

## PROPHECY AND INSPIRATION.

BY JAMES B. SMILEY.

PRIMITIVE men believed that vast numbers of spirits teemed in the air, and these spirits were "supposed able either to exist and act flitting free about the world, or to become incorporated for more or less time in solid bodies."<sup>1</sup> These spirits were believed to enter men, and cause all the diseases to which they were subject. "Disease being accounted for by attack of spirits, it necessarily follows that to get rid of these spirits is the proper means of cure."<sup>2</sup> This gave rise to the world-wide practice of exorcism to drive out these intruders. Exorcism was common in ancient times, as it is among the undeveloped races of the present day.

Thus we are told that in ancient Babylonia disease was "supposed to be due to the direct presence in the body, or to the hidden influence, of some pernicious spirit. The cure was by the exorcism of the troublesome spirit."<sup>3</sup> Similarly in ancient Egypt diseases were believed to be "caused by demons who had entered into the sick. Under these circumstances medicines might be used to cause the disappearance of the symptoms, but the *cure* was the expulsion of the demons" (spirits).<sup>4</sup> A similar belief was entertained by the savages of Africa,<sup>5</sup> by the New Zealanders,<sup>6</sup> and it has been world-wide. The following is a good example of the way in which phenomena were interpreted. "On Corisco Island, in 1863, a certain man had acquired prominence as a magic doctor; he finally died of consumption. . . . A post-mortem being made, cavities were found in the lungs. Ignorant of disease, they thereupon dropped the in-

<sup>1</sup> Tylor, *Primitive Culture*, II, 123. Holt ed. 1889.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 125.

<sup>3</sup> Jastrow, *Religion of Babylonia and Assyria*, p. 246.

<sup>4</sup> Wiedemann, *Religion of the Ancient Egyptians*, p. 271.

<sup>5</sup> Ellis, *Tshi-speaking People*, p. 14.

<sup>6</sup> Rev. R. Taylor, *New Zealand and Its Inhabitants*, p. 170.

vestigation, saying that his own 'witch' had 'eaten' him,"<sup>7</sup> i. e., his lungs had been "eaten" by an intruding spirit.

Naturally the unusual and almost super-human strength often displayed by the insane would be ascribed to a spirit's power. Thus we are told that in savage Africa "the insane being supposed to be physically and mentally possessed by an intruding spirit, their actions are necessarily not considered to be the outcome of their own volitions.... In some regions a tribe holds the following reasoning: This person is possessed by a spirit. That spirit is occupying his body and using his voice and limbs for some reason."<sup>8</sup> And this was the general primitive belief.

Our words catalepsy (Greek *katalepsis*, from *kata*, down or into, and *lambanō*, future *lēpsō*, I seize) and epilepsy (from *epi*, upon, and *lēpsō*, I seize) are derived from a Greek word meaning to seize. i. e., it was the ancient belief that the victim was "seized" by an entering spirit, which was the cause of the disease and the peculiar symptoms. The pale and emaciated appearance of invalids was in ancient times attributed to the action of intruding spirits or demons that were sucking the blood of the victim, much as the legendary vampires, which were mythical blood-sucking ghosts, were believed to do. In Rome, epileptics were sometimes carried into the arena to suck the wounds of dying gladiators. Pliny says that in his time the lips of epileptics were smeared with human blood as a prophylactic. The reason for this was probably similar to that which led the inhabitants of Peru to sprinkle llama's blood "on the doorway and internal walls" of the houses "to keep out the evil spirit,"<sup>9</sup> and the natives of Dahomey, in Africa, to strike blood on "the lintel and two side posts of all the houses,"<sup>10</sup> and the ancient Hebrews to smear blood "on the two side posts, and on the upper door-post of the houses" (Exodus xii. 7—the passover) so that the approaching spirit, seeing the blood, might be prevented from entering.

An Algonquin song asked "Who makes this river flow?" and it answered "The spirit, he makes the river flow,"<sup>11</sup> i. e., the spirit that dwelt in the river. There has been a world-wide belief that spirits

<sup>7</sup> Nassau, *Fetichism in West Africa*, p. 87.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 271, 272. See also Declé, *Three Years in Savage Africa*, p. 154; Tylor, *Primitive Culture*, II, 128; Spencer, *Sociology*, I, 227, 232, 248, etc.

<sup>9</sup> Payne, *History of America*, I, 436, 437.

<sup>10</sup> Forbes, *Dahomey and the Dahomans*, I, p. 172. See also Nassau, *Fetichism in West Africa*, pp. 93, 219, for other instances.

