

THE GODS OF PERU

BY LEWIS SPENCE

CERTAIN lands possess an individuality well-nigh magical, standing out boldly from the regions which surround them as an isolated cliff rises from the monotonous levels of a prairie. Such a country is Peru. Like Egypt or Spain it appears to overshadow its neighbors, not merely by reason of its physical altitude, but because of its mysterious and shadowy aloofness and its traditions of a high antiquity and a vanished civilization.

That it certainly possesses a sorcery of its own, an environment capable of shaping a wonderful race, is witnessed by the gigantic ruins of the strange and picturesque civilizations which formerly occupied its arid and wind-swept tablelands. These successive cultures were created by races who were among the most advanced of the Indian peoples of America, and the singular human society they developed surprised and bewildered the Spanish conquerors of Peru by its complexity and rich variety.

Centuries before the arrival of the Spaniards, and probably while Spain was still a Roman province, civilized communities waxed and waned, warred and struggled, on the plateaus of Old Peru. Some of these were situated in widely distant parts of the country, but all appear to have possessed a common distinctive culture. All we know of these remote peoples is what can be gleaned from the remains of their architecture their pottery and their tombs. In the North are to be found the vestiges of a race known to archaeologists as the Incas, who built the gigantic structures of Chimu, near Truxillo whilst in the south the Nazca maintained a very similar mode of life, pastoral and agricultural, building large irrigation terraces for the cultivation of maize, and manufacturing fine painted pottery.

Of the precise origin of these, the earliest Peruvians, we know nothing. But we are better informed regarding the races which

succeeded them, the Quichua-Aymara tribes, who, indeed, may have had a close affinity with them. The Quichua-Aymara people seems to have drifted down by degrees from the Altaplanicie Highlands of Bolivia, or, as some authorities believe, wandered westward in early times from the shores of the great and almost land-locked sea which formerly covered the present site of Argentina, founding later a settlement in the neighborhood of Lake Titicaca. These tribes, the Quichua and Aymara, formerly one people, seem to have divided into two swarms, the Aymara occupying the plateaus of the Andes ranges, so that in course of time they became a race of mountaineers, and the Quichua occupying the warm valleys beyond the Apurimac, to the northwest of the Aymara-speaking folk. The difference in the language spoken by these races was, and still is, little more than a difference of dialect, such as, for example, is found between Dutch and Flemish.

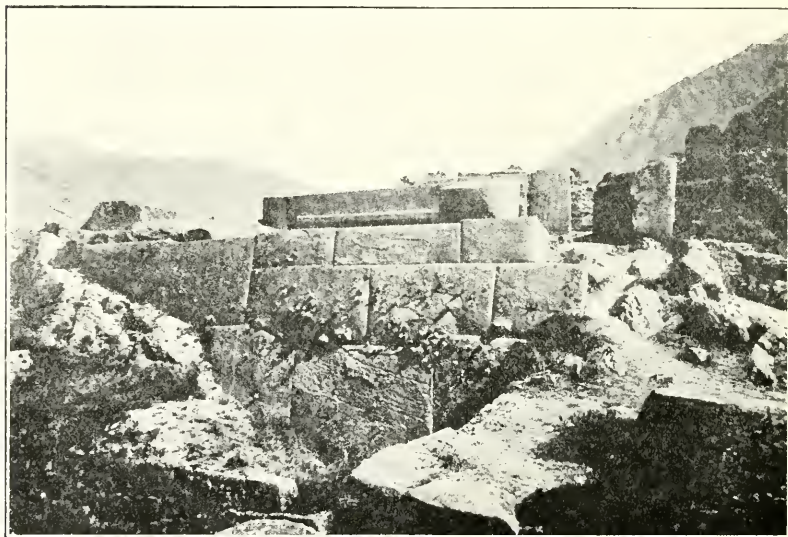
Before the advent of the Incas these peoples had developed a civilization of their own. To the Aymaras is probably due the construction of the extraordinary city of Tiahuanaco, on the southern shore of Lake Titicaca, and built at a level of 13,000 feet above the sea. Of this once great community only some of the most outstanding fragments of masonry remain, great blocks hewn from trachytic rock. The most remarkable is a great doorway, carved out of a single block of stone, seven feet in height and thirteen and one-half feet wide, its upper portion decorated with symbolic figures in high relief. Scattered over the site are gigantic blocks of stone, some thirty-six feet long, the remains of cyclopean walls, standing monoliths and colossal statues.

