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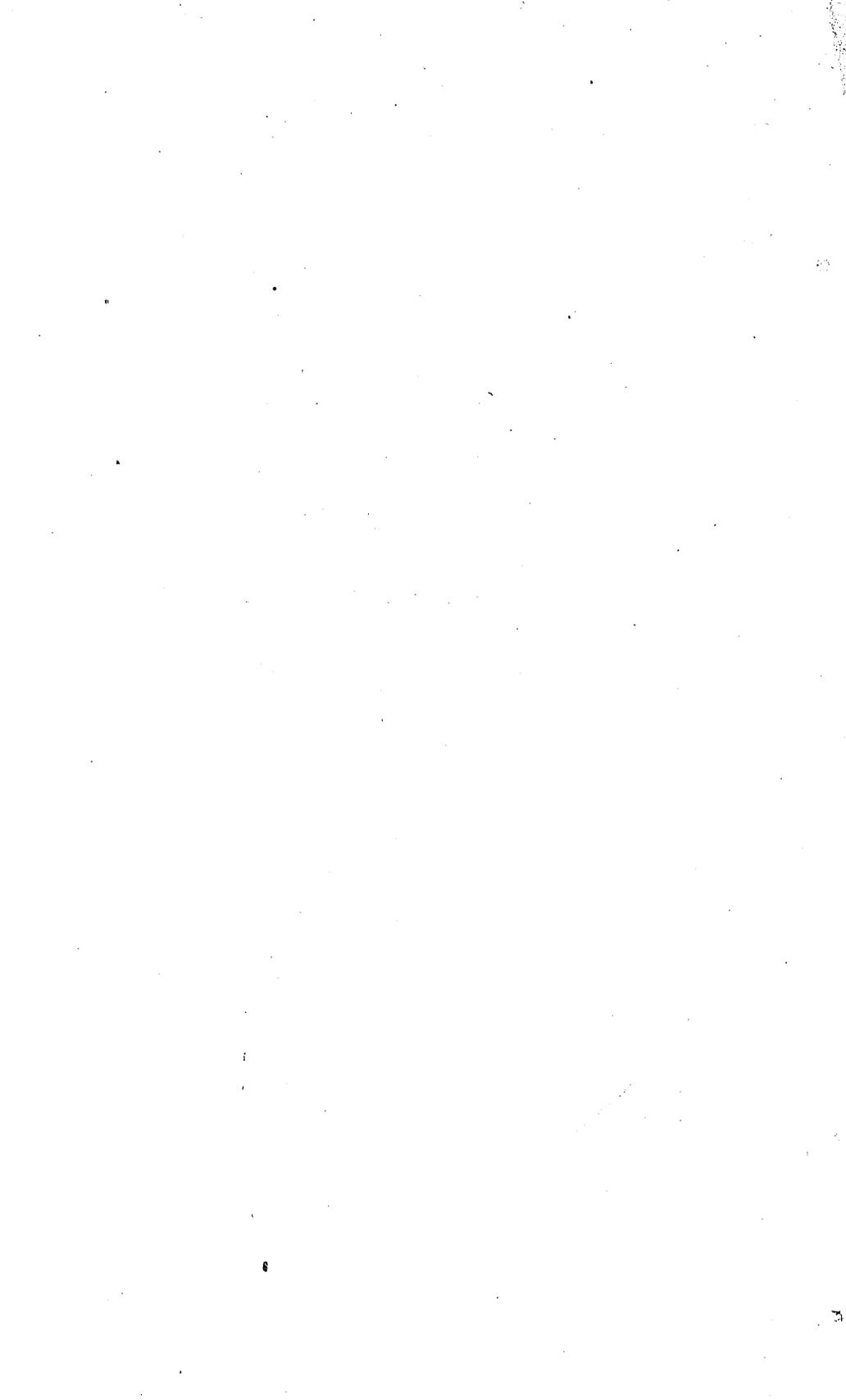
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THE RELIGION OF  
THE ABORIGINAL TRIBES  
OF INDIA.

BY

PROFESSOR J. AVERY,

*Of Bowdoin College, Brunswick, Maine, United States.*

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*BEING A PAPER READ BEFORE THE VICTORIA INSTITUTE, OR  
PHILOSOPHICAL SOCIETY OF GREAT BRITAIN.*

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*THE RELIGION OF THE ABORIGINAL TRIBES OF  
INDIA.* By Professor J. AVERY, of Bowdoin College,  
Brunswick, Maine, United States.

**I**F an apology were needed for bringing to the attention of students of religion the crude notions of savage tribes regarding their relations to the unseen world, and the often revolting practises which have sprung therefrom, this would not be founded solely upon the claim which they rightly make upon Christian philanthropy, but as well on their scientific interest and value. If we have observed aright the course of thought at the present time, there is a growing disposition to study attentively all the systems of religion which at one time or another have been devised or accepted by men, with the view to discover their origin and the laws which have governed their development. There is a tendency also to withdraw the study of religion from the exclusive dominion of sentiment, and to apply to it the same rigid canons of criticism which have been used so successfully in other fields of inquiry. There has been a time when the Christian Church viewed everything called religion outside its own fold much as the Greeks looked at the world beyond the confines of their peninsula, and lumped together alien

beliefs of every variety and merit under the general title of heathenism; but, happily, a more appreciative spirit now prevails, and we are coming to see that there is much in other systems of belief which deserves our admiration,\* and not a little that has served the Divine purpose in educating the world up to the understanding of a purer revelation. The study of religions has a scientific as well as a practical aim, and scholars have employed in it the inductive method of investigation with such a degree of success, that we may feel assured that the foundations are being laid for a science of religion. Indeed, some writers talk as if such a science were already constructed; but we are constrained to believe that this use of language is premature. So vast is the field of inquiry, so important is it that every part of its surface be explored and carefully mapped out, and so recently have scientific methods been employed in its survey, that investigators in this domain may well at present be content with modest claims for their study. It cannot be denied, then, that we shall not have a complete science of religions—much less of religion—until we shall have measured and deposited in its proper place in the building every variety of religious belief, no matter how crude it may seem, or how near the bottom of the social scale its professors may stand. If we feel any diffidence, therefore, in presenting to the members of the Victoria Institute a sketch of the religious beliefs and practices of the aboriginal tribes of India, it is not on the score of the subject possessing no intrinsic interest, but rather because of the present lack of materials in some parts of the field and our consequent inability to present the theme with the fulness of illustration desirable. And here we desire to express our great indebtedness to Colonel Dalton's invaluable work, the *Ethnology of Bengal*, without which many facts stated in the following pages would have been beyond our reach. Before proceeding with our inquiries, it will be useful if we state the location of the tribes to whom we shall repeatedly refer; for, though British power has existed in India for nearly two centuries, it has only been within a very recent period that we have been able to get trustworthy information concerning the aboriginal population; and even now that information is largely confined to the few persons whom official duties or missionary efforts have brought into close relations with it. It has been usual to divide these primitive races into three groups—viz., Thibeto-

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\* "Which deserves our admiration." Dr. Avery, in a letter which is appended, explains the intention with which he uses these words.—ED.

Burman, Kolarian, and Dravidian. Without entering upon the question of the correctness of this classification, or the ethnic connexions of its several members, we shall find it sufficiently convenient for our purpose.

The tribes comprising the first group are found in their most primitive condition scattered along the foot-hills of the Himālayas, from Nepal eastward to the farther extremity of Assam, thence along the range forming the eastern and southern border of that province back to the valley of the Ganges. Some tribes of the same stock are also found in the lowlands on either side of the Brahmaputra; but they have to so great a degree exchanged their ancient customs for those of the Hindus, that they offer fewer points of interest for our present inquiry than their kindred in the jungles upon the hills.

Following the route just indicated, we find on the northern border of Nepal the Kirantis, the Limbus, and some other tribes of inferior importance. Passing across Sikhim and Bhutan, whose inhabitants, the Lepchas and Bhutias, have adopted Buddhism, we come to the Akas, and next in order, to the Dophlas, the Miris, and the Abors, which last tribe has settlements as far east as the Dibong, a northern tributary of the Brahmaputra. The Dibong serves also as an ethnic boundary, the tribes already named to the west of it showing a decided affinity to the Thibetans, and those beyond the stream exhibiting a closer likeness to tribes in Burmah. Between the Dibong and the Digaru are the Chulikata, or Crop-haired Mishmis. Next to these, on the north-eastern border of Assam, is another tribe, also called Mishmis, but differing in many respects from the one last mentioned. South of the Mishmis, partly within and partly beyond the eastern boundary of the province, are the Khamtis and the Singphos. Now, turning westward, and still keeping within the mountain district, we come first to the numerous tribes of Nagas spreading westward to about the 93rd deg. of E. long. On their western border are the Mikirs and the Kukis. Continuing in the same direction across the Kapili river, we meet, first, the Syntengs or Jaintias; next, the Khasias; and last of all, at the end of the range, the Garos. At the foot of the Garo hills are the Pani-Koch, a tribe partly converted to Hinduism. The tribes of the lowlands might be left out of view altogether, were it not that their conversion has not been so radical as to quite efface their primitive superstitions. The most important of these tribes are the Ahams, the Chutias, the Koch, and the Kacharis. They are scattered here and there over the entire valley, and are reckoned as inferior castes of Hindus.

