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THE ORIGIN OF SACRIFICE AMONG THE SEMITES AS DEDUCED FROM FACTS GATHERED AMONG SYRIANS AND ARABS.

THIS paper is based on scores of facts collected during five summers in personal interviews with Syrians and Arabs, throughout the length and breadth of Syria, parts of Palestine and the Hauran.

The method employed is to introduce typical examples of sacrifice, and then to make an induction as to the motive for sacrifice, and finally, but briefly, to consider whether such motives may be regarded as primitive.

In the discussion of the origin of sacrifice among the Semites we must premise two factors: man, under very simple and rudimentary conditions; and a divine being suited to this man's understanding and needs in his conflict with adverse existences as they seem to him.

Ignorant man, whether Semite, African, Chinese, or South Sea Islander, has a feeling of intense need. Devastating storms, drouth, barrenness, disease, death and all other ills are directly attributed to a divine power, either to the chief god, or to one of the innumerable evil spirits. Of this fact there are numerous illustrations in the works of various modern travellers, besides my own personal observations. The world which such a man inhabits is not only peopled with men and women, but also by harmful beings, which must be overcome, or placated. Besides these there are divine beings whose aid may be invoked. These may be either progenitors of some particular tribe or clan, or independent beings. This religion is based largely on fear of harmful spirits, or on a sense of help needed from some Divine person. The offering, whatever it may be, is really the price paid for help.

In this investigation I do not at all consider the Biblical

doctrine of sacrifice, for we have to do, as it seems to me, with an earlier and a prehistoric state of religion, which we have reason to believe exists, not only among the Semites, but also among all primitive peoples, whose characteristics have been transmitted essentially unchanged to the present time.

I now give various typical examples of the occasions on which Syrians and Arabs invoke the aid of a divine being of a lower grade than God Himself.

1. A natural disaster is considered as supernatural and as wrought by an enraged weli. This affected the water supply of the town of Nebk in the Syrian Desert, inhabited by about six thousand people, including Moslems and various sects of Christians. Ever since the existence of the town, the water supply has been derived from a series of wells on a gentle incline, commencing about quarter of a mile away, each drawing water from the surrounding earth at a depth of about twelve feet, and each connecting with the next a little lower down, thus gradually forming a powerful stream. Near the mouth of the stream is the makam of the weli. A season of unusual rain comes. Three times this artificial series of fifty, or one hundred, wells is swept away, and three times it is repaired. The people, both Moslems and Christians, attribute this misfortune to the anger of the weli, because the waters flowing through the makam were rendered unclean by those bathing in them, thus defiling him; because a corpse was said to have been borne across the series of wells, thus polluting the water; and, especially, because his sacrifices had been neglected. These evils were overcome by slaughtering a number of sheep after the wells had been repaired the third time.

2. God, or some spiritual being, is held responsible for barrenness, peril in childbirth, or for what seems to be a mortal disease.

(1) A woman has no child. This is not only a deep disgrace, but the continuance of such a condition may either cause her to be put away, or may lead to the introduction of a rival wife. She does not at all think that her condition is caused by some physical disability, which might be removed by proper medical treatment, but attributes it to the ill will of a divine being, who has made her barren (cf. Gen. xvi. 2, xx. 18, xxx. 2; 1 Sam. i. 5, 6). She therefore goes to that nebi or weli that she thinks most likely to help her, and vows that if he will give her a man child, she will bring him a sheep, or goat, or some other object of value. In numerous instances, concerning which there can be no doubt, she considers him the procreator of the son that is born, for in this case she must not only pay her vow, but also induce the weli to waive his claim to the possession of her son.

(2) A woman seems to be in mortal peril, like the wife of Phineas (1 Sam. iv. 19, 20). Anxious relatives watch about her. Since Mar Jirjis in many parts of Syria is regarded as little less powerful than God, a sister finally says, "Oh, St. George, if you will bring Maryam through her peril, and grant her a man child, he shall be thine." A boy is born. He is called John. As he gets older he is told, "You belong to St. George," until finally at the age of twelve years all the family, including the aged grandmother, take him to the monastery of St. George in Northern Syria, where the Archimandrite cuts his hair, and his father makes payment for him in silver.

(3) An infant son lies at the point of death. This may be due to improper care. But the fond mother sees in his illness, either a visitation from God, or from some hostile being. Again, on condition of healing, a gift is promised to some weli; or, if it is a Moslem woman, she may vow that if the child is restored to health she will take him to a Christian church for the repugnant rite of baptism.