But the reason for selecting such a site as Tiahuanaco is a mystery. The tableland on which the great city stood is desolate and difficult of access, the snow-line is close at hand, and breathing at such a height is no easy matter. Nor can maize be grown at such an altitude. How, then, did Tiahuanaco get its food-supply? The probable reply to this fascinating riddle is that great climatic changes have taken place at this site through the gradual rising of the land, a phenomenon which, it is known, has occurred on the coast-line of Peru.

Upon the Quichua-Aymara peoples the Incas swooped down as invaders. They were a clan of Aymara stock, who had developed a culture of their own in the neighborhood of Lake Titicaca, and may have been the last representatives of the great race who built Tiahuanaco. At some time in the twelfth century they defeated the

Chanca, a neighboring tribe, and with their assistance overran Central Peru, making Cuzco their capital. But several centuries of hard fighting were necessary before they were able to annex the last province of their vast empire and they only succeeded in consolidating their conquests about a century before the arrival of the Spaniards.

But although engaged in almost constant warfare, the Incas succeeded in developing a civilization of surprising richness and complexity. It was especially in vast undertakings of engineering and in architecture that their genius displayed itself. They drove long,



THE INCA FORTRESS OF OLTANTAY-TAMPU.

straight tunnels through the Andes mountains, the pillars of their empire, and bridged seemingly impassable gorges, connecting up the centers of population by admirable highways. As builders they were supreme, indeed no race in the world's history has ever surpassed the solidity and exquisite finish of their masonry, the stones of which were frequently ground to fit each other in a series of angles. Perhaps the most famous Incan building was the Coricancha or "Golden House" at Cuzco, the great temple of the sun-god, the walls of which were covered with thin plates of gold, and whose gardens were filled with gold and silver animals and insects. Even the water-

pipes of this temple were of silver, and in its inner shrine the mummies of the dead Inca Kings sat in state, as though still alive.

The rule of the Incas was paternal, even "grandmotherly," and their control of the people was over-emphasized. The Inca, or Emperor, was regarded as the representative of the sun upon earth, and on the principle that the rays of the sun penetrate into every corner, he delegated his authority to officials, each of whom had charge over ten thousand, a thousand, a hundred, or even over ten families. Every person when born was provided with a portion of land, and this he was forced to till, when old enough. He had also to help to maintain the lands of the Inca and the priests. He was compelled to wear a headband of a certain color which showed from which province he came, and his wife was selected for him by the Incarial authorities. The rule of the Incas has been described as "state socialism." However that may be, it was a soulless machine which made no allowances for individuality, but treated the wretched people precisely as it did the herds of llamas it reared for their wool.

This unique civilization was almost entirely destroyed by a handful of Spanish adventurers. In 1532 Francisco Pizarro, with two hundred men, landed in Peru, and, taking full advantage of a struggle for the crown between the rival princes Atahualpa and Huasca, speedily seized Cuzco and executed Atahualpa, the successful claimant to the throne. The empire of the Incas collapsed like a house of cards, and although several efforts were made by members of the royal family to expel the Spaniards, none of these succeeded, and Peru became an appanage of the Spanish crown.

Although excellent topographical and archaeological results have recently been achieved on Peruvian soil, little or no research has been lavished upon the strange and still obscure religion of the Incas since the death of Sir Clements Markham. Yet that religion is well worthy of the most careful study, and it is little to the credit of Europe that none of her scholars is at present devoting his exclusive efforts to the consideration of the difficult but fascinating problems it affords. Such an investigator would find a quite embarrassing amount of material awaiting examination and collation. The chief authorities on the rites and myths of old Peru are those Spanish scribes who were either contemporary with its conquests by Pizarro, or who wrote at a time not far distant from that event. These have bequeathed much knowledge of the Inca religion, which is now readily available in translations from the Spanish by the late Sir Clements Markham, published by the Hakluyt Society.

In the century preceding the Spanish Conquest of 1532 the religion of the Incas had been regulated in such a manner by the State that anything approaching independent theological thought was impossible. There is abundant evidence, however, that prior to this period the priestly class—that is to say the royal caste—had been at considerable pains to amalgamate into one official belief the several aboriginal faiths popular in the various districts of Peru.