Crossing the lower Ganges valley, and ascending the rugged highland which forms the core of India, we find ourselves in the home of a most primitive population. Here tribes of both the Kolarian and the Dravidian stock, protected by the nature of the country, have long resisted the advance of a higher civilisation. Of the un-Hinduised Kolarians, the Santals occupy the Santal Parganas and the hill tracts of Orissa, on the eastern border of the highland. Adjoining this tribe, on the south and south-west, are the Bhumij, the Mundas, the Kharrias, and the Hos or Larka-Kols. Still farther south, in the tributary states of Cuttack, are the Juangs. In the Ganjam district of the Madras Presidency are the Savaras. Directly west of the Kharrias are the Korwas, and, extending in scattered settlements across the plateau to the Nerbudda and Tapti rivers, are the closely-allied tribes of Kurs and Kurkus. Of the Dravidian tribes, the Khonds live just north of the Savaras, in the tributary states of Orissa; the Oraons are found in Chutia Nagpur; the Paharias or Malers occupy the Rajmahal hills, where they overlook the Ganges; the Gonds spread over a large area in the centre of the plateau; while the Todas, Badagas, and one or two other small tribes, are far away on the Nilgiri hills of southern India. It is hardly necessary to add that the tribes of the last group do not represent the whole Dravidian population; with the civilised portion, which constitutes the majority, we have here no concern. In addition to the tribes already named, there are certain partly-Hinduised tribes to whom we shall occasionally refer. These are the Cheros and Kharwars of the Shahabad and Palamau districts; the Parheyas, the Kisans, the Bhuihers, the Boyars, the Nagbangsis, and the Kaurs about Palamau, Sirgūja, and Jashpur.

Proceeding now to the subject of our inquiry, after this preliminary explanation, we shall describe the religion of the aboriginal population under the following heads:—1st, the gods, and the kind of worship paid to them; 2nd, places of worship; 3rd, images and other representations of Deity; 4th, the priesthood; 5th, divination; 6th, witchcraft; 7th, the future life and the worship of ancestors; 8th, speculations regarding the origin of the world and of man; 9th, influence of Buddhism and Hinduism. It is almost needless to say that these tribes, without exception, and in common with the lower orders of men generally, have an unquestioning belief in the existence of spirits, both human and divine; sometimes they go even farther than this, and attribute to animals and inanimate objects immortal souls, like their own. The materialistic theories which have been reached by the speculations

of civilised philosophers seem never to have clouded their child-like faith. But, teeming as is the unseen world with beings created by a savage imagination, we are not to look for an orderly and consistent arrangement of powers and spheres of activity among these deities, such as we find in the Pantheons of Greece and Rome; rather, we are to expect the condition of things out of which these developed. Whenever such an elaborate system of theology is described as worked out by a tribe in other respects low down in the social scale, it is to be viewed with extreme caution, and by no means accepted as genuine, until attested by more than one skilful observer. An example in point is the account of the Khond religion by Major Macpherson. We shall be more likely to find confused and even flatly contradictory notions of the gods, blind attempts to properly adjust human relations with the higher powers. Though the gods served by these tribes are for the most part of a low order, scarcely rising above the level of their worshippers, still there are here and there indications of a dim conception of a God throned far above these inferior deities, and more deserving of reverence and love. We will first search for these. The Singphos have a tradition that in a former sinless state they worshipped a Supreme God, of whose attributes they can give no account; but that they fell from that condition, and have since adopted the superstitions of surrounding tribes. The Abors and Miris have a vague idea of a God who is the Father of all; but as they connect him with the abode of the dead, and call him Jam Raja, it is easy to see that their conceptions are derived from the Hindu god, Yama. The Kukis, who seem to have advanced farther in their reasoning, or borrowed more, believe in a Supreme God, whom they call Puthen, who not only created the world, but governs it and rewards men according to their deeds. It is in the last particular that their views are in marked contrast with those generally held by these tribes. Puthen has a wife, Nongjar, whose good offices as an intercessor with her husband can be secured by suitable offerings. The children of this benevolent pair are, like the other inferior gods, of a malicious disposition. With most of these tribes the sun is regarded as the impersonation of their highest god. The Garos call him Saljang, or Rishi Saljang, and sacrifice white cocks in his honour. They say that he resided for a time on the Garo hills with his wife, Apongma, and begat children, but subsequently returned to heaven, where he now dwells. The Bhuiyas call him Boram, and likewise offer to him a white cock at the planting season. He is worshipped by the

Kharrias under the name Bero, and every head of a family is bound to offer to him five sacrifices in a lifetime, each oblation exceeding in value the last one. The Hos and Santals call the sun-god Sing Bonga. He is represented as being self-created and the author of the universe. He does not inflict suffering, but is sometimes invoked to remove it when appeals to the inferior gods have proved ineffectual. The Hos observe a yearly festival in honour of him, at which a white cock and the first-fruits of the rice harvest are offered. Among the Santals, the head of the family, every third or fourth year, sacrifices a goat to Sing Bonga in an open space at sunrise. The Mundas pray to him when selecting the site of a house. The Korwas worship him under the name Bhagavan, a Sanskrit word. The Muasis pay homage to both the sun and the moon. The Oraons reverence the sun as Dharmesh, the Holy One. They say that he created the world, and that he preserves men, unless thwarted by the malice of demons. No oblations are presented to him, since his good-will is already secured. The Khonds are divided into two sects, if Major Macpherson's statement can be trusted. One sect worship Bura Pennu, who manifests himself in the sun, and is the creator and benefactor of mankind. The other sect have chosen as their highest object of regard his wife, the bloodthirsty earth-goddess, Tari, who demands a yearly offering of human victims. The Todas regard the heavenly bodies as gods, and address them in certain set phrases, but have no clear idea of their attributes or requirements.

It seems plain, from the facts cited, that most of the aboriginal tribes of India have some vague notion of a Power throned far above the world; who was concerned with its creation; who manifests himself in the heavenly luminaries; whose disposition towards his creatures is benevolent, but is sometimes unable to reach its aim; and who demands from them only a distant and formal recognition, or none at all. Whether these are a vanishing traces of a primitive revelation, or the result of their own reflections, or have been borrowed from the religion, particularly the Hari-worship, of the Hindus, we will not here inquire. It is, at any rate, certain that the contemplation of their highest god has little effect in regulating conduct.

Another god of a similar character, but second in rank, is worshipped chiefly by the Kolarian tribes in Central India. This is Marang Buru, or Great Mountain.

Remarkable peaks, bluffs, or rocks not unnaturally suggested to their simple minds an idea of Divinity, and called

forth their reverence. Since from such places descend the streams which irrigate the fields, Marang Buru has become the god to be invoked for rain. Offerings are made to him on the summit of the hill or other object in which he is supposed to reside.

It is not, however, with the superior gods and their decorous worship that we have most to do in describing the deities of these rude tribes. Their chief concern is to keep the peace with a host of minor gods, with whom their imagination has filled the whole realm of nature. In the forest, the field, the house—everywhere these beings throng. They are mostly of a jealous, revengeful disposition, and seem to take a malicious pleasure in teasing mankind. Fortunately, they are not insensible to human blandishments, and he is pretty sure to prosper who most assiduously cultivates their good-will, which can best be done by providing for them some toothsome dainty. It would be quite unnecessary to record lists of these lower gods, whose names are legion, since their attributes and the worship by which they are propitiated are everywhere of the same general type. A few characteristic examples will suffice. The Singphos recognise three spirits called Nhats, who preside respectively over the higher, the lower world, and the household. Offerings of fowls, dogs, and on special occasions a buffalo, are made to them. The Chulikata Mishmis declare that the spirits whom they worship are mortal like themselves. The gods of the Abors and Miris dwell in the trees of the woods which cover their hill-sides. They love to kidnap children, whom they can generally be made to restore by proceeding to fell the trees in which they reside. The Nagas say that their gods are created beings, and they are accustomed to vary their offerings according to the dignity of the recipient. Semes, the god of wealth, gets the larger domestic animals; Kuchimpai, the god of fertility, receives fowls and eggs; while Kangniba, who, on account of blindness, cannot distinguish offerings, gets nothing of any value. They believe that each disease is the work of a special demon, whose business and pleasure it is to spread it abroad; but his malicious design is sometimes thwarted by hanging bunches of withered leaves on the lintels of the door to frighten him, or branches of trees are stuck in the paths leading to the village, that the spirit may take them for untravelled ways. Since the tiger is of all beasts in India the most dreaded, it is not strange that a tiger-demon should be recognised. He is worshipped by the Kisans, who think in this way to escape the ravages of that animal. Among the Santals, in Ramgarh, only those who

have lost relatives by the tiger think it necessary to propitiate the tiger-demon. The Gonds also pay him reverence. Since the deities of these tribes are anthropomorphic, it is a matter of course that gender should be allotted them; hence goddesses are frequently worshipped, and they show themselves not a whit behind their male consorts in malignant and blood-thirsty disposition. The Bhuiyas and Savaras, though recognising the benevolent sun-god, pay special honour to a savage goddess called Thakurani, who was formerly propitiated by human sacrifices. It is thought that upon her worship is founded that of the Hindu Kālī, who once received human victims in this very part of India.

