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Extension of the Religious Parliament Idea

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APHRODITE.

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ON GREEK RELIGION

BY MRS. HENRY HULST

THE early Greeks understood that Homer was primarily religious and, with Hesiod, credited him with naming their gods and giving them their attributes; but in later and historic times interpreters and critics, such as Plato, became irreverent to this religion, and when Christianity came it was transcended and passed away. The Greeks had very little of what we call historical sense, and even Plato did not think of crediting Homer for holding advanced thought as compared with that of his own contemporaries in a prehistoric past but judged some of his myths unfavorably comparing them with the thought in the late day. To understand Homer rightly and to appreciate his value in his own prehistoric as well as in their historic days, the methods of archaeology must be adopted and the ideas and ideals of his contemporaries must be dug out in the Hebrew religion, the Hindu, the Babylonian, the Persian and Egyptian, and others. Then it can be seen which outworn and inferior beliefs he discarded, which he held, also where he made an advance. Defects and inconsistencies will be discovered, and his must be looked upon as another Old Dispensation out of which the New Dispensation could grow . . . much that resembles the old institutions of Abraham and the other patriarchs will be found in Homer's epics.

Early and simple people are troubled little, if at all, by inconsistencies in their religion, but those things become very serious to subtle and acute minds in later periods; and when Grecian critics culminated in Plato and Socrates, a process was under way which must result in the rejection of much that the earlier gen-

erations had held true and the re-formation of what could be retained in accordance with the thought and spirit of that day. Many centuries had intervened between Homer and the philosophers who were his critics—at least as many as have intervened between the Puritans and their descendants of to-day who have rejected much that the fathers held true. The changes that were occurring between Homer and Plato may be compared also to the changes that occurred in the period between the Early Church and the Reformation, when, finally, a succession of critics, culminating in Luther and Calvin, led many people to give up the veneration of the Saints and re-form doctrines in accordance with the thought of their own century. It would be as great a mistake to hold that there had been no Grecian religion before Plato as to hold that there had been no Christianity before Luther and Calvin. If the Greeks had not turned Christian after Plato, it is safe to say that their religion would have undergone great change. In Plato's day, the foremost were ready to adopt Monotheism.

Homer was the founder of a religion, a religion which was his nation's guide in life for more than a thousand years and which can be gauged by the excellent institutions and the marvellous temples, the Thought and the Art by which Greece is glorious among the nations. His mythology was allegorical and, with the philosophy which developed from it, was, as Saint Clement pointed out, "a schoolmaster to bring the Hellenic mind to Christ".

As he showed them in his epics, the Greeks of Homer's time were a serious and deeply religious people, thought and talked a great deal about their gods, prayed to them often, purified themselves, made restitution, heeded soothsayers, and put their trust in oracles. They believed that the gods punished evil-doers in this world and the next; they regarded pestilence and all other calamities as a punishment sent by the gods because of some sin that had been committed, and they had a more definite conception of Hades and the conditions there after death than the people of Israel had of Sheol at that period . . . think of the ingenious and harrowing sufferings that Odysseus saw the wicked enduring when he descended into Hades? His Hades was the prototype of the Inferno that Vergil, and after him Dante, described; and perhaps it had its prototype and some of its main features from Egypt, where, centuries before Homer lived, it had been believed that the Dead were ferried across to the Lower World

by an old ferryman, named *Turn-Face* or *Look-Behind*, to the Happy Fields if they had lived good lives, but were refused passage if they had been guilty of any of the forty-two crimes that were enumerated in the Book of the Dead. These crimes, for which Osiris tried Egyptians at their Judgment, included the very crimes which Homer's epics showed committed and punished, among them being murder, wronging widows and orphans, impiety, adultery, reviling, violence, and the like. These ideas had been held in Egypt as early as the Fifth Dynasty, 2750—2625 B. C., and such ideas pass easily from land to land and from age to age. In the *Odyssey*, Menelaus tells what he expects his own condition to be in the world of the Dead, and shows how he got this idea in Egypt—he expects to go to the Happy Fields in the West and to be immortal.