The record of their efforts is related in the "Royal Commentaries of the Incas," written by one of the descendants of the ruling race, Garcilasso de la Vega, and provides matter of intense interest to students of Comparative Religion, as affording a practical insight into the methods which were employed in the making and development of an official religion. In pre-Inca times, says Garcilasso, every district, village and family possessed its own god, and these were usually such objects as mountains, trees, flowers, herbs, caves stones great or small, and animals. The jaguar, puma and bear were worshipped for their strength and ferocity, the monkey and fox for their cunning, and the condor of the Andes because several tribes believed themselves to be descended from it. In a word, the type of nature-worship described by Garcilasso was, in some cases, pure fetishism, in others totemism.

Lakes, springs, rocks, mountains, precipices, and caves were all regarded by the various Peruvian tribes as *pacchariscas*—places whence their ancestors had originally issued to the upper world. The *paccharisca* was usually saluted with the cry, "Thou art my birth-place, thou art my life-spring. Guard me from evil, O Paccharisca!" In the holy spot a spirit was supposed to dwell which served the tribe as a kind of oracle. Naturally the *paccharisca* was looked upon with extreme reverence. It became, indeed, a sort of life-center for the tribe, from which it was very unwilling to be separated.

The worship of stones appears to have been almost as universal in ancient Peru as it was in ancient Palestine. Man in his primitive state believes stones to be the framework of the earth, its bony structure. He considers himself to have emerged from some cave—in fact, from the entrails of the earth. Nearly all American creation-myths regard man as thus emanating from the bowels of the great terrestrial mother. Rocks which were thus chosen as *pacchariscas* are found, among many other places, at Callca, in the valley of the Yucay, and at Titicaca there is a great mass of red sandstone on the top of a high ridge with almost inaccessible slopes and dark, gloomy recesses, where the sun was thought to have hidden himself

at the time of the great deluge which covered all the earth. The rock of Titicaca was, in fact, the great *paccarisca* of the sun itself.

We are thus not surprised to find that in aboriginal times, many standing stones were worshipped in Peru. Arriaga states that rocks of great size which bore some resemblance to the human figure were imagined to have been at one time gigantic men or spirits who, because they disobeyed the creative power, were turned into stone. According to another account they were said to have suffered this punishment for refusing to listen to the words of Thonapa, the son of the creator, who had taken upon himself the guise of a wandering Indian, so that he might have an opportunity of bringing the arts of civilization to the aborigines.

The earlier processes of religion as they appeared in Peru, are also illustrated by the reverence of objects known as *huacas*. The word comes from the root *huacan*, "to howl," native worship taking the form of a weird dirge-like wailing or howling. All sacred objects indeed, were known as *huacas*, and these had numerous forms. They were usually stones or pebbles, carved or painted, the personal fetishes of their owners, and frequently depicted the llama or the ear of maize, symbols of the food supply. In order that irrigation for agricultural purposes might proceed favorably, agricultural *huacas*, known more particularly as *ccompas*, were placed near the irrigation canals to exert a lucky influence upon the water-courses, and stones of a similiar kind were set up in the maize fields to ensure that a sufficient supply of rain might be forthcoming. These maize *huacas* were known as *chichics* or *huanacas*, and the spirits who resided within them, *mamas*, or "mothers." To this was added the generic name of the plant over which they presided. Thus *acsumama* was the potato-mother, *saramama* the maize-mother, and *cacamama*, the mother of the coca-shrub, from which cocaine is procured, and which has been masticated by the Peruvian natives since time immemorial. The maize-mother frequently took the self-same shape as the Scottish kirnababy, a doll fashioned from the stalks of maize, renewed at each harvest, and sacrificed to as the presiding spirit of the maize-crop.

Connected with agriculture in some degree was the Huamantantac ("he who caused the Cormorants to gather themselves together.") This was the agency responsible for the gathering of sea-birds, resulting in the deposits of guano to be found along the Peruvian coast, which are so valuable in the cultivation of the maize-

plant. He was regarded as a most beneficent spirit, and was sacrificed to with exceeding fervor.

The *huaris*, or "great ones," were the ancestors of the aristocrats of a tribe, and were regarded as specially favorable toward agricultural effort, possibly because the land had at one time belonged to them personally. They were sometimes alluded to as the "gods of strength," and were sacrificed to by libations of *chicha*. Ancestors in general were deeply revered, and had an agricultural significance, in that considerable tracts of land were tilled in order