But the most remarkable system of human sacrifices, in connexion with the worship of female deities, was that instituted in honour of Tari, the earth-goddess of the Khonds. Since she presided over fertility, victims were immolated chiefly at the time of sowing. The persons destined for sacrifice, called Meriahs, were kidnapped from the plains or from other tribes, and, under strict guard, were petted and fed like cattle fattening for the slaughter. Children were allowed to grow up, and were encouraged to marry and rear families, but parents and offspring were equally devoted to the goddess, and were liable at any moment to be sacrificed to quench her thirst for blood. When the time of offering came, the body was hacked into small pieces, and each worshipper struggled to secure a shred of flesh or piece of bone to bury in his field. It has been about forty years since an end was put to these horrid rites by the combined efforts of Major S. C. Macpherson and General John Campbell. The Khonds say that Tari lives in heaven with her beneficent husband, Bura Pennu, while numerous inferior gods roam the earth, seen by the lower animals, but invisible to men. It cannot be doubted that the custom of human sacrifice was once wide-spread in India, as indicated not only by the facts just stated, but by the practice of sham offerings existing among other tribes at the present time. The Oraons and Gonds even now make a wooden or straw image of a man, and after prayer to a divinity for the blessings desired, sever its head with the stroke of an axe. As a general rule, the inferior gods stand in no clearly recognised relation of dependence upon the superior gods. Their will is usually exercised independently of higher control. We have noticed an interesting exception in the case of Kols, who assert that there are certain blessings reserved for the sun-god, Sing Bonga, to grant; and that offerings made to the lower gods will induce them to intercede with their master in behalf of the supplicants. One of the

simplest, most childlike forms of worship is that practised by the Todas on the Nilgiri Hills of Western India. Almost the sole means of support possessed by this tribe are their herds of buffalos; hence these, together with the implements and persons specially connected with them, have come to assume a sacred character. Certain old cow-bells, said to have come originally from heaven, are worshipped as gods; and the priests or milkmen who tend the sacred buffalos, of which several herds are specially set apart, are during their time of service also gods, and as such cannot be touched by any mortal. The duty of the priest is to perform a few simple rites daily before the cow-bells, and to care for his buffalos, in which labour he is assisted by a semi-sacred herdsman. He can return at pleasure to ordinary human life, when, though no longer the embodiment of deity, he is treated with marked respect. The Todas believe in other gods, who are invisible, and whom the priest salutes as fellow-deities, but their ideas regarding them are extremely vague.

The residence of the gods is sometimes localised by these aboriginal tribes as heaven, some distant and lofty mountain peak, a huge rock, or a grove of ancient trees. Spirits who are likely to prove good neighbours are sometimes enticed to take up their abode near a village by liberal offerings. Among the Kolarians of Central India every village has several sacred groves consecrated to tutelary gods. The trees in these groves must be left undisturbed on pain of divine displeasure. It is true, as a rule, that the Thibeto-Burman and Kolarian tribes construct no temples nor images of their gods, while images, or something answering to them, are common among the Dravidians. Still, among the former tribes there is usually some spot where village or family worship is commonly performed, and which is marked by certain objects designed to suggest the sacredness of the place. The Garos set up before their houses bamboo poles, with fillets of cotton or flowers attached, and before these make their offerings. The same thing is done by the Limbus. The Kacharis, the Bodo, the Mishmis, and some of the tribes of Central India worship the Sij (*Euphorbia*) plant as an emblem of deity. The Juangs, Kharrias, and Korwas regard the ant-hill as a sacred place, and use it to take an oath, or to sacrifice upon. The Akas alone of these north-eastern tribes have images of their gods, and little huts to serve for temples; but, as they are partly converted to Hinduism, this custom is probably derived from that source. In the villages of Dravidian tribes one finds some objects set up to represent the tutelary gods. These are often rude in shape—a lump of

earth, a stone, or stakes of different heights to represent the two sexes.

Having spoken of the deities revered by these primitive races and of the worship accorded to them, we proceed to describe the persons, whenever there are any such, whose special duty it is to perform that service. It may be said that, with few or no exceptions, all the tribes employ priests regularly or occasionally. When a tribe has no priests of its own, it borrows them from another tribe. Moreover, the office is usually not hereditary, but may be taken up or laid down at pleasure. In this respect the priesthood among the aboriginal population of India stands in marked contrast with that of the Hindus. The Singphos have no regular priests of their own, though members of the tribe sometimes act as diviners. The Buddhist priests of their neighbours, the Khamtis, are greatly esteemed by them. Among the Garos the priest leads the same kind of life as the laity, and the only preparation needed by him before assuming the sacred office seems to be an ability to repeat the usual incantations. The Oraons, when in want of a priest, discover the proper individual by divination. Taking a winnowing sieve in their hands, they march about the village, and are involuntarily led away by movements of the sieve to the right house. Among the Paharias, persons desiring to enter the priesthood are required to retire for some days to the jungle, and commune in solitude with the deity. Before they are confirmed in their office they are expected to perform some marvellous act, as evidence of having acquired superhuman power. They wear their hair uncut while acting as priests. The same tribe have also priestesses as well as priests. Some tribes, that have in other respects adopted the religion of the Hindus, employ the priests of neighbouring unconverted tribes to propitiate local deities. The distinction between priests and laity among most tribes is so slight that unconsecrated persons not unfrequently perform the offices of religion. The Juangs, who are among the lowest of all the tribes described, employ an old man as priest. Among the Kharrias the head of the family presides at offerings to the sun-god in behalf of the household, but a priest is employed to act for the community. The Kols allow certain elders or the heads of families to perform the service. Among the Santals the head of the family offers the ancestral sacrifices, but other services are performed by village priests, who fit themselves for the purpose by prayer, fasting, and silent contemplation of some god until they are possessed by him. Among the Khonds a regular priest always officiated at the festivals in honour of the

earth-goddess, but it appears that on ordinary occasions any one who chose to do so could assume the priestly functions, his reputation being dependent upon his skill as a diviner. We are told by Hodgson that among the Bodos and Dhimals the priests do not form an hereditary class, though it is not uncommon for the son to take up the business of his father; but that the elders of the people, heads of families or clans, frequently act as priests. We have already seen that among the Todas the manager of religious affairs is at once priest and god. His novitiate is passed by retiring to the jungle, and remaining there alone and without clothing for eight days, during which time he performs certain purificatory rites. On the eighth day he returns and enters upon the discharge of his duties.