<sup>11</sup> Tylor, *Primitive Culture*, II, 210.

dwelt in trees, springs, wells, lakes, rivers, etc.<sup>12</sup> The rippling of the leaves of trees, the bubbling of wells and springs and the dashing of the torrents in brooks and rivers were attributed to the action of these indwelling spirits.<sup>13</sup> These spirit inhabited wells, rivers, etc., have been regarded as sacred, and it was a common ancient belief that diseases could be cured by bathing in these sacred waters.<sup>14</sup> The healing power of rivers has in some places been attributed to the power of the "spirits who dwell in running water. . . .to counteract the seizure of the patient's body by those malevolent spirits who cause disease."<sup>15</sup> Sacred wells and springs have been common in Europe,<sup>16</sup> and other parts of the world.<sup>17</sup> Thus we are told that "sacred wells in connection with sanctuaries are found in all parts of the Semitic area. . . .Healing springs and sacred springs are everywhere identified. . . .and the Arabs still regard medicinal waters as inhabited by *jinn*" (spirits).<sup>18</sup> When the water in the pool at Bethesda, mentioned in the New Testament, was "troubled" (bubbled) it was believed that an angel (spirit) had entered it, and thus manifested his presence. The first person who then stepped into the pool was "made whole of whatsoever disease he had" (John v. 2-4). Possibly it was the Hebrew belief that the spirit that entered the pool and manifested his presence by troubling the water, would drive away from the first person afterward entering it the spirit that caused his disease. The faith in the healing power of this spirit-possessed pool seems to be merely a Hebrew example of a wide-spread belief.

In ancient Mexico drunkenness, "like other pathologic states, was considered. . . .to be merely possession by a god or spirit,"<sup>19</sup> and this belief has been world-wide. Our word "spirits," which is

<sup>12</sup> For a large number of instances of river spirits see *Prim. Cult.*, II, 209-214.

<sup>13</sup> Payne, *History of America*, I, 497.

<sup>14</sup> Haddon, *The Study of Man*, p. 298. Payne, *Hist. of Amer.*, p. 492. In pre-Aryan times almost every river in India had its inhabiting spirit and was worshiped. This appears to be the origin of the belief in the sacredness of the Ganges, which is of great antiquity, and the reader will recall the desire of the modern Hindu to bathe in this sacred stream, which is a modern survival of a very ancient belief. (See *Prim. Cult.*, II, 211, 212.)

<sup>15</sup> Payne, *Hist. of Amer.*, pp. 494, 492.

<sup>16</sup> For sacred wells in Europe see R. C. Hope, *Legendary Lore of the Holy Wells of England*; Gomme, *Ethnology in Folk-Lore*; Haddon, *The Study of Man*, 295, 298, 304, etc.

<sup>17</sup> For Japan see Ashton, *Shinto*, p. 43. For Peru, see Payne, *Hist. of Amer.*, I, 494. See also Tylor, *Prim. Cult.*, II, 213, 214.

<sup>18</sup> Smith, *Religion of the Semites*, 152, 153.

<sup>19</sup> Payne, *History of America*, I, 478.

applied to intoxicating beverages, originated in the belief entertained by our ancestors, that when liquor was imbibed a "spirit" entered the drinker and caused the intoxication, and his strange actions and utterances.

Many plants and drugs which produced abnormal mental states have been regarded as divine. In India the soma plant produced an intoxicating beverage. "The exhilarating effects of the beverage were attributed to inspiration by a supernatural being who was therefore lauded and adored. . . . 'The Rishis had come to regard Soma as a god, and apparently to be passionately devoted to his worship.'"<sup>20</sup> The soma plant, in which the spirit (god) was believed to dwell, was regarded as a divine plant. The mescal plant yielded buds which, when eaten, produced mental excitement. The visions resulting were believed to be divine revelations and the plant was revered as divine, because inhabited by a spirit.<sup>21</sup> In ancient Peru tobacco was called "the sacred herb on account of the nervous stimulation it afforded."<sup>22</sup> The cocoa plant was also regarded "with feelings of superstitious veneration,"<sup>23</sup> and the same is true of opium.<sup>24</sup> The spirits that dwelt in the plants might at times enter men, and cause visions and intoxication.

Growing out of the belief that spirits thus entered and took possession of men, there would naturally arise the belief that at times these spirits could speak through them. Such men were believed to be inspired, and to have the gift of prophecy. Their words were not their own, they were the words of the indwelling spirit or god. Men who were thus inspired were regarded with superstitious reverence by the people, and spirit possession was often desired, and artificial means were frequently resorted to for this purpose, such as fasting, drinking blood, inhaling smoke, taking drugs of various kinds, etc. "According to Gassandi, a shepherd of Provence produced visions and prophecy through the use of deadly nightshade. The Egyptians prepare an intoxicating substance from hemp, called oosis. They roll it into balls of the size of a chestnut. After having swallowed a few they experience ecstatic visions. Johann Wier mentions a plant in the Lebanon (Theangelides) which, if eaten, causes persons to prophesy."<sup>25</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Spencer, *Sociology*, I, 348, Appleton ed., 1887.

<sup>21</sup> *Pop. Science Monthly*, May, 1892, art. "Mescal."

<sup>22</sup> Spencer, *Sociology*, I, 350.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 345.

<sup>25</sup> Ennemoser, *History of Magic*, trans. by William Howitt, I, 81.