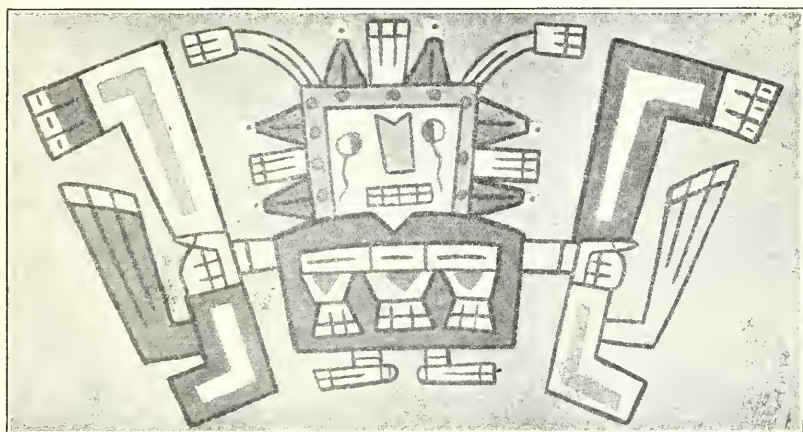
THE GOD PACHACAMAC FROM A PECTOID.

that they might be supplied with suitable food and drink offerings.

Later Peruvian theology recognized only three gods of the first rank, the earth, the thunder, and the creative agency. Pachacamac, the great spirit of earth, derived his name from the word *pacha* which may perhaps, be translated as "matter." In its sense of visible matter it is equivalent to "world" or "universe," but applied to events which happen in succession, it is capable of being translated as "time." Pachacamac, however, was not the earth itself, the

material soil, but the spirit which animates it and all things which emerge therefrom, men, animals and plants. He was, indeed, the all-pervading soul of nature. His consort was Pachamama, who presided especially over mountains, rocks and pampas, and who appears to have been literally the earth or earth-mother, a goddess developed from the idea of the earth as a living being.

But in the latter years of the Inca dynasty Pachacamac appears to have been somewhat overshadowed by a more ideal form, Pachayachachi, an advanced conception of the creative agency, who seems to have had a solar origin. This change was probably due to the influence of the Inca Pachacuti, who is known to have made several other doctrinal innovations in Peruvian theology. He com-



THE GOD PACHACAMAC, FROM AN ANCIENT PERUVIAN VASE.

manded a great new temple to the creator-god to be built at the northern angle of the city of Cuzco, in which he placed a statue of pure gold, of the size of a boy of ten years of age. The small size of this idol was intended to facilitate its removal, as Peruvian worship was nearly always carried out in the open air. In form it represented a man with his right arm elevated, the hand partially closed and the forefinger and thumb raised, as if in the act of uttering the creative word. To this god large possessions and revenues were assigned, for, previously, service rendered to him had been voluntary only.

The rain-and-thunder god of Peru was worshipped in various parts of the country under various names. Among the Collao he

was known as Con, and in that part of the Inca dominions now known as Bolivia he was called Churoquilla. Near the cordilleras of the coast he was probably known as Pariacaca, who expelled the *huaca* of the district by dreadful tempests, hurling rain and hail at him for three days and nights in such quantities as to form the great lake of Pariacaca. Burnt llamas were offered to him. But the Incas, discontented with this local worship, which by no means suited their system of central government, determined to create one thunder-deity, to whom all the tribes in the empire must bow as the only god of his class.



PERUVIAN DEITY FROM A VASE.

Sun-worship was officially established in Peru by Inca Pachacuti, about the middle of the fifteenth century, and it was only at this period that the Incas became known as "Children of the Sun." The worship of the sun had formerly had a merely tribal significance on the shores of Lake Titicaca. Now it took on a national aspect, was placed first in the trinity of gods, and special lands were devoted to the upkeep of its temples, which were served by a specially dedicated caste of priests and nuns. Great annual festivals were cele-

brated in honor of the luminary, and the establishment of these necessitated the revision of the calendar, and, as in Mexico, brought about the introduction of human sacrifice.

By degrees this solar worship almost entirely obliterated the lesser tribal cults, and, indeed, surpassed those of the thunder and earth deities, which, if they never entirely disappeared, became quite subservient to it. Permanent provision was made for sacrifices to the sun before the other deities were so recognized, and as the conquests of the Incas grew wider and that provision extended to the new territories, they came to be known as "the Lands of the Sun," the natives observing the dedication of a part of the country to the luminary, and concluding therefrom that it applied to the whole. The material reality of the sun would enormously assist his cult among a people who were too barbarous to appreciate an unseen god, and this colonial conception reacting upon the motherland would undoubtedly inspire the military class with a resolve to strengthen a worship so popular in the conquered provinces, and of which they were in great measure the protagonists and missionaries.