(4) An Arab seemingly is in mortal danger. It may have come through some exposure, and might pass away through proper medical care; but his wife, thinking it entirely due to some hostile spirit, takes their little daughter, and leading her three times around the pallet, says, "Oh, Az'abi, if you will recover my husband, when my daughter gets to be of marriageable age, I will give her to thee as a bride." The Arab recovers. When his daughter is thirteen or fourteen years of age, she is decked out as a bride, and is taken to the shrine of Az'abi, where she is given in marriage to one of his descendants.

3. God sends plague which is removed through the intervention, or intercession, of the weli.

Cholera is raging in Tiberias. Exaggerated reports reach the Arabs living on the highlands east of the lake and in other parts of the country. A tribe remembers its ancestor. They are all persuaded that they sprang from him. They have brought him sacrifices from time to time, but they have never built him a makam. In this dire visitation, of which God is the author, what friend have they but their ancestor? Supposing he should resent their neglect of him, who would intercede for them and protect them against this dread scourge? They seek therefore to win his favour. They build him a makam. Before it they slaughter sheep, sprinkling their blood on the front of it, and imploring that he will pardon their neglect.

An Arab sheik of one of the villages of the Hauran, terrified at the reports he has heard of the cholera in a town on the railroad, falls asleep. During his alternations of hope and fear, his waking thought has been of Ahmed el-Bedawi, whose shrine is near the village. He dreams. He sees the cholera advancing like an invading army. On it comes, but Ahmed el-Bedawi appears holding his long

lance, ready to hurl it against the host. They turn back in dismay. The weli assures the Arab sheik that the cholera shall not invade his village. He wakes from his sleep, tells his dream to others, and the whole village comes the next day to the makam of Ahmed el-Bedawi, bringing offerings from the flock and the threshing-floor, so as to propitiate him and keep the cholera out of the village.

4. Danger to the denizens of new tents and houses, and to mariners and passengers on new ships, averted by sacrifice.

(1) A Bedawi is about to raise a new tent—his "house of hair." With infinite pains the Bedawiyeh has woven the long strips of black cloth on the desert sands. The tent is to be occupied for the first time, but there are other dwellers in human habitations besides men; they enter tents, caves, and new houses. They can cause the death of a beloved son, or of some other member of the family. The only recourse surely to avert such a calamity is to offer sacrifice before the new tent when it is raised for the first time, just as the Arab or Syrian dweller in the town kills a victim at the door of a new house, lest some harm should come to the inmates.

(2) In the port of Juneh, near Beirut, not to speak of other ports on the Mediterranean, a vessel is ready to be launched. But there is foul weather as well as fair. The foul weather is attributable to God (Jonah i. 4), or to some hostile power; hence a sheep is brought, its neck is placed on the prow, its throat is cut, the blood flows into the water. The body is either cast into the sea or given to the poor. In either case it is an offering to Mar Jirjis, who is especially present with mariners.

5. Sacrifice to a tribal god on going into battle by the Arabs.

The Rualla, a division of the Aeneze, is on the eve of

battle. On the morrow it is to make a raid on another tribe, in the hope of rich booty in the addition of hundreds of camels to its great herds. But a religious service must first take place. The representative of the tribe that goes into battle is the sheik's daughter or sister, adorned to make herself as lovely as possible in the eyes of all the warriors of the tribe. She is seated on a camel under a canopy. But that camel has been sprinkled with sacrificial blood, an offering to Abu Dahur, the progenitor of the tribe, in order that he may go before them and fight for them.

6. Sacrifices for the safety of pilgrims.

Travellers are setting out on a journey through the desert. There are the perils from lack of water, from marauding bands, who lie in wait for travellers. It is a grave undertaking, of which no one can guess the issue. He goes therefore to his makam and promises the weli that if he will give him a safe conduct he will bring him a sacrifice. On his arrival the promise is paid.

We have now to make an induction as to the typical cases mentioned with reference to the origin of sacrifice. In making it we are to recall that all calamity is attributable to some supernatural power; either to God Himself, or to some evil spirit, remembering that, so far as my observation goes, people go to the makam to get help. There can be but three means of relief from the evil which threatens man: either to induce God or the evil spirit to change his mind, or to overcome the hostile spirit. This work is entirely committed to the nebis or welis. They are always the ones to whom the Arab or Syrian goes in his trouble, and upon whom he relies for relieving him from it. This relief may come either through the intercession of these beings, or through their own act.