Among the hill tribes generally the principal duties of a priest are to cure sickness, to ascertain coming events by divination, and to preside over the public offerings. The theory of the Nagas that sickness is caused by a demon, who takes this way to gratify a personal spite against some mortal, is shared by other tribes. This being the diagnosis, the only rational course to pursue is to call in the priest. Among the Kukis, when this personage arrives, he first determines from the symptoms which one of the gods is offended. He then roasts a fowl, and eats it on the spot where the sick man was first seized with his malady. After throwing the fragments away, as an offering to the demon, he goes home. Should the gravity of the case demand the sacrifice of a larger animal, the priest collects his friends and shares the feast with them. In case the first application of the remedy does not prove effectual, it has to be repeated until the man dies or his resources fail. Among the Garos, the priest, with the patient lying beside him, takes his seat near a bamboo altar, around which an assistant leads the animal to be sacrificed. From time to time it is taken away and washed, and then brought back and fed with salt and caressed. Its head is then severed with a single blow, and its blood smeared upon the altar. A somewhat more economical plan is in vogue among the Bodos. The exorcist places before him on the ground thirteen leaves, with a few grains of rice upon each. Over these leaves, which represent the names of divinities, he causes a pendulum suspended from his thumb to vibrate, and the leaf towards which it moves indicates the god to be propitiated. An appropriate victim is then promised him, but only on condition that the patient recovers. The same use of a pendulum has been observed among the Paharias. Sometimes the sickness is due to the spell of a witch, and then the following method is

employed by the Kols for the detection of the offender. A large cone-shaped wooden vessel is placed apex downward upon the ground, and on this is laid a flat stone. A boy is made to balance himself upon the stone, while the names of all the people in the vicinity are slowly repeated. With the mention of each name a few grains of rice are thrown at the boy; and when the right name is uttered the stone moves, and he falls off. The foretelling of future events by the observation of omens is one of the most important functions of the priest; although the interpretation of these is among some tribes the duty of a special diviner, who is another person than the priest. Among the Singphos the diviner holds over the fire joints of a large sort of grass until they explode, and then examines the position of the minute fibres thrown out beside the fracture. The Abors scrutinise the entrails of birds, but get the best results from pig's liver. They informed Colonel Dalton "that the words and faces of men were ever fallacious, but that pig's liver never deceived them." The Khasias seek omens from the contents of eggs. The western Naga tribes put the village under *tabu*, when the omens are to be observed; and no one is permitted to enter or leave it, or to engage in labour for two days. This especially occurs when they are about to cut down the jungle for their rude agriculture. At this time all fire is extinguished, and new fire is produced by the friction of two sticks. When there is a birth or death in a family the house is put under *tabu* for five days, and no one but the inmates can enter or leave it. The same practice of *tabu* is observed among the Mishmis, who, when misfortune visits a house, thus isolate it by placing the sprig of a certain plant at the door. A common mode of divination among the Nagas is to cut slices from a reed, and observe how these fall. They also kill a fowl, and notice how the legs lie. If the right leg lies over the left, the omen is favourable; but if the reverse is the case, it is unlucky. Among some of the tribes the diviners are called *ojhas*, a Bengali word derived from *ojh*, "entrail." Among the Mundas a common way to ascertain which of the gods ought to be propitiated is to drop oil into water, at the same time naming a deity. If the globule remains whole, the right name has been pronounced, but if it divides, the experiment must be repeated. A method sometimes employed by the Oraons to show whether the god is pleased with a proposed sacrifice is to make a mud image of him, and to sprinkle upon it a few grains of rice; then the fowls designed for the sacrifice are placed before it, and if they peck at the rice the omen is favourable. Belief in witchcraft is not uncommon.

The Kacharis regard sickness as frequently due to this cause; and, having discovered by divination the old woman exercising the spell, they flog her until she confesses, and then drive her from the village. This belief in witches, and wizards as well, appears to be most prevalent among the Kol tribes of Central India. Sometimes a magician pretends to have discovered that the evil influence proceeds from a rival in another village. The latter is then summoned and beaten until he finds it best to admit his fault. If he is unable to undo the evil caused by his spell, the beating continues, sometimes with fatal results. If the Gonds have reason to think that death has been caused by witchcraft, the funeral rites are postponed until the sorcerer has been pointed out. This is accomplished by the aid of the corpse. They first make a solemn appeal to it, and then taking it up carry it about the village. It will lead the bearers to the house of the guilty person, and if this is done three times it is regarded as conclusive evidence, and summary vengeance is inflicted upon him. It is easy to see that this is a convenient way to get rid of an obnoxious individual. Witches are supposed to have demon lovers, with whom they dance and sing at night in the forest. The Khonds believe that some women can transform themselves into tigers; and occasionally individuals endeavour to spread this impression regarding themselves in order to extort presents from their neighbours as the price of immunity from their ravages. Trial by ordeal is also resorted to by the Gonds for the conviction of a person suspected of witchcraft; but it is so arranged as to make escape impossible in any case. The woman is securely bound and thrown into deep water. If she swims, she is guilty; if she sinks, she is drowned. Or the witch is beaten with castor-oil rods; if she feels pain, it is proof of guilt. Women, and those not always the old and ugly, are more often suspected of the black art than men are.

We have reserved to this place an important feature of the religion of the aboriginal tribes of India, namely, their views concerning a future life and the customs connected therewith. While it is true that savage races generally have held to the survival of the soul after death, their notions regarding the character of the future life and its bearings upon the present existence have greatly varied. Among the lowest tribes the future life has been commonly imagined to be a continuation of the present life, though under conditions more favourable for physical enjoyment. In a more advanced stage of society, where the moral powers have reached a fuller development, men have looked upon that life as an opportunity to balance the accounts of this life, to render to every man according to

that he hath done. We therefore proceed to inquire with much interest what these tribes have to say concerning the world of the dead. The Chulikata Mishmis deposit in the grave with the dead his weapons, clothes, and ornaments, and some food ; but they affirm that this is done only as a mark of affection, and not with the idea that he can make any use of them. They declare that there is no future life, but that they and the gods whom they worship have but a temporary existence. The Juangs also are said to have no expectation of survival after death. The Mundas have a vague notion that the ghosts of the dead hover about, and they sometimes set apart food for them in the house. The same vagueness of conception is characteristic of the Oraons. They say that those who have been killed by tigers are transformed into that animal ; also that the ghosts of women who have died in childbirth hover about graves, clad in white garments, and having lovely faces, but hideous backs and inverted feet. But as a general rule, the tribes not only believe in a future life, but are able to tell something more definite of its nature. The Abors think that the character of the future state is determined in some degree by present conduct, but this advanced conception is perhaps due to the Hindus, whose god of the dead they have borrowed. Their neighbours the Miris share the same views, and bestow unusual care upon the bodies of the dead. They are completely dressed, and supplied with cooking vessels and every appliance for a journey, and are placed in graves lined with strong timbers to protect them from the pressure of the earth. The eastern Naga tribes believe that the future life is like the present one, or on the whole rather more to be desired. Their belief in immortality is shown by the care with which they place in the grave the belongings of the dead. The residence of the disembodied spirit is not necessarily a distant region. The Nagas suppose that the soul hovers about its former abode, and considerable anxiety is felt for its convenience. Captain Butler mentions an instance where a native was buried midway between two villages in which he had resided at different times in order that his soul might most conveniently visit either. Some tribes place the body in a wooden hut, in the wall of which an aperture is made for the ghost to pass to and fro. When a Garo dies, his soul goes to Chikmang, one of the highest mountain peaks in their country. Food is provided for the journey, and dogs are slaughtered to track out the path for them. Formerly slaves were killed at the grave to attend persons of note, but the custom was stopped by order of Government. A choice offering on such occasions,

and probably for the same purpose, used to be heads of Bengalis from the plains. An incident observed by Colonel Dalton shows that the Garos believe not only in the survival after death of the souls of men and animals, but in that of inanimate objects. Witnessing the funeral of a young girl, the friends were observed to break all the earthen vessels placed on the grave. In answer to inquiry he was told that only in this way could they be used by the girl, that for her the pieces would reunite. In other words, the vessels must die like men, but their ghosts survive. The Khasias, while burning the corpse, make offerings to the ghost that it may be kindly disposed to them hereafter, but take little thought about the future life. The Kukis imagine a paradise in the north, where the good will enjoy abundance without labour, where the enemies one has slain will attend him as slaves, and the cattle he has killed in acts of hospitality will be restored to him. The wicked will be subjected to the worst tortures the imagination can devise. The Toda after death goes to a home in the west, where he is joined by the ghosts of his buffalos, and goes on living just as before. It does not appear that he ever returns to trouble his relations.

According to what seems to be the prevailing view, however, the spirit acquires after death divine powers to some degree, and hovers about its former abode in a restless and uncomfortable state. It has wants much like those experienced in the body, and if these are not attended to it becomes malicious, and the cause of innumerable vexations to its kindred and neighbours. The Pani-Koch offer some of the first-fruits of the harvest to the ancestral spirits, clapping the hands to attract their notice. The priests of the Kirantis celebrate two festivals yearly to ancestors. Among the Kharwars, each family sacrifices annually a wether goat to the dead. The Hos celebrate a festival to the shades, after the sowing of the first rice-crop, in order that they may favour the sprouting of the grain. It is also the custom with them to prepare for a visit from the ghost of the deceased on the evening when the body is consumed. Some boiled rice is set apart in the house, and ashes are sprinkled on the floor, by which its footsteps may be detected. The relatives then go outside, and, walking around the funeral pile, invoke the spirit. If, on returning to the house, the ashes are found disturbed, they are filled with terror at the supposed presence of the ghost. The Santals have very little to say about a future life, though offerings are made to ancestors at the close of the late harvest. The Korwas, of Sirgūja, told Colonel Dalton that they worshipped no gods, but that the head of

each household made offerings to the dead. The Gonds say that one of their chiefs was, in early life, devoured by a tiger, and that he afterwards appeared to his friends, telling them that, if worship were paid to him, he would protect them from that animal. They acted upon the suggestion, and he was duly installed among their gods. The Bhuiyas, of Keonjhur, after the funeral rites are concluded, place a vessel, filled with rice and flour, upon the grave. This has the effect to recall the ghost, for, after a time, the print of a fowl's foot will be plainly visible at the bottom of the vessel.