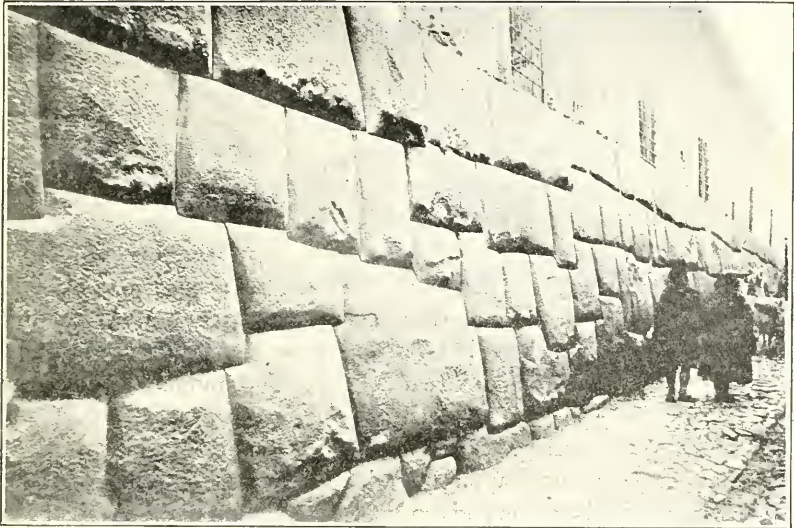
In every Peruvian village the sun had considerable possessions. His estates resembled those of a territorial chieftain, and consisted of a dwelling-house, a *chacra*, or portion of land, flocks of llamas and pacos, and a number of women dedicated to his service. The cultivation of the soil within the solar enclosure devolved upon the inhabitants of the neighboring village, the produce of their toil being stored in the *inti-huasi*, or sun's house. The Women of the Sun prepared the daily food and drink of the luminary, which consisted of maize and *chicha*. They also spun wool and wove it into fine stuff, which was burned in order that it might ascend to the celestial regions, where the deity could make use of it. Each village reserved a portion of its solar produce for the great festival at Cuzco, and it was carried thither on the backs of llamas destined for sacrifice.

The Rock of Titicaca, the renowned place of the sun's origin, naturally became an important center of his worship. The date at which the worship of the sun originated at this famous rock is extremely remote, but we may safely assume that it was long before the conquest of the Collao tribe by the Inca Pachacutic. Reverence for the luminary as a war-god by the Colla chiefs was noticed by Inca Tupac, who, in suppressing a local revolt, concluded that the local observance at the rock had some relationship to the disturbance. It is, however, certain that Tupac proceeded after the re-con-

quest of the region to establish at this natural center of sun-worship solar rites on a new basis, with the evident intention of securing on behalf of the Incas of Cuzco such exclusive benefit as might accrue from the complete possession of the sun's paccarisca. According to a native account, a venerable *colla* (or hermit) consecrated to the service of the sun, had proceeded on foot from Titicaca to Cuzco for the purpose of commending this ancient seat of sun-worship to the notice of Tupac. The consequence was that the Inca, after visiting the island and inquiring into the ancient local customs, re-established them in a more regular form. This account can hardly be accepted in face of the facts which have been gathered. Rather did it naturally follow that Titicaca became subservient to Tupac after the revolt of the Collao had been quelled. Henceforth the worship of the sun at the place of his origin was entrusted to Incas resident in the place, and was celebrated with Inca rites. The island was converted into a solar estate and the aboriginal inhabitants removed. The land was cultivated and the slopes of the hills levelled, maize was sown and the soil consecrated, the grain being regarded as the gift of the sun. This work produced considerable change in the island. Where once was waste and idleness there was now fertility and industry. The harvests were skilfully apportioned, so much being reserved for sacrificial purposes, the remainder being sent to Cuzco, partly to be sown in the *chacras*, or estates of the sun, throughout Peru, partly to be preserved in the granary of the Inca and the *huacas* as a symbol that there would be abundant crops in the future and that the grain already stored would be preserved. A building for the Women of the Sun was erected about a mile from the rock, so that the produce might be available for sacrifices. For their maintenance, tribute of potatoes, ocas and quinoa was levied upon the inhabitants of the villages on the shores of the lake, and of maize upon the people of the neighboring valleys.