The following examples, selected from many, are given to show how common and wide-spread this belief in inspiration and prophecy has been in the world. Miss Kingsley thus describes what she saw in West Africa. "After a time the fetish-man is wrought up into a state of fury. He shakes violently and foams at the mouth; this is to indicate that the fetish (spirit) was come home and that he himself is no longer the speaker, but the fetish who uses his mouth and speaks through him." Then people who have requests to make say that "knowing he is a great fetish they have come to ask his aid, and beg him to teach them what they should do. He then speaks kindly to them, expresses his hope that he shall be able to help them, and says, 'I go see.' It is imagined that the fetish then quits the priest and after a silence of a few minutes he is supposed to return and give his responses to the inquiries."<sup>26</sup> Mr. Ellis thus describes the process of prophecy in Dahomey, in Africa. "In regard to possession the priests seem fully aware of the fact that an empty stomach is productive of hallucinations and mental aberrations; hence persons who wish to consult the gods are enjoined to fast, while drugs are sometimes administered as well. The honest priest, in a condition of morbid mental exaltation produced by these means, fully believes, I think, that he is inspired by a god, when, wound up to a pitch of religious enthusiasm, he makes those utterances which are regarded by the bystanders as the words of the god."<sup>27</sup>

"Mr. Backhouse describes a Tasmanian native sorcerer, 'affected with spasmodic contractions of the muscles of one breast, which he attributes, as they do all diseases, to the devil'; this malady served to prove his inspiration to his people. . . . The Patagonian wizard begins his performance with drumming and rattling till the real or pretended epileptic fit comes on by the demon entering him, who then answers questions from within him in a faint and mournful voice. Among the wild Veddas of Ceylon the 'devil-dancers' have to work themselves into paroxysms, to gain the inspiration whereby they profess to cure their patients. . . . In the Pacific Islands spirits of the dead would enter for a time the body of a living man, inspiring him to declare future events, or to execute some commission from the higher deities. . . . The Fijian priest sits looking steadfastly at a whale's-tooth ornament, amid dead silence. In a few minutes he trembles, slight twitchings of the face and limbs come on, which increase to strong convulsions, with swelling of the veins, murmurs and sobs. Now the god has entered him, and with eyes protruding.

<sup>26</sup> Kingsley, *West African Studies*, p. 172.

<sup>27</sup> Ellis, *Ewe-speaking People*, pp. 150, 151.

unnatural voice, pale face and livid lips, sweat streaming from every pore, and every aspect of a furious madman, he gives the divine answer, and then, the symptoms subsiding, he looks around with a vacant stare, and the deity returns to the land of spirits."<sup>28</sup>

Sometimes by drinking blood a spirit was believed to enter the prophet, as in the following instances. "In Southern India a devil-dancer 'drinks the blood of the sacrifice, putting the throat of the decapitated goat to his mouth. Then, as if he had acquired new life, he begins to brandish his staff of bells, and to dance with a quick but unsteady step. Suddenly the afflatus descends. There is no mistaking that glare or those frantic leaps. He snorts, he stares, he gyrates. The demon has now taken bodily possession of him; and though he retains the power of utterance and motion, both are under the demon's control, and his separate consciousness is in abeyance....He is now worshiped as a present deity, and every bystander consults him respecting his diseases, his wants, the welfare of his absent relatives, the offerings to be made for the accomplishment of his wishes, and, in short, respecting everything for which superhuman knowledge is supposed to be available.' At a festival of the Afoors of Minahassa, in Northern Celebes, after a pig has been killed the priest rushes furiously at it, thrusts his head into the carcass, and drinks the blood. Then he is dragged away from it by force and set upon a chair, whereupon he begins to prophesy how the rice crop will turn out that year....It is thought there is a spirit in him which possesses the power of prophecy."<sup>29</sup>

From India we get the following account. "In the wide range of human history, it is difficult to find an example of a primitive horde or nation, which has not had its inspired prophet or deified ancestor. The man-god whom the Kanjars worship is Máná.... The worshipers collect near a tree, under which they sacrifice a pig or goat, or sheep, or fowl, and make an offering of roasted flesh and spirituous liquor....At the close of the ceremony there is a general feast, in which most of the banqueters get drunk. On these occasions—but before the drunken stage has been reached—a man sometimes comes forward, and declares himself to be especially filled with the divine presence. He abstains from the flesh and wine of which others partake, and remains standing before a tree with his eyes closed as in a trance. If he is seized with a fit of trembling the spirit of Máná is thought to have possessed him, and while the in-

<sup>28</sup> Tylor, *Primitive Culture*, II, 131, 133, 134.

