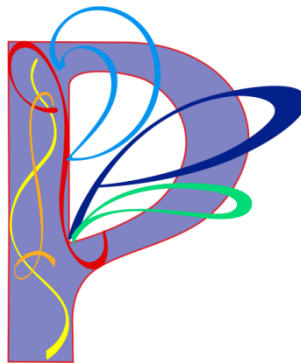
Thus we find again the old truism that it is but names and forms that change — ideas remain the same; and the older a faith, the stronger it clings to the relics of its youth. If it be true of all religions what is said by Prof. Max Müller, who remarks that

¹ C. Cornelius Tacitus, *De Moribus et Populis Germaniae*, ch. ix

² [Adolphe Napoléon Didron]

. . . if there [is] one thing which a comparative study of religions places in the clearest light, it is the inevitable decay to which every religion is exposed, then on the other hand, nothing of the kind can ever be said of symbolism. The primitive purity of a creed can become soiled; its apostles can degrade and soil it by the inevitable admixture of human element. But its symbolism as the concrete expression of some now lost idea of the founder, will survive for ever. It may have its meaning changed, nay, even its outward form altered. Like the phoenix of old, it will continue periodically to revive from its ashes.

H.P. BLAVATSKY



“Keys to the Mystery Language,” in the same series — ED. PHIL.