It would be interesting to know how the speculations of these rude tribes regarding the origin of the universe and of the human race compare with those of more civilised peoples; but we have little information on this point. It does not seem to be a subject upon which they have spent much thought. It is enough for them to know that they and the world are, without taking the trouble to inquire how they came to be. A few exceptions are worth noting. The legend of the Singphos, to which we have already alluded, is that "they were originally created and established on a plateau called 'Mājai-Singra-Bhum,' situated at the distance of two months' journey from Sadiya, washed by a river flowing in a southerly direction to the Irrawaddy. During their sojourn there they were immortal, and held celestial intercourse with the planets and all heavenly intelligences, following the pure worship of the Supreme Being." They, however, fell by bathing in forbidden water, and, descending to the earth, became mortal, and adopted the debased worship of their neighbours. The Abors get back as far as the first mother of the race, who had two sons, the elder of whom was skilled in hunting and the younger in handicraft. Like Rebecca, she loved the younger son better than the elder, and migrated with him to the west, taking along all the products of his skill. Before forsaking her elder son, she gave him a stock of blue and white beads, and taught him how to make the *dao*, a sort of hill-knife, and musical instruments from the gourd. The Abors are the descendants of the elder brother, while the younger brother became the progenitor of the English and other western nations. The Garos, who do not seem lacking in imagination, explain the origin of the world as follows:—The germ of creation was a self-begotten egg. From this sprung the goddess Nushtoo, who sat, for a time, on a water-lily; but, finding her quarters too restricted, she sent to Hiranman, the god of the lower world, for some earth, upon which she successively fixed the different objects of nature. First, rivers proceeded from her,

then a reptile of the crocodile type, afterwards grasses and reeds, an elk, fishes, trees, buffalos, a priest, and last of all a woman.

The Hos relate that their god Sing Bonga, who was self-created, made the earth and furnished it with vegetation and animals,—first the domestic and then the wild ones. He then created a boy and a girl, and taught them how to make rice-beer. This produced amatory desires, and they became the parents of twelve boys and twelve girls. For these children Sing Bonga made a feast, providing all manner of food. The guests were told to pair off, and taking the kind of food they preferred, to go away and shift for themselves. They did so, and their choices can still be discerned in the various modes of life among mankind. The Santals say that a wild goose came over the great ocean, and laid two eggs, from which the first parents of their tribe were hatched.

We have more than once intimated that it is impossible in all cases to draw the line sharply between what is primitive in the religious beliefs and usages of these tribes and what has been borrowed in whole or in part from Brahmanic or Buddhist sources,—chiefly the former. It is not uncommon to observe Hinduism and Paganism struggling for supremacy in the same tribe and the same village, now the one and now the other claiming the larger share of interest. Hinduism, with its extraordinary power of assimilating alien systems, has usually been content to insist upon some general and public observance of caste rules, while not interfering with the private observance of the old religion; or it has given to the ancient superstitions some new explanation or purpose, and fitted them into its own system. So it would be hard to find an aboriginal tribe so completely transformed into Hindus in language, dress, and manner of life, that its non-Aryan origin may not be detected by its private religious usages, as well as by its physical traits. Facts illustrative of this have already been cited. We have spoken chiefly of the influence of Hinduism upon the pagan religion, and it cannot be doubted that this will ultimately result in the effacement of the latter, unless, as is to be devoutly hoped, this work shall be done by Christianity; but the counter-influence of the older faith upon Hinduism is not less certain, if less easily traced, and would form a most interesting theme for inquiry; but we cannot enter upon it here.

In conclusion, we trust that this necessarily imperfect sketch of the religion of the aboriginal tribes of India may at least serve to attract those who are interested in the history of the religious development of the race to an important

source of evidence. If Hinduism, whose many-sidedness is well symbolised by the many-faced images of its gods, shall furnish greater attractions to the majority of students, still it must not be forgotten that the simple beliefs and rites that we have sketched belong to a much earlier stage of religious growth, and may, if attentively studied, throw much welcome light on the genius of all religion.

The CHAIRMAN (Mr. W. N. WEST).—All will desire me to tender the thanks of the meeting to Professor Avery for his very able paper, and also to Mr. H. Cadman Jones for the admirable way in which he has read it. I will now invite those present to take part in the discussion.

Maj.-General F. T. HAIG, R.E.—As I happen to have had an extensive acquaintance with one of the aboriginal tribes of India, I have been asked to come here and offer a few remarks on this paper. The subject is certainly one of great interest; but it seems to me that there are two points of view from which we may approach it, and that it is important we should, in the first place, determine which it is to be, because upon that will necessarily depend, to a great extent, the conclusions we may arrive at in reference to the general subject of the so-called “science of religion,” which is more or less raised by the author of the paper. I do not wish to enter at large into that subject, but will offer a few remarks, which I think will enable me to put my own position clearly before you, and in doing so state what I have myself seen of the religion of these aborigines. Such investigations may follow two opposite courses. We may either dismiss altogether the question as to whether there is such a thing as Divine revelation in the world, and confine our inquiries simply to the investigation of the origin and development of the different religions of the world, Christianity included. This, perhaps, might be called the strictly scientific method, though I do not think it is so; but it would at least yield the advantage that we should be able to pursue the inquiry with no more of that sentiment which appears to be deprecated in the paper than we should feel if we were engaged in investigating the claims of a number of old bones to having belonged to some extinct Saurian; but at the same time, if we pursue this method, the only standard by which we can judge of the relative value of the different religions must be such notions as we can evolve from our own consciousness, or those derived from natural theology. On the other hand, if we have, from careful investigation of the credentials of Christianity, arrived at a full conviction that it is a Divine revelation, two or three very important consequences follow. First of all, Christianity must be set on one side as not coming within the scope of our inquiry; because its origin, development, and character are already authoritatively laid down in its sacred books. In the next place, we shall have a much higher and an authoritative standard to which to bring all the different religions we may investigate; and, lastly, there is this to notice, namely, that the whole subject becomes invested with deep and intense interest—infinity

greater than if it were approached from any other point of view ; because, if we accept Christianity—as I do—as a revelation from God, we have, at least, in all these aboriginal tribes objects of the divine regard and benevolence, rather let me say of Divine love, in a degree which it is not possible for any created mind to conceive. This, I say, must invest the whole question with intense interest. For myself, I fully accept the divine origin of Christianity, and looking on its records as inspired, the question of the religious condition of these aboriginal races has a very special interest for me, which has, doubtless, been the more developed by a residence of some years among one of them. The tribe to which I refer is a branch of the great Gond family, who inhabit a wide district stretching down to the river Godavery. They extend, indeed, over a portion of India which is about as large as one-half of Ireland. In reference to them, there is one point in the paper which here strikes me as worthy of notice, namely, the remark that “there is much in other systems of belief which deserves our admiration, and not a little that has served the Divine purpose in educating the world up to the understanding of a purer revelation.”\* I should be inclined to say, speaking from my knowledge of these Gonds and their religious beliefs, that this remark, as applied to the question as between the religion of the aborigines and that of the Hindoos, does not hold good. I think indeed that precisely the opposite is the case. I believe it is found that, exactly in proportion as Hindooism has become more and more highly developed, so has it departed further and further from the truth, as judged by the Christian standard, which is the standard by which I elect to judge. We also find that the difficulty met with in presenting Christianity to the Hindoos, and their slowness to adopt it, is much greater than among the aboriginal tribes. The reason for this is not one that we need go far to seek, because among the aboriginal tribes the truths they hold in a very remarkable degree, although in an exaggerated or corrupted form, need only to be purified from the accretions of error that have gradually grown upon them in the course of centuries to be fitted into a place in the Christian system. A question is raised in the paper as to whether these aboriginal tribes believe in one supreme God, as the Creator and Ruler of all things. The tribe to which I refer certainly do, although in an exceedingly vague and uncertain way. They retain the belief, but it has no effect upon their lives, and the moment the truth of the unity of the Divine Being—the one God over all—is presented to them as a revealed certainty, it is at once accepted, and is simply regarded as a confirmation of the belief which has been long and dimly held. And so it is with other portions of their belief, as regards, for instance, the existence of evil spirits. They need to be told that those spirits are not the spirits of departed persons—their ancestors and relatives ; the truth requires to be guarded in that and in other ways, but, nevertheless, there is a considerable element of truth in