<sup>29</sup> Frazer, *Golden Bough*, I, 134.



spiration lasts he is consulted as an oracle by any man or woman of the assembly who desires to be helped out of a difficulty."<sup>20</sup>

In the Hindoo Koosh a fire is kindled with twigs of the sacred cedar, "and the Dainyal or sibil, with a cloth over her head, inhales the thick pungent smoke till she is seized with convulsions and falls senseless to the ground. Soon she rises and raises a shrill chant, which is caught up and loudly repeated by the audience.... The Bacchantes ate ivy and their inspired fury was by some believed to be due to the exciting and intoxicating properties of the plant."<sup>21</sup> Among the Fijians a dish of scented oil is placed before the priest with which he anoints himself. "In a few minutes he trembles; slight distortions are seen in his face and twitching movements in his limbs. These increase to violent muscular action which spreads until the whole frame is strongly convulsed, and the man shivers as with an ague fit.... The priest is now possessed by his god, and all his words and actions are considered no longer his own, but those of the deity who has entered into him."<sup>22</sup>

It was early perceived that fasting had a tendency to produce vivid dreams or visions, and these were generally regarded as caused by spirits, and as giving glimpses into futurity, and also into the spiritual world. This was one cause of the world-wide observance of fasting as a religious exercise. All visions resulting from the use of drugs like mescal and opium were similarly regarded and explained. To illustrate the way in which fasting was viewed we are told that among some "American tribes the 'jossakeed' or soothsayer prepares himself by fasting and the use of the sweating-bath for the state of convulsive ecstasy in which he utters the dictates of his familiar spirits.".... Among the Abipones "those who aspire to the office of juggler are said to sit upon an aged willow, overhanging some lake, and to abstain from food for several days, till they begin to see into futurity.... The Zulu doctor qualifies himself for intercourse with the *amadhlozi* or ghosts, from whom he is to obtain directions in his craft, by spare abstemious diet, want, suffering, castigation, and solitary wandering, till fainting fits or coma bring him into direct intercourse with the spirits. These native divines fast often, and are worn out by fastings, sometimes of several days duration, when they become partially or wholly ecstatic, and see visions. So thoroughly is the connection between fasting and spiritual intercourse acknowledged by the Zulus, that it has become a

<sup>20</sup> Nesfield, *An Account of the Kanjars of Upper India*, pp. 12, 13.

<sup>21</sup> Frazer, *Golden Bough*, I, 135.

<sup>22</sup> Williams, *Fiji and the Fijians*, I, 224.

saying among them, 'The continually stuffed body cannot see secret things.' They have no faith in a fat prophet."<sup>33</sup>

I have already stated that in antiquity intoxication was regarded as caused by a spirit which entered the body. Thus, of the Greek Dionysus, Euripides says: "And this deity is a prophet. For Bacchic excitement and raving [intoxication] have in them much prophetic power. For when this god enters in force into the body he causes those who rave to foretell the future."<sup>34</sup>

At Delphi, in ancient Greece, there was a famous oracle which was consulted by the Greeks for hundreds of years. It seems to have owed its origin to the fact that here, from a cleft in a rock, an intoxicating vapor arose, and those inhaling it were believed to be possessed by a spirit (god) and so were inspired and could prophesy. The method of consulting this oracle has been thus described. "The Pythia had prepared herself by bathing and a three days' fast. She burned barley meal on the altar at the stone of Apollo, drank from the spring of Cassolis. . . . took laurel leaves in her mouth, and arrayed in a long garment and with gold ornaments in her hair ascended the tripod, beside which the prophet took his place. The ascending vapors gradually brought the Pythia into a state of ecstasy. Foaming at the mouth and with convulsive movements, she gave utterance to some incomprehensible tones which the prophet caught, and having connected them into a sentence announced it to the inquirer."<sup>35</sup> Here the disconnected utterances of the Pythia into whom the spirit had entered, were caught by a priest and construed into a sentence, which was interpreted as the utterance of a god.

Spirits were also believed to enter trees and other objects as well as men. Thus in Dodona in Greece, there was a tree inhabited by Zeus who manifested his will by rustling the leaves. This was a very old oracle, and Hesiod said, "There at the outlying limit, Dodona is founded, which Zeus loved and decreed for his oracle to be loved of men." This tree was an oak, and Plato said that the sayings of the oak were the most ancient prophetic utterances. "Priestesses of the temple led inquirers to the oak, and when it rustled said to them, 'Zeus speaks thus.' . . . The priestesses fed the god with offerings of food."<sup>36</sup>

<sup>33</sup> Tylor, *Prim. Cult.*, II, 413, 414.

<sup>34</sup> Quoted in Spencer, *Sociology*, I, 350.

<sup>35</sup> Duncker, *History of Greece*, II, 234.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, I, pp. 27, 169, 170. For spirits rustling leaves see also Letourneau, *Sociology*, 284; Payne, *History of America*, I, 497. For spirits inhabiting trees see Tylor, *Prim. Cult.*, II, 217-221.