Titicaca at the time of the Spanish conquest was probably more frequented than Pachacamac itself. These two places were held to be the cardinal shrines of the two great *huacas*, the creator and the sun respectively. A special reason for pilgrimage to Titicaca was to sacrifice to the sun, as the source of physical energy and the giver of long life; and he was especially worshipped by the aged, who believed he had preserved their lives. Then followed the migration of pilgrims to Titicaca, for whose shelter houses were built at Capacahuana, and large stores of maize were provided for their use. The ceremonial connected with the sacred rites of the rock was rigor-

ously observed. The pilgrim ere embarking on the raft which conveyed him to the island must first confess his sins to a *huillac* (a speaker to an object of worship); then further confessions were required at each of the three sculptured doors which had successively to be passed before reaching the sacred rock. The first door (Puma-puncu) was surmounted by the figure of a puma; the others (Quenti-puncu and Pillco-puncu) were ornamented with feathers of the different species of birds commonly sacrificed to the sun. Having passed the last portal, the traveller beheld at a distance of two hundred paces the sacred rock itself, the summit glittering with gold-leaf. He was permitted to proceed no further, for only the



CONVENT OF THE VIRGINS OF THE SUN, CUZCO, PERU.

officials were allowed entry into it. The pilgrim on departing received a few grains of the sacred maize grown on the island. These he kept with care and placed with his own store, believing they would preserve his stock. The confidence the Indian placed in the virtue of the Titicaca maize may be judged from the prevalent belief that the possessor of a single grain would not suffer from starvation during the whole of his life.

The Intip-Raymi, or Great Festival of the Sun, was celebrated by the Incas at Cuzco at the winter solstice. In connection with it the *Tarpuntaita-cuma*, or sacrificing Incas, were changed with a re-

markable duty, the worshippers journeying eastward to meet one of these functionaries on his way. On the principal hill-tops between Cuzco and Huilleanuta, on the road to the rock of Titicaca, burnt offerings of llamas, coca, and maize were made at the feast to greet the arrival of the young sun from his ancient birthplace. Molina has enumerated more than twenty of these places of sacrifice. The striking picture of the celebration of the solar sacrifice on these bleak mountains in the depths of the Peruvian winter has, it seems, no parallel in the religious rites of the ancient Americans. Quitting their thatched houses at early dawn, the worshippers left the valley below, carrying the sacrificial knife and brazier, and conducting the white llama, heavily laden with fuel, maize, and coca leaves, wrapped in fine cloth, to the spot where the sacrifice was to be made. When sunrise appeared the pile was lighted. The victim was slain and thrown upon it. The scene then presented a striking contrast to the bleak surrounding wilderness. As the flames grew in strength and the smoke rose higher and thicker the clear atmosphere was gradually illuminated from the east. When the sun advanced above the horizon the sacrifice was at its height. But for the crackling of the flames and the murmur of a babbling stream on its way down the hill to join the river below, the silence had hitherto been unbroken. As the sun rose the Incas marched slowly round the burning mass, plucking the wool from the scorched carcass, and chanting monotonously: "O Creator, Sun and Thunder, be for ever young! Multiply the people; let them ever be in peace!"

The most picturesque if not the most important solar festival was that of the Citoc Raymi (Gradually Increasing Sun), held in June, when nine days were given up to the ceremonial. A rigorous fast was observed for three days previous to the event, during which no fire must be kindled. On the fourth day the Inca, accompanied by the people *en masse*, proceeded to the great square of Cuzco to hail the rising sun, which they awaited in silence. On its appearance they greeted it with a joyous tumult, and, joining in procession, marched to the Golden Temple of the Sun, where llamas were sacrificed, and a new fire was kindled by means of an arched mirror, followed by sacrificial offerings of grain, flowers, animals, and aromatic gums. This festival may be taken as typical of all the seasonal celebrations. The Inca calendar was purely agricultural in its basis, and marked in its great festivals the renewal or abandonment of the labors of the field. Its astronomical observations were

not more advanced than those of the calendars of many American races otherwise inferior in civilization.

The religion of old Peru must thus be regarded as a highly composite faith, early native cosmological and totemic ideas being combined, under priestly guidance, with a solar religion of distinctly loftier character, which, at the coming of the Spaniards, was itself in a condition of disintegration. For did not one of the later Incas, who seems to have had in him the makings of a higher critic, express the opinion that the Sun was a being which possessed no volition of its own, but was compelled to walk his allotted path each day "like a tethered beast?" The faith of Old Peru is, indeed, rich in significance for students of Comparative Religion, and it is unfortunate that its more intimate study seems at the present time to have no outstanding protagonists.