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\* *Vide* second page of the paper.

their ideas. And so, in regard to their belief in a future state, and in the necessity for sacrifice—although the idea of sacrifice which they entertain is that they have to propitiate a bloodthirsty being ; still, the notion is one that tends to the confirmation of the great leading truth, set forth in the one great sacrifice of the Cross. We find, therefore, in these aboriginal tribes a larger degree of preparation for the truths of Christianity than among the Hindoos. In putting Christianity before the Hindoos you have to encounter and to overthrow their whole system of religious belief, which is utterly, hopelessly, and fundamentally wrong. Therefore, without going further than the limits over which my own experience has extended, so far from thinking that the more elaborate religions to which reference has been made have educated the people up to the “understanding of a purer revelation,” I hold that precisely the contrary is the fact. There are one or two other points I may be allowed to mention. I think this paper is the best I have ever read or heard on this subject. I am especially struck with the discrimination exercised by the writer—a discrimination which shows itself in the selection of the facts which are laid before us, and especially in the rejection of so very much that we often find in papers and utterances on this subject. I may say, in regard to the general question of the aborigines of India, that in my opinion much of what is in this paper, and which has been very carefully sifted from a larger amount of information, must be received with a good deal of caution ; because we are apt to forget to what extent Hindoo ideas, and even those of the Mohammedans, have, in the course of centuries, filtered through the whole of Indian society. The aboriginal tribes have been secluded, owing to their inhabiting great forest tracts which have been like islands in the midst of the great sea of Hindooism for centuries, but not so completely so as to be absolutely beyond the reach of other religious influences. Traders have been in the habit of penetrating the wild tracts to which those tribes have been confined, for the purpose of selling cloths and carrying things for barter ; and the people themselves come down to the more settled districts for salt, which they greatly covet, and for which they have to pay a high price. It is consequently very hard to distinguish how much the religious beliefs of these people are to be regarded as original, or to what extent they may have been modified by Hindooism or Mohammedanism. When I speak of Mohammedanism, I speak of a religion which holds the unity of God, and which has been in India for centuries. Then, there is another point with regard to the information furnished to us with reference to the aboriginal tribes, and that is that we ought to bear in mind the extreme timidity of the people, who are exceedingly superstitious, and whose lives are spent in a constant state of fear. Such information as we have had placed before us this evening is mostly gathered by officials—that is to say, a man like Col. Dalton, wishing for information in regard to the religions of the people under his government, sends a circular to his subordinates, requesting them to supply him with the requisite data. Upon this, questions have to be put to some of the native tribes, and these must naturally be leading questions. The result is that these poor

people often intentionally tell falsehoods, because they fear to divulge the truth. Knowing this tendency, there is, of course, a certain amount of suspicion cast upon the information which comes to us, and therefore we must receive it with a good deal of reserve, and a feeling that we can hardly draw any very reliable conclusion from it. These tribes retain the belief, although in an exceedingly dim manner, in a supreme God. The gods they really worship and fear—for their religion is wholly one of intense fear—are for the most part those minor and malignant deities who are the spirits of departed persons. Their imagination fills the forests and villages with these spirits, and they spend their lives in terror of them. This is one of the reasons which account for the extremely migratory habits of these people, who can hardly be induced to remain more than two or three years at the same spot. This is partly due to their peculiar method of cultivation; they cut down the forest, and burn it, in order to manure the land with the ashes, which give them rich crops for two or three years; and, when they have thus used up all the land around a village, they are naturally disposed to move somewhere else. Another and a frequent cause of the breaking up of their settlements is, however, the terror inspired by the spirits of the departed. Perhaps one or two deaths have occurred rather suddenly—perhaps there may have been three or four, more than they expected. These deaths they attribute to one of the spirits, and therefore abandon the village and move somewhere else; and this constitutes one of the difficulties we have in the civilisation of these tribes. It is certainly a great obstacle in the way of their christianisation, and is so found to be by those who labour among them with a view to their evangelisation. The paper very accurately describes some of the customs of these people. They practise divination and witchcraft, and hold to the custom of using a corpse, when it is being conveyed to the place of burial or burning, to indicate the house of the person to whose means the death is attributable. This custom has always prevailed among them. The corpse is taken up by four bearers, who go staggeringly and uncertainly along through the village; and, if one sees a house belonging to a man to whom he wishes to do an ill turn, he pushes in that direction, while the others, feeling the pressure, also move towards the same point until they come up against the house of the person so singled out, and he is thereupon believed to have been the person causing the death. The punishments meted out in such cases are, however, far more serious than those stated in this paper. Even impaling was not at all uncommon before the advent of British power. I may here say, in reference to a remark in this paper, that human sacrifices were certainly at one time common among all these tribes. In the district to which I have referred they carried on the practice down to a recent period, and it is only within the last two or three years I have heard of more than one instance occurring within a few miles of a government civil station, in which there was quite a panic among the people, in consequence of a report that some one or other would be carried off for sacrifice. This, at any rate, shows that there is still an impression that

human sacrifice is practised, even down to the present day. There are some other points I should have liked to have mentioned, but I will not go into them now, as I fear I have already occupied too much of your time. (Applause.)

Mr. HORMUZD RASSAM.—I am somewhat reluctant to make any remark on a paper in the author's absence ; nevertheless, I feel bound to take notice of two allusions he has made and to which I take great exception. I believe the majority of those present will agree with me in thinking it is very heretical to the Christian belief which, I presume, is held by all of us, to hear what the writer asserts with regard to heathenism :—He says “there has been a time when the Christian Church viewed everything called religion outside its own fold much as the Greeks looked at the world beyond the confines of their peninsula, and lumped together alien beliefs of every variety and merit under the general title of heathenism.” I should be sorry to think that the Christians did not believe this of the other religions, barring Judaism and Mohammedanism, these two faiths, of course, could not be characterised as heathenism, because both Jews and Mohammedans believe in the true God. The writer goes on to say : “But, happily, a more appreciative spirit now prevails, and we are coming to see that there is much in other systems of belief which deserves our admiration, and not a little that has served the divine purpose in educating the world up to the understanding of a purer revelation.” Now, I am pained to see a Christian writer make such a remark, because it makes the belief in revealed religions quite inconsistent.\* Then, further on, the same writer says :—“Whether these are vanishing traces of a primitive revelation, or the result of their own reflections, or have been borrowed from the religion, particularly the Hari-worship, of the Hindoos, we will not here inquire. It is, at any rate, certain that the contemplation of their highest god has little effect in regulating conduct.” We, who believe in Revelation, know very well that there was at one time throughout the world a universal belief in one God Almighty ; that through the wickedness of man's nature he was alienated from his Creator, and that consequently God chose the Jews as His people in preference to any other, because they continued to worship Him like their forefathers, Abraham and his immediate progeny. It is the same with regard to Christianity, and we must believe that, if people will only take the Bible and examine it in relation to the other religions, they will find that those other beliefs are nothing more than corruptions of Revealed Religion. If we take Mohammedanism as it exists at present, we shall find that it has adopted some truths of the Old and New Testaments, although we cannot, of course, admit that the Koran is inspired ; and so, with regard to other religions, according to the received theory, they are nothing but corrupt belief in God. We need not go further than the present century to see that among all the denominations of religious belief, whether Jew, Mohammedan, or Christian, this has been the case ; and I could mention many instances of particular superstitions in which, although

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\* See note on second page.

the people are believers in Revelation, you would not think them one whit better than the Hindoos. So we may trace the whole system of Hindooism and Buddhism to revealed religion; but as to what time they became corrupted, and at what time they maintained a belief in God Almighty, it is, of course, utterly impossible to tell without a thorough and exhaustive examination of the whole question.