Similarly we are told that in West Africa "spirits are believed to inhabit large rocks, caves, hollow trees, etc.... A deep cavern, with an echo, is always fixed upon as a favorite residence for these spirits, and oracular answers are given on all subjects, provided a suitable offering is presented at the same time."<sup>37</sup> So also in America the savage inhabitants consulted the spirits for advice in "hunting and fishing expeditions. The Esquimaux still consult spirits for this purpose, and their wizards are as familiar with the art of giving ambiguous replies to their anxious clients as were the well-informed keepers of the oracles of Greece. . . . The principal gods of aboriginal America universally performed the function of oracles, exactly as did the gods of the Old World previously to the rise of philosophy."<sup>38</sup>

I have already stated that dreams were believed to be caused by spirits, and regarding these spirits Tylor says that "man's most distinct and direct intercourse is had where they become actually present to his senses in dreams and visions. The belief that such phantoms are real and personal spirits, suggested and maintained as it is by the direct evidence of the senses [in dreams] of sight, touch and hearing, is naturally an opinion usual in savage philosophy, and indeed elsewhere, long and obstinately resisting the attacks of the later scientific doctrine."<sup>39</sup> "The North American Indians allowed themselves the alternative of supposing a dream to be either a visit from the soul of the person or object dreamt of, or a sight seen by the rational soul, gone out for an excursion while the sensitive soul remained in the body."<sup>40</sup> It is also said that "an Indian who wants anything will fast till he has a dream that his manitu [god] will grant it to him. While men are hunting, the children are sometimes made to fast, that in their dreams they may obtain omens of the chase. Hunters fasting before an expedition are informed in dreams of the haunts of the game."<sup>41</sup>

In many oracles the gods were believed to speak to men in dreams. "We can trace occasional survivals of the most primitive form of the hero-oracle. The person who seeks advice goes to sleep over the actual grave, and the dead man appears in a dream."<sup>42</sup> In such cases the spirit was believed to reside in the dead body in the grave, and it came forth and appeared to the suppliant for ad-

<sup>37</sup> Wilson, *West Africa*, p. 218.

<sup>38</sup> Payne, *History of America*, I, 442.

<sup>39</sup> Tylor, *Primitive Culture*, II, 188.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 442.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 411. See also Spencer, *Sociology*, I, 133-139.

<sup>42</sup> *Encycl. Brit.*, article "Oracle."

vice, in his dreams. At Oropus, in Attica, in ancient Greece, there was an oracle. "Those who consulted it, fasted a whole day, abstained from wine, sacrificed a ram to Amphiaraus, and slept on the skin in the temple, where their destiny was revealed by dreams."<sup>43</sup> The scores of oracles found in various parts of the world appear to have all had their origin in the ancient belief that spirits (gods) entered these places, and from them would reveal the future, and give counsel and advice to men.

In ancient Egypt prophecies of a general kind took place during the religious procession of the god Apis. "Then the youths who accompanied him sang hymns in his honor.... Suddenly the spirit took possession of the youths and they prophesied."<sup>44</sup>

In common with the other nations of antiquity the Hebrews believed that all diseases were caused by spirits, and for centuries they believed in spirit possession, the "Talmud and other Rabbinical writings being full of allusions"<sup>45</sup> to it. As late as the time of Christ it is several times referred to in the New Testament. Thus in Acts reference is made to a "damsel possessed with a spirit of divination.... which brought her masters much gain by soothsaying." Paul "said to the spirit, I command thee in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her. And he came out the same hour." (Acts xvi. 16, 18). Here a spirit had entered the girl, and spoke through her, and it is evidently the same belief that we have found in other parts of the world.

The Hebrew word *nābî*, translated "prophet" in the Old Testament, "is neither part of the old Semitic vocabulary.... nor has it any etymology in Hebrew, the cognate words 'to prophesy' and the like being derived from the noun in its original sense. But we know that there were *nabîm* among the Canaanites; the 'prophets' of Baal appear in the history of Elijah as men who sought to attract their god by wild orgiastic rites.... The new Hebrew enthusiasts had at least an external resemblance to the devotees of the Canaanite sanctuaries, and this would be enough to determine the choice of a name which in the first instance seems hardly to have been a name of honor."<sup>46</sup> The exact interpretation of the word *nābî* is none too clear, but it seems to have been connected with the idea of ecstasy or exhilaration, and in some cases with the idea of madness. Thus it is said that "an evil spirit from God came mightily upon Saul and

<sup>43</sup> *Chambers' Encycl.*, article "Oracle," Lippincott ed., 1886.

<sup>44</sup> Wiedemann, *Religion of the Ancient Egyptians*, p. 189.

<sup>45</sup> *Supernatural Religion*, pp. 66, 67, Watts ed., 1902.