Let us pass the examples cited in review.

1. A weli attempts to destroy the water-supply of a large

town. The successful execution of this plan, which is announced by a threefold flood, would mean the wiping out of a large and prosperous community. The inhabitants seek to placate him and satisfy his wounded honour by offering sacrifices. Here there can be no other motive than the commercial one. The people in effect say to the weli, whose makam is near the outflow of the water system, "We cut the throats of these sheep in payment of our past neglect, and of any indignity that has been done you."

2. An unfriendly power keeps a woman from bearing, or when she has come to the birth-hour, threatens to take away her own life or that of the child, or tries to rob a mother of a son, or seeks to deprive the Bedawiyeh of her husband. In each case a bargain is made with the weli, either a sheep, or money, or a girl is given as the price. The weli is to do something, and in consideration of what he does is to get something.

3. God threatens cholera. The weli is trusted to see that the cholera does not come, and is paid for his services in keeping it away.

4. Dangers to inhabitants of new dwellings, or mariners and passengers on ships. The danger is considered so real that in numerous sections of the country, in the desert, and at various ports of the Mediterranean sacrifices are offered. These may be considered as a premium paid on an insurance policy, which protects the lives of the people from the afrit, or from divine visitation.

5. Sacrifices to the god of war. There is no other object than to secure his aid in battle. The sacrifice is nothing else than the price paid to guarantee his aid in fighting against the enemy.

6. The offering given the weli for the safe conduct on the journey, much on the same principle that a traveller gives a megidie a day to the mounted soldier who has guarded him safely through a dangerous part of the country.

We may now ask the question, whether this idea of payment for services rendered appertains to the origin of sacrifice among the Semites. It certainly seems to be characteristic of the sacrifices described, and is a simple conception suited to a low stage of intelligence. The primitive man feels he cannot exist without the help of a higher power, and that he can secure that help through a gift. What that gift is, whether it is a human life, as among some savage tribes, or whether the animal slain is a substitute for a human life, does not appertain to the discussion of this subject, which is simply: Why does the Semite offer sacrifice now? Could his progenitor have had any more child-like motive than the Syrian or Arab to-day?

The answer cannot be one of certainty, but it seems to me both to be one of great probability, and emphatically affirmative. If our picture of primitive man as feeling that he is surrounded by adverse forces is correct, and he believes in a higher power, or departed ancestor, one of the simplest conceptions is to get the aid of that being. Even under the most rudimentary conditions of society something is not secured for nothing. It must be paid for.

It is here that examples from the religions of other peoples, some of whom are in a state of savagery, may prove of service. I do not claim to have made any exhaustive study of the subject, though I have read books on comparative religion; I merely give examples which were not sought to support any theory, which came to me mostly in the library of Dr. Wright of Nablus, who was for ten years missionary in Africa; and from two volumes, not yet published, by a fellow-traveller on the Mediterranean, Mr. W. E. Geil, who has travelled almost continually during the past four years in the South Sea Islands, in China, and in Africa. He has recorded what he has seen and heard, without at all recognizing its significance for this discussion.

It will be seen that these examples are finely illustrative of the subject under discussion. I also quote once each from Stanley and from Rev. J. K. Giffen, a missionary in the Sudan, grouping all the quotations under six heads :

1. Hostile powers who must be propitiated. Stanley, who, as we have seen, thought the Wahuma of Africa had no religion, says : " They believe most thoroughly in the existence of an evil influence in the form of a man, who exists in uninhabited places as a wooded darksome gorge, or large extent of reedy brake, but that he can be propitiated by gifts ; therefore the lucky hunter leaves a portion of the meat, which he tosses, however, as he would to a dog, or he places an egg, or a small banana, or a kid-skin, at the door of the miniature dwelling which is always found at the entrance to the zeiba." There are the following parallelisms between this example and simple Semitic religion : fear of a hostile power who must be placated by a bit of meat, or by leaving a present at what seems to be the makam, about which we read elsewhere.