Mr. W. GRIFFITH, Barrister-at-Law.—In one part of the paper the author speaks of a practice which prevailed in former times of “lumping together alien beliefs of every variety and merit under the general title of heathenism.” Some who have spoken this evening have come to the conclusion that, while blaming what may have been an improper practice, the writer has intended to uphold the advantages of the system of education which exists among the aboriginal tribes of whom he speaks; but, in my opinion, this is hardly a necessary consequence of the language he employs. What he says is, that “there is much in other systems of belief which deserves our admiration, and not a little that has served the Divine purpose in educating the world up to the understanding of a purer revelation;” but he does not say that these characteristics exist in the systems which prevail among the aboriginal tribes to whom he refers. For my own part, I would rather have put this interpretation on his meaning—that there has been much to admire in other systems such, for example, as those of Greece and Rome; something to admire in the system of Confucius which obtains in China at the present day; something to admire in the system of Mohammedanism, which is opposed to idolatry and teaches the existence of but one true God; and something also to admire in the system of asceticism and charity which prevails among certain Hindoos. I think we may put this interpretation on the meaning of the writer without any breach of fairness, and that in common charity we ought, in his absence, to say the best we can of the sentiments he has advanced. It is an argument frequently used by writers, that the very defects exhibited by even the admirable parts of other systems have shown the want of a revelation. I would rather interpret the concluding portion of the sentence in which the writer says these things have “served the divine purpose in educating the world up to the understanding of a purer revelation,” as meaning that these very things have shown that a purer religion was wanted. (Hear, hear.) They have served as proof that the unassisted power of man could not devise what was perfect; that revelation was needed in order that we might obtain that pure, and perfect, and settled system of faith and practice called Christianity, which man by his own unaided powers would never be able to develop. I repeat, that I think we might in fairness put this construction on the author’s sentiments, which have been to some extent misconstrued in consequence of a vagueness in the language employed. To pass, however, from these controversial points, I think we may say that the paper presented to us is full of interesting information and one which may prove of great utility. The word “science” may not be altogether applicable to it, as was remarked by the first speaker;

but the word "science" is a somewhat vague one. I do not think it an appropriate use of the word to apply it to large classifications of facts. The facts must be collected independently; but there is no reason why they should not be classified, nor why different collections should not be made at the same time. Whether it is useful to do this is another question; but I think that no one who has considered the utility of a great number of collections can doubt the advantages derivable from the adoption of systematic method, and so forming what some are pleased to name the inductive sciences. There are in India at least fifty districts where different languages are spoken, many of them large districts, in which the face of a white man is never seen; but, if we have regard to the importance of that Empire to ourselves and the duties imposed on us as its rulers, surely everything connected with the classification of the people, their habits, customs, and religious beliefs, must be a matter of deep concern to us. Undoubtedly the population contains a large number of Mohammedans and Hindoos; but, seeing the vast proportion of native tribes, in that territory, over whom we have control, we should be only too thankful to have information such as is contained in this paper, so that it may be turned to its appropriate use. It will enable our missionaries to adapt the means at their command to the wants of the people; it will also enable the Government to put a stop to immoral practices which they would otherwise know nothing of: it will, probably, be the means of attracting a large number of travellers to the districts spoken of and of developing a large amount of trade, although trade and travelling are matters of inferior importance when compared with the moral and religious well-being of the people. Before we can hope to benefit the large mass of the population by Christianity or civilisation, we must first inform ourselves of the peculiarities of the creeds which at present exist among them. (Hear, hear.) I think the author of the paper has produced a very valuable contribution to our previous knowledge, and I hope it may result in benefit to the Indian races.

Mr. **RASSAM**.—I am afraid that the gentleman who has just spoken quite misunderstood me. I spoke as a Christian, and am sure very few Christians would disagree with me in regard to the comparison made between us as Christians and the Greeks who represented the heathens outside Christianity. There can be really no comparison. Even if we appealed to the Mohammedans' theory, they would tell us that those who do not believe in God Almighty, whom we call Jehovah, are heathens. God has given the world revelation, and if we refer to history we shall find that, in the infancy of the Christian Church and in the fourteenth century, hundreds of missionaries went from Mesopotamia and preached to the Chinese, the Tartars, and the people of India. I do not mean to say they were all converted, but thousands were.

Mr. **GRIFFITH**.—I had no wish to depreciate Christianity or compare it with the heathen systems. The God of the Christians, the Father which is in heaven, is a Spirit whose will is just, whose wisdom, power, and goodness are infinite and consistent. It were indeed monstrous to compare this Heavenly Father with stocks, and stones, and graven images.

But I said I thought it hardly fair to say that the author of the paper had done so. As to the historic question, I am aware that there were Christian missionaries at the time the last speaker has mentioned. St. Thomas the Apostle is supposed by some to have introduced Christianity into India.

Mr. CALEB (an East Indian visitor).—I think there is much that is profitable in this paper. We read of the various beliefs as to the life hereafter and the sacrifices that are made by the different Indian tribes. Does it not thus help us to understand more than hitherto the value of the One great sacrifice that was made on the cross for us, and does it not also help us more clearly to understand the conditions of an eternal life hereafter?

The meeting was then adjourned.

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### REMARKS ON THE FOREGOING PAPER.

By the Rev. R. COLLINS, M.A., late Principal of Cottayam College.

Professor Avery's paper is most valuable, as affording us important facts, which must be taken into consideration in drawing conclusions as to the origin of the various religious ceremonies and beliefs of mankind. Professor Avery himself, however, does not here draw conclusions: and yet for this alone are such facts of value. We are presented with disjointed parts of a puzzle, and we instinctively try to put them together.

These religious rites, beliefs, and traditions of the more uncivilised, and no doubt topically the more ancient, tribes of India, seem to me to be chiefly interesting when taken in connection with those of other nations, Hindoos, Greeks, Romans, Assyrians, Accadians, &c. If we find one thought, or principle, running through all, we must give to that one thought, or principle, the same, or a similar origin. Can this similar origin be due to the similar idiosyncrasies of different tribes? There are, in fact, several principal ideas and customs common to the religions of these Indian tribes, as described by Professor Avery, and other, whether more or less civilised, peoples of all ages; there are, to take only three, the priest, the sacrifice, and the propitiation. The interest in the study of Comparative Religion centres round the question of the origin of these. Mr. Herbert Spencer traces the origin of the religious sentiment to "ghost worship," Mr. Frederic Harrison to the worship of "natural objects:" and both would, I believe, make all religious observances the outgrowth purely of human nature. The value of Professor Avery's paper to me is, that it seems to help the evidence, that all such religious observances and beliefs are relics, it may be more or less degraded, of a Divine revelation given to the early families of mankind, similar to that given to Moses on the Mount. It is impossible, I think, to imagine why primitive man should propitiate "ghosts," dreaded though they might be, or "natural objects" endowed by their heated imaginations with ghost-like influences, by offer-

ings of slain animals, and, as among the Garos, and many other tribes beside those mentioned by Professor Avery, by pouring the blood upon an altar; or why they should invent a priesthood. Men surely do not thus, and never did, attempt to propitiate each other. The belief in, and fear of, ghosts, the adoration of mysterious powers, and the use of symbolism in religion, we can easily understand, because they come under our own experience: superstitious dread is nothing strange to us, who perhaps have friends who would not on any account sit down thirteen at a table, or encourage a marriage on a Friday; but we cannot trace the principle of propitiation *through the shedding of blood* to anything that we can grasp in human nature. On the other hand, if the Almighty and Allwise instructed the fathers of mankind to sanctify a meal (perhaps every meal) to the remembrance of Himself, the Giver of all, and to make the very killing of the food-animal (as was certainly done under the Mosaic dispensation) a picture of the atonement of Christ, the Life of the world, upon the cross, which is the central object of all Divine teaching, we can well understand the method of priest and sacrifice, and the sentiment of propitiation; and we can understand their being perpetuated, even amongst the most uncivilised and illiterate races. *Methods* in religion are most likely to be permanent. The character of the *sentiment* expressed is more likely to be subject to change. The sentiment of propitiation itself in the abstract in connection with sacrifice is one likely to remain; but the sentiment as to the object to be propitiated is likely to change. The object is unseen and unknown, except by revelation. Man is superstitious by nature: indeed I suppose it may fairly be taken as an actual "law of nature" that he is so. He is also prone to forget God, as we see in all our experience. We are not astonished, therefore, at man worshipping either "ghosts" or "natural objects," when we see man in our own day transferring the worship of Jehovah to the "ghosts" of "canonized" men and women. But can we look upon ghost-dread, or the adoration of the mysterious in natural objects, as the origin of the universal (and Prof. Avery's examples help us to believe that it has been universal) method of priest, sacrifice, and offerings in religion? It must be admitted that honestly we cannot do so; we must find an independent origin for that; an origin independent of humanity; an origin which we must attribute, as historically we ought to attribute it, to a revelation from God.