<sup>46</sup> *Encycl. Brit.*, article "Prophecy," p. 811.

he prophesied<sup>47</sup> [raved] in the midst of the house." (Sam. xviii. 10). Again it is said that "the spirit of God" came upon Saul, "and he also stripped off his clothes, and he also prophesied [raved] before Samuel, and lay down naked all that day and all that night. Wherefore they say, Is Saul also among the prophets?" (1 Sam. xix. 24). Here are some of the well-known phenomena found in other parts of the world—raving, attributed to possession by a spirit, and prophecy. The prophet that spoke to Jehu was called a "mad fellow" (2 Kings ix. 11). Jeremiah speaks of "every man that is mad, and maketh himself a prophet" (Jer. xxix. 26), and Isaiah says it is the Lord who "maketh diviners mad" (Isaiah xlv. 25). Dean Stanley says that the real meaning of the Hebrew word *nābî* is "to give forth exciting utterances, as appears from its occasional use in the sense of raving."<sup>48</sup>

In order to induce the desired state of prophetic exaltation music was sometimes employed (2 Kings iii. 15; 1 Sam. x. 15). Speaking in the time of Saul it is said, "he that is now called a Prophet was before time called a Seer" (1 Sam. ix. 9). A seer was one who was subject to visions and could foresee or divine the future. At times messages appear to have been received by dreams. Thus Jeremiah says, "The prophet that has a dream, let him tell a dream." (Jer. xxiii. 28. See also 1 Sam. xxviii. 6; Zech. x. 2; Jer. xxvii. 9.)

Large numbers of prophets arose, and after the time of Samuel many of them gathered together in groups, which have sometimes been termed "schools of the prophets." The people fully believed they could foresee and foretell future events, and no doubt many agreed with Amos who said, "Surely the Lord will do nothing, but he revealeth his secret unto his servants the prophets" (Amos iii. 7). They were frequently consulted and their advice sought. But at times different prophets gave exactly contrary predictions about the same future event, as in the case of Ahab, who was told by many of the prophets that he would be victorious if he went into battle, while Micaiah said he would be defeated. (1 Kings xxii. 6-28. See also Jer. xxvii. 12-14.) Repeated prophetic failures would naturally cause perplexity, and to guide the people the following advice was given to them: "And if thou say in thine heart, How shall we know the word which the Lord hath not spoken? When a prophet speaketh in the name of the Lord, if the thing follow not, nor come to pass, that is the thing which the Lord hath not spoken, but the

<sup>47</sup> Revised Version of the Bible says "raved" in the margin.

<sup>48</sup> Stanley, *History of the Jewish Church*, I, 367.

prophet hath spoken it presumptuously." (Deut. xvii. 21, 22.) That is to say, if the prophecy came true he was a true prophet, but if it failed he had "spoken it presumptuously." The common belief that the prophets had a supernatural power of peering into the future, so that they could foresee and correctly foretell future events, does not appear to be in accordance with the facts, but it is part of a world-wide belief.

In studying the work of the Hebrew prophets undue attention seems to have been paid in the past to certain questionable predictions of future events. After the time of Amos (B. C. 810-785) a number of remarkable prophets appeared whose really great work for the world consisted in helping to develop a conception of a moral God, who demanded moral conduct of men, instead of ceremonial observances. Thus Isaiah said, "To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? saith the Lord: I am full of the burnt offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts; and I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he-goats. . . . Bring no more vain oblations: incense is an abomination unto me. . . . Put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil; learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow" (Isaiah i. 11-18).<sup>49</sup>

The beneficial influence of such teaching has been incalculable, and it was clearly the most important work they did. "Although the prophets were far from originating a new conception of God, they none the less were the founders of what has been called 'ethical monotheism.'"<sup>50</sup> Also, echoing down through the centuries has come the optimistic voice of their prophetic hopes that at some time in the future every man should sit under his own vine and fig-tree, and nation should no longer make war against nation (Micah iv. 3, 4). The optimistic hope of the great Hebrew prophets that a brilliant future awaits the human race has been a wonderful help and stimulus to millions of men.

The belief that spirits (gods) took possession of men and spoke through them, so that they were inspired and could predict future events, arose in the world centuries before the art of writing was invented. But after this art was developed the belief would naturally be extended so that the indwelling spirit could dictate the written, as well as the spoken, word. Thus certain writings would be regarded as inspired, and as the utterances of a god.

<sup>49</sup> See also Micah vi. 6-8; Amos v. 8-15. Many similar passages will occur to the reader.

<sup>50</sup> *Encycl. Brit.*, article "Israel."

The Egyptian "Book of the Dead" was "according to Egyptian notions essentially an inspired book."<sup>51</sup> Kobo who founded a system in Japan in the early part of the ninth century, went to the temple of Ise, the most holy place of Shinto, and followed out the "ordinary Shinto plan for securing god-possession and obtaining revelation; that is, by starving both the stomach and the brain. After a week's waiting he obtained the visitation. The food-possessing goddess... manifested herself to him and delivered the revelation on which his system is founded."<sup>52</sup>