Reviewing all of the facts bearing on the date of Homer, Professor Dörpfeld has recently decided that it was about 1200 B. C.; and we know that the ancient world was in religious ferment in that century, deeper insight was being attained, older faiths were being rejected or re-formed, old Nature gods, Love goddesses, and Wargods were being transcended, and new religions, higher intellectually and morally, were being born, whose gods were Wisdom and Righteousness. It was in this century that Moses led the Children of Israel out of Egypt, under Rameses 11, (who died in 1225 B. C.), and gave them the Commandments, the Law of Jehovah, the God of Righteousness; in Persia, about 1200 B. C., Zoroaster, or Zarathushtra, re-formed the religion of his people, rejecting the Devas whom they had worshipped and teaching the worship of One Supreme God, the *Lord Wisdom*, Ahura Mazda, whose Helpers are Virtues and Powers, abstractions personified. Among these are (1) *Holy Law*, Asha, the True and the Just, called also the son of Ahura Mazda; (2) *Piety*, *Devotion*, Aramaiti, called also the daughter of Ahura Mazda; *Good Mind*, Benevolence, and others. In Homer's religion, Themis, the *Law*, was above all, even above Zeus, while Zeus was above gods and men, being the god of the Sky and the Thunder. His two main Helpers were (1) his glorious son, Apollo, who typified Truth, Justice, the Light in Inspiration, and (2) his powerful daughter, Athena, who typified Wisdom. These new religions were very much alike in some of their essentials, and they agreed in elevating Wisdom and Righteousness above Love and War, the gods who had been given the highest veneration

in the East. It is clear that Moses, Zarathushtra, and Homer were introducing a new principle, establishing a new trend for the mind and heart which was to divide the West from the East. In this, Moses and Homer were to be the most influential, for Western culture was to be enriched with study of the Hebrew and the Greek. There have been times and places where other Eastern influences have been strong.

In the East, especially in Babylon, Ninevah, Tyre, and the Tyrian colony of Carthage, the worship of the Goddess of Love, called also The Mother, Ishtar, Ashtaroth Tanuit, Sams, and many other local names, was often licentious, very passionate, uncontrolled, expressed in orgies, in wild shouting, raving, cutting with knives, and mutilations; in strong contrast to this, the religions of Israel and the Greeks were self-restrained. In the light of this difference, the words inscribed on Apollo's most sacred temple bears profound historical significance as well as the religious significance that has always been understood: ALL THINGS IN MODERATION. Moderation, self-restraint, had become a determining article in the Grecian Creed.

The self-restraint of Homer and the early Greeks was, then, Apollonian; and violent and orgiastic practices did not enter Greece until long after Homer, when the worship of new gods, Dionysos and Orpheus, was introduced from the East. And in Athens these were never completely accepted; Orphism was always held in discredit, and Dionysos was never really adopted into the Olympian Circle though he became extremely influential and was worshipped as a god, with dramas presented in his Theatre, which was his temple, and with the Sacred Mysteries conducted at Eleusis. The tragedies of Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides and the comedies of Aristophanes, which were written for his celebration and in his spirit, were presented with Apollonian moderation, or self-restraint, in Athens; and at Eleusis the late story of Cupid and Psyche gives another instance of Apollonian self-restraint united with Dionysian fervor, the introduction of new ideals and enthusiasm and hopes, but accord with the spirit of Homer, for the character of Aphrodite in that story is still cruel and unlovely, and she is shown making trouble for mortals. Enthusiasm, and rapture, were introduced into Greek religion with the worship of Dionysos, approaching in some ways and places the rapture which characterized in the East the worship of the Love Goddess, *whom* Homer had not included for rapturous worship among his

gods—on the contrary he showed the goddess of Love, whom he named Aphrodite, with all of the evils that can attend love and in the strongest contrast to Wisdom, who was the Virgin goddess, Athena. He showed a scene in which Zeus himself admonished Aphrodite to exercise her powers for the home, not to mislead men and ruin them—it is admitted that she is a goddess of great power, of whom men should beware.

Homer's reason for picturing the goddess of Love like this was doubtless political as well as moral and religious, for the Greeks like the Israelites, must have been always in fear of military invasion from the East, with defeat of the gods of their fathers, along with loss of their personal freedom and possessions. On the gods of their fathers would depend their freedom and possessions, and they knew, better than we know from ancient monuments, what would be the fate of the peoples whose gods were conquered by the East. Were Ashtaroth and Baal, the gods of Love and War in the East, to displace Jehovah, the God of Righteousness of the Patriarchs, reducing the children of Israel to slaves? Were Aphrodite and Ares, also the gods of Love and War, to supplant in Greece as they had in Troy, the gods of the Grecian fathers, Athena, Apollo, and Zeus? Homer showed these two groups of gods at war, in which Aphrodite and Ares were defeated, fortunately, both in the war as a whole and in all separate encounters and combats. He showed this so very effectively that in all of Grecian history there was never a temple to Ares built on Grecian soil, and no temple to Aphrodite was built by the Greeks themselves, though there were temples in Greece to the Eastern Love Goddess built by and for Eastern people residing there. Until danger of attack by the East was past, and until the East had been conquered by Greeks, it would be impossible that Eastern influence should become strong in Greece; and when such an influence entered the West later, by infiltration or by deliberate adoption, it was not likely that the Eastern Goddess would be adopted and honored among the elect in Greece, but that they would continue to worship their Homeric gods with the old Apollonian moderation.