I would venture one further word: is there not a fallacy in taking for granted, that, because the men of a race are to-day illiterate, and, it may be, descended from the aborigines, or at least very early inhabitants, of a country, therefore their present religious rights and beliefs represent those of all primæval men, or even of their own ancestors? The state of a thing to-day is scarcely a sure indication of what it, or something allied to it, was a thousand or two thousand years ago. I refer to the last sentence in Prof. Avery's paper, "still it must not be forgotten that the simple beliefs and rites that we have sketched belong to a much earlier stage of religious growth" (that is, than Hindooism). There is nothing to show, as we regard

these things merely to-day, whether those beliefs and rites are in a state of "growth" to something higher in the future, or a state of decay from something higher in the past. The latter seems to me to be more likely to be the case, agreeing, as it does, with all we know of the propensities of human nature, and with the testimony of history up to the time not only of Noah, but of Adam himself.

I am, therefore, thankful to Prof. Avery for the very interesting examples he has given us of the present state of religious observances among the aboriginal tribes of India, because the most characteristic of them seem to me to be independent vestiges, like the rites of the Hindoos and other nations, of a Divine revelation as to worship and belief, given in the far past by Jehovah Himself. The traditions, as amongst the Singphos, the Abors, Miris, Kukis, and others, as to a Supreme God and Father of men, as well as other parts of the beliefs of these (why should we prejudge their religious history by calling them "primitive," when all we really know is that they are at present uncivilised?) tribes, would add to this conviction; but I have already written too much.

#### REMARKS BY THE REV. W. T. STORRS.

I have read the paper through, but there seems little to excite discussion.

As to the Santals, the Sun is their God, as far as they have any idea of God; Marang Buru (literally, the great mountain) is only the greatest among a large number of demons, *daimonia* whom one could scarcely call devils, being evidently in a great measure deified heroes, and the local spirits of groves, streams, &c.; and this Marang Buru is a created being, and not the Creator, and is always, without any suggestion of ours, equivalent to the devil in the minds of those Santals who have accepted Christianity. They declare plainly that it was Marang Buru who tempted the first pair to sin by offering them intoxicating liquor. They have little huts in the street of each village, where are two small wooden doll-like images of Adam and Eve (as we should call them) stuck into the ground, and to which offerings are made. But the great place of worship is the sacred grove outside each village, where in the darkness their festivals are held with dancing, singing, &c. They have some very pretty festivals and customs, especially the spring festival with its emblematical water sprinklings and offerings of flowers, and the harvest festival with its degrading Saturnalia.

#### LETTER FROM THE AUTHOR.

In regard to the sentence in my paper which seems to have been received with some hesitation, I have to say by way of explanation, that it seems to me one may discern now and then in the religious systems of the heathen world a more or less clear apprehension of some of the truths of revealed religion,—such as the existence of a Supreme Deity, all-powerful and beneficent, the Creator of the universe; the idea of sin as a violation of Divine law, and its corollary the need of divine forgiveness; the brotherhood of man, &c.

Whether these ideas are a survival from a primitive revelation, are echos of Christian teaching, or have come to human thought in the following way must be determined by the evidence in each case, and, in the present state of our knowledge, should not be settled too dogmatically. I like to think that the Divine Spirit acting in connection with the "law written in their hearts" has wrought a work in the souls of some devout heathen, thus preserving a witness for God and preparing the way for the prompt reception of the Gospel of His Son. That these glimpses of truth have been clouded with error, and that heathen systems *as a whole* are powerless to raise men to a high moral level I fully recognise. To me Christianity is not one step higher, simply, in an ascending scale of religious development; the best that Paganism has done for the enlightenment of the race is to the smallest blessings derived through Christianity as the feeble flicker of a rushlight compared with the splendour of the noon-day sun.

### THE AUTHOR'S REPLY ON THE DISCUSSION, ETC.

The printed account of the discussion on my recent paper has just reached me, and has greatly interested me. I am grateful for the kind words of appreciation expressed by nearly all the speakers, and the more so as I am fully aware of the difficulty of treating the subject in a wholly satisfactory manner. In regard to the introductory sentences which proved stumbling-blocks to some, I think my former letter and the remarks of Mr. Griffith make all the explanation necessary. Mr. Griffith caught my idea exactly, and illustrated it just as I should have done. I confess that as I read my language again I hardly see why it should have been misconstrued at all. There were several points brought up in the discussion upon which I should be glad to explain my views at length, but it would hardly be worth while to do so at the present time. I will simply add, in reply to the very interesting remarks of General Haig: 1. The paper was designed solely to discover and systematically arrange the *facts* regarding the religious beliefs and practices of these tribes; and not to set forth any theory of their origin, or to compare them with Christianity. I hold that for a long time to come the chief task of the student of religions (of course I am not talking of the missionary) will be to ascertain what the heathen world actually believes and practices; when this shall have been done and the facts are all in hand, it will be time enough to see what we can make of them. 2. I was quite awake to the subtle penetration of Hindu and Mohammedan ideas into the secluded homes of the non-Aryan tribes, and sought to unmask them wherever they occurred. This is not always easy to do, and requires a broad survey of the whole field. A comparison of the beliefs of tribes widely separated, and differently related to the higher civilization will often help to separate what is indigenous from what is borrowed.

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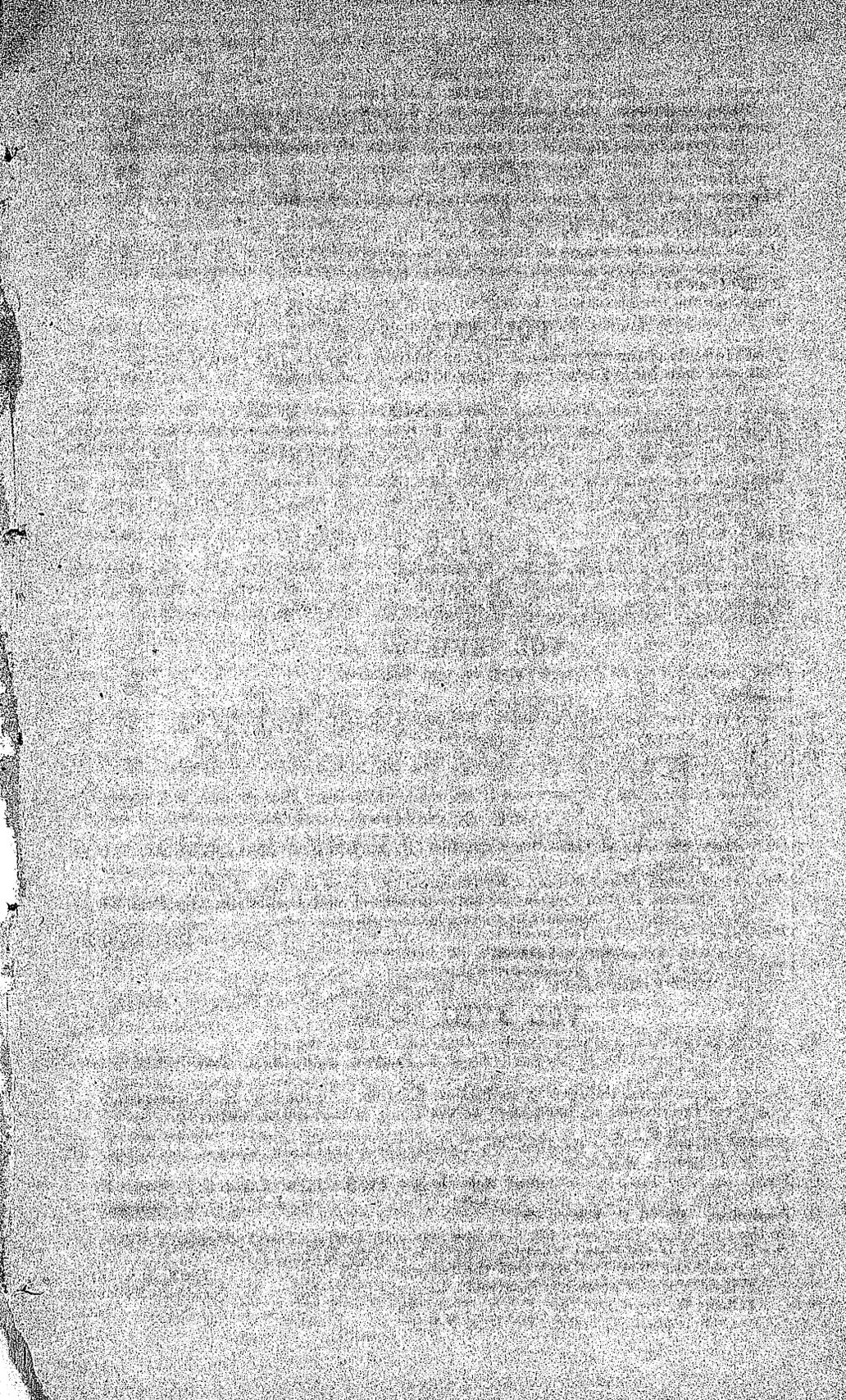
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