It is said that to the Nichiren sect of Japan "the very book itself is inspired, for the Nichirenites are extreme believers in verbal inspiration, and pay divine honors to each jot and tittle of the sutra, which to them is a god."<sup>53</sup> Here we find profound belief in a *book* which is regarded as *verbally inspired* and sacred. So also Zend-do, the famous Chinese founder of a Chinese sect, "when writing his commentary, prayed for a wonderful exhibition of supernatural power. Thereupon a being arrayed as a priest of dignified presence gave him instructions on the division of the text in his first volume. Hence Zend-do treats his own work as if it was the work of Buddha, and says that no one is allowed either to add to or take away even a word or sentence of the book."<sup>54</sup>

Mohammed, who lived 570 to 632 A. D., seems to have been subject to attacks resembling epilepsy, which the Arabs, like other people in antiquity, believed to be due to a possessing spirit. He was also subject to visions and dreams, and he was regarded as an inspired prophet. Ayishah, one of his wives, said, "The first revelations which the Prophet received were in true dreams... Haris ibn Hishan asked the Prophet, 'How did the revelations come to you?' and the Prophet said, 'Sometimes like the noise of a bell, and sometimes the angel would come and converse with me in the shape of a man.'<sup>55</sup> "It is certain that he had a tendency to see visions, and suffered from fits which threw him into a swoon, without loss of inner consciousness."<sup>56</sup>

The Koran was dictated by Mohammed to a scribe in fragmentary passages, during a period of twenty-three years, and without any attempt at connected order. After his death these frag-

<sup>51</sup> Bunsen, *Egypt's Place*, V, 132.

<sup>52</sup> Griffin, *Religion of Japan*, p. 201.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 274.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 267.

<sup>55</sup> T. P. Hughes, *Dictionary of Islam*, article "Qur'an" (Koran).

<sup>56</sup> *Encycl. Britan.*, article "Mohammed."

ments were gathered together and subjected to two or three redactions before they assumed their final form. It is said that some passages were dictated to the scribe "immediately after one of those epileptic fits which not only his followers, but (for a time at least) he himself also, regarded as tokens of intercourse with the higher powers."<sup>57</sup> Sometimes his revelations came from inspirations "in the Prophet's breast," and sometimes from God himself, "veiled and unveiled, in waking and in the dreams of night."<sup>58</sup>

The adherents of Islam regard the Koran, which was thus dictated by Mohammed, with the highest reverence. The book has been carried wherever Islam has extended. We are told that "the claim to divine inspiration is made in every chapter and every line of it; God himself is the speaker." The book was "exalted in later stages to the highest conceivable honors; and one of the greatest controversies of Islam raged round the question whether it had existed from eternity and was uncreated."<sup>59</sup>

There has been much discussion as to whether Zoroaster (which is the Greek form of the Iranian word Zarathushtra) is a real historical character or purely mythical. After discussing this question the *Encyclopædia Britannica* says, "It becomes impossible to answer otherwise than affirmatively every question as to the historical character of Zoroaster."<sup>60</sup> The exact date and place in which he lived is uncertain, although it was probably in eastern Iran (Persia) and at some time prior to B. C. 1000. The sacred book of his followers is commonly called the Zend-Avesta. It consisted "of twenty-one books, called Nasks, each containing Avesta and Zend, i. e., an original text (the Avesta) and a commentary on it (the Zend). The number 21 was evidently an artificial arrangement, in order to have one Nask for each of the 21 words of the most sacred formula of the Zoroastrians. . . . From the contents of the Nasks. . . we clearly see that they must represent the whole religious and scientific literature current throughout the ancient Persian Empire; for they treated not only of religious topics, but of medicine, astronomy, agriculture, botany, philosophy, etc. . . . This extensive literature. . . in all probability was already complete in B. C. 400. . . . At least this much seems to be certain, that at least a thousand years must have elapsed before a sacred literature so varied and extensive could have grown

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, article "Koran."

<sup>58</sup> *Chambers' Encycl.*, article "Koran."

<sup>59</sup> Menzies, *History of Religion*, 236, 237.

<sup>60</sup> *Encycl. Brit.*, article "Zoroaster."



up out of the seeds sown by the great founder of the Parsi creed, Spitama Zarathushtra."<sup>61</sup>

"The meaning of the supposed Zoroastrian authorship of the whole Zend-Avesta is that the scripture is the joint work of the high-priests of the ancient Persian Empire, and other priests nearest to them in rank, compiled in the course of centuries."<sup>62</sup> The original texts are believed to have been long transmitted orally. "As long as the language of the hymns or prayers repeated was a living one and perfectly intelligible, there was no need of committing them to writing; but as soon as it had become dead, the aid of writing was required in order to guard the sacred prayers against corruption and mutilation. This was, in all probability, the case a thousand years before the beginning of our era."<sup>63</sup>