The difference in religious spirit and practices between the East and the West is well illustrated in the incident when the worship of the Eastern Love Goddess, the Mother, was introduced into Rome, directly and formally, and by decree of the Senate. Roman fathers had worshipped the gods of their nation,

their fields, and their home in sober and self-restrained way, but a dark day came in the Punic Wars when Italy was invaded by Hannibal and these gods did not avail to drive the Carthaginians out. The powerful patron of Carthage was Tanuit, the Eastern goddess, brought from Tyre, and now the Sibyl prophesied to the Romans in their hour of doubt that if they would bring the Eastern Goddess to Rome they would be able to expel the Carthaginians from the peninsula, apparently on the theory of fighting fire with fire, and of dividing the support of the enemy, to rule. A deputation was sent to Pergamum, where the Romans had allies, and the Sacred Stone representing the Goddess was brought to Rome, with priests to conduct her services. When Hannibal departed from Italy, the Eastern Goddess was given the credit of the Victory and the prophecy of the Sibyl was understood to have been fulfilled, so the worship of the Eastern Goddess had to be retained, although it was entirely unlike anything that had been previously known at Rome and was very offensive to the Roman people. Citizens were greatly shocked when first they saw it, and no Roman was permitted to become a priest in that cult so long as the Republic endured. Phrygian priests had to be brought in to conduct the services, and they were forbidden to hold their processions in public because the wild singing, wild dancing, and bloody rites were not approved.

But with the coming of the Empire the spirit of Rome was changed, and the Goddess of Love was given worship under many names, the process being hastened and conditioned by the subjugation of the East. While Roman armies were conquering Eastern provinces, the Eastern spirit and religion conquered Rome. As a pre-requisite to his Eastern conquests, Alexander had felt that he must prove himself descended from a god because Eastern rulers had claimed to be descended from gods, or to be gods incarnate; and now the Caesars traced their descent from the Eastern goddess, when Romans gave the Roman name of Venus, meaning *Love*. Octavius Caesar assumed divinity in his own person and assumed as an appropriate name for this new assumption Augustus, which means *receiving offerings in honor*, like a god. Finally, to glorify the Love Goddess and to invent a beginning and a background for Roman history which would support his claims, the poet Vergil wrote his *Aeneid* for Augustus, imitating Homer's style and treating the Trojan War as his subject, but giving the honors all to Venus and the Trojans. By

imperialist Romans, the Love Goddess was rendered such honor as she had not received from Israel or the Grecian peoples for more than a thousand years, and in the welter of nations that Rome became it seemed that the Western ideals must go down in spite of the long struggle that Israel and Greece had made.

But at the very moment when degenerate, imperial Rome was descending into paganism of this low type as a growing minority was forming throughout the Roman Empire, who would not bow the knee to Venus, Aphrodite, Ashtaroth, Istar, Isis, Tanuit, Sams, the Mother or whatever the Love Goddess might be named, but who turned in devotion to a new Queen of Heaven, both a Virgin and a Mother, Mary whose Son was born King in a Kingdom not of this world. The Greeks had worshipped Athena as "the Virgin", "the Parthenon", the very opposite in character of the Love Goddess of Homer and the East; but Mary was honored for ideals that Athena did not possess. While Mary was the Virgin, she was the Mother as well, who satisfied the heart more than the Eastern Mother had done. Saluted by angels and sought with offerings by Magi, she lived among lowly people and was a mother of earth. The human griefs that made her the Mother of Sorrows endeared her the more to men, and they turned to her for consolation under a hundred names, while they turned to her Son as a Saviour who satisfied their needs. Within corrupted imperial Rome, the City of God thus began to take form, as Saint Augustine called it writing for the Christian of his day; and his Christian criticism, more destructive than that of Plato, resulted finally in sweeping the Roman gods away.