Geil, in his *Yankee on the Yangtze*, says : " The Kachin is most superstitious. He believes in one great spirit, the creator of all things. . . . He . . . upholds and sustains all things, and is benevolent ; but has withdrawn himself to the spirit land and does not care for the Kachins, so they need not concern themselves about him. . . . All the other spirits are malicious, and are feared by the Kachins, especially those of thunder and lightning. All the sacrifices are made through fear and gratitude." Here, as among the Syrians, is the common idea that God is so far away as to be of no practical significance for life, and the gift made, by inference, to the evil spirit. Obviously in this and every one of the following examples as to the religion of a given country there has been a failure to ask most important questions.

2. Departed kings in Africa honoured by human sacrifices.

Dr. Wright reports that the kings of Uganda are worshipped after death. They believe in a Great Spirit, who inhabits the Victoria Nyanza. In connexion with spirit-worship, they worship the spirit of the departed king. They go to the king's tomb. . . . There is a house over him. The king's palace becomes his shrine. . . . They offer human sacrifices from time to time. Here again there is the one Great Spirit, and the worship of the departed king, as of the departed sheik, among the Arabs, though only a few have this honour; here, too, is something corresponding to a makam, and here is human sacrifice, or the gift of personality which we shall observe more than once, and which there is some reason for believing was the earliest form of bloody sacrifice among the Semites.

3. Welfare of flocks, herds and fields secured through sacrifice. The belief of the Sudanese is summed up by Rev. J. K. Giffen as follows: "They believe in a great God, creator of all things, and in a demi-god or prophet, who under the great creator controls every event for good or evil. They do not seem directly to offer worship to the Great Creator, or to have any responsibility to him, but rather to the demi-god, or prophet, who is called Nik-kanga. . . . There is a line of priests, descendants of the Nik-kanga, who sacrifice the victim. . . . This sacrifice, in their belief, has some influence on the amount of rain, the growth of their flocks and the prosperity of their flocks and herds." This quotation is in the line of the others, only, as so often among the Syrians, the priestly family is descended from the national god, who is distinguished from the Creator.

4. Sacrifices for houses and vessels. In the South Sea Islands, "when a chief's house was in the course of erection, where the posts were to be set large holes were dug, and a live man stood in each, clasping the post in his arms, while the earth was cast in about them, burying the poor fellows alive." These human sacrifices were believed to give per-

manency to the house. In another of the South Sea Islands the doorposts are regarded as sacred because each was resting on a human sacrifice. "On the eve of the New Year in the province of Sueshwan in western China they sacrifice a cock directly before the front door of each dwelling, and sprinkle the blood on the sill to keep out the evil spirit."

The following instance of a sacrifice in connexion with the launching of ships is given, as also found in one of the South Sea Islands: "When a canoe of a big chief was launched, live bodies were used for rollers, and the awful groans and cries were overwhelmed by the gleeful shouts of the launchers."

One more illustration must suffice: "Among the necessary preliminaries to starting on a boat of this kind (i.e. the red lifeboat), the Chinese usually kill a cock and smear the blood and feathers on the bow of the boat."

These examples of sacrifice for boats and houses are most instructive, when taken in comparison with those in Syria. We may well ask again, in passing, whether human sacrifices do not present a more primitive stage than the sacrifices of fowls or animals?

From the four classes of examples, which came to me unsought in this connexion, it seems to me we have illustrations of similar features to those found in Semitic religion. This similarity has in no sense been produced by contiguity, for the examples are taken from China, Africa and the South Seas, but represents, as it seems to me, most ancient ideas in every part of the world, of man's need, of the dangers to which he is exposed, and of the aid which he seeks from a divine being, who may not represent the highest power, and who must either be propitiated or must propitiate some one else. To this being the Syrian, Arab, African, Chinaman, or South Sea Islander presents his gift for services rendered. This seems to be the primitive idea

of sacrifice, from which all the other more complex ideas, such as vicarious sacrifice, and the sacrificial meal, of which I have found the faintest if any traces, have been evolved. Vows and sacrifices, or promises to pay, and exact payment at the shrines among Moslems and Christians, survive to-day as a tremendous force in the religion of Syria, as I have sought to prove in a previous paper.

My only desire is that I might present in all their force the array of facts I have gathered up in my journals during seven years of research in the Orient, and that I might make others feel the power of that persuasion that comes from living and moving during all these years in a constantly enlarging domain of impressions, as well as facts. Direct and indirect evidence seems to converge toward the persuasion that we may still recognize, in outline, though not in detail, a religion which we may call, for lack of a better term, pre-historic or primitive. If this be so, we should also be able to recognize the origin of sacrifice.

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