The above are the conclusions of modern scholarship, but we are told that the authorship of these books was "ascribed by the ancient Greeks and Romans, and is so by the present Parsis, to Zoroaster himself." Parsi tradition asserted "that all the twenty-one Nasks were written by God Himself, and given to Zoroaster, as his prophet, to forward them to mankind. . . . The prophet was believed to have held conversation with God Himself, questioning the Supreme Being about all matters of importance, and receiving always the right answers to his questions. The prophet accordingly, after having been instructed, communicated these accounts of his conversations with God to his disciples and the public at large."<sup>64</sup> "Zoroaster experienced within himself the inward call to seek the amelioration of mankind and their deliverance from everlasting ruin, and regarded this inward impulse, intensified as it was *by means of dreams and visions*, as being the call addressed to him by God Himself. Like Mohammed after him, he often speaks of his conversations with God."<sup>65</sup>

The Hindu word *veda* is derived from the Sanskrit *vid*, "to know." Hence it literally means "knowledge." It is applied to those "ancient Sanskrit works on which the first period of the religious belief of the Hindus is based." The word is applied to four collections of sacred books, called respectively the Rig-veda, the Yajur-veda, the Sama-veda, and the Atharva-veda. "The oldest of

<sup>61</sup> Haug, *The Sacred Language, Writing and Religion of the Parsis*, pp. 125, 135, 136.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 138.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 137. The reader will recall the Old Testament account of Moses conversing with God.

<sup>65</sup> *Encycl. Brit.*, article "Zoroaster." The italics are mine.

these works—and in all probability the oldest literary document existing—is the Rigveda; next to it stands the Yajurveda and Samaveda; and the last is the Atharvaveda.”<sup>66</sup> “Each Veda is divided into Mantras and Brāhmanas. The Mantras are a collection of hymns in which the praises of the gods are sung and their blessings invoked. The Brāhmanas are treatises written in prose for the use of the Brahmins, and contain both the liturgical institutes, in which the ceremonial application of the hymns is prescribed, and the Aranyakas and Upanishads, or the theological disquisitions, in which the spiritual aspirations gradually developed in the minds of the more devout of the Indian sages find expression.”

“When the four collections of the Vedas were arranged by Vēdavyāsa, their mythical compiler, when the Brāhmanas were compiled, and probably for three or four hundred years afterwards, writing was unknown in India. . . . It is evident, therefore, that all the literature of the Vedas was handed down orally, like the Homeric poems. Every Brahmin had to learn the Vedas by heart during the twelve or more years of his student life. . . . Long after writing was introduced the Brahmins were strictly forbidden to write or read the Vedas. In the Māhābhārata it is written, ‘Those who sell the Vedas, and those who write them, those also who defile them, they shall go to hell.’ ”<sup>67</sup>

“It has been the prevalent belief in India for centuries that the Vedas came not from man, but from God. And though the hymns are ascribed to various Rishis, or saints, whose names they bear, yet the Hindus have maintained for ages, and continue to maintain, that the Rishis were only ‘Seers,’ who intuitively saw them, or vehicles through which they were communicated by divine power. Hence many conflicting theories of inspiration have been propounded, and many contradictory schemes for proving the divine origin of the Vedas have been set forth.”<sup>68</sup> The word Rishi is derived from the Sanskrit *rishi*, “to see,” and in its origin and meaning it is probably similar to the “seers” found among the ancient Hebrews, and in other parts of the world.

“The Hindus hold that the Vedas have existed from all eternity and survive the periodic dissolutions of the universe, and that they have no human authors, but are ‘seen’ by the Rishis or ‘seers’ to whom they are from age to age revealed.”<sup>69</sup> Some 600 B. C. “every

<sup>66</sup> *Chambers' Encycl.*, article “Veda.”

<sup>67</sup> Phillips, *Teaching of the Vedas*, pp. 21-23.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>69</sup> Appleton's *Universal Encycl.*, article “Sanskrit Literature.”

word, every verse and every syllable" of the Rigveda was counted, and the number "now agrees with existing copies as nearly as one could expect." The Brahmans hold the four Vedas to be "entirely the work of God," and both hymns and commentaries to be "god-given and inspired."

Thus we find that the Koran, the Zend-Avesta and the Vedas are alike held by the adherents of the religions to which they belong, to be verbally inspired and sacred books. Nowhere has the belief in such inspiration been more devout and unquestioned than among the millions who adhere to those religions.

The exact date at which the Septuagint translation of the Old Testament was made from the Hebrew into Greek is uncertain. It was called the Septuagint because the translation was reported to have been made by seventy-two learned and eminent men. By some the translation was believed to have been made about B. C. 280-270. Philo, an Alexandrian Jew, who wrote about the beginning of our era, was a man of much learning, and his writings have had much influence. He said that the Hebrew prophets "are interpreters of God, who uses their organs for declaring whatever he will." "They speak nothing of their own, but only what another suggests; and their own reflection resigns the citadel of the soul to the divine spirit dwelling within them."<sup>70</sup> This we have already found to be the world-wide primitive conception of inspiration—that of a "spirit dwelling within" the prophet, and speaking through him. Of the Septuagint translation it is said that he accorded "to the Greek text as profound a veneration and faith as if it had been written by the finger of God himself."<sup>71</sup> This belief in inspiration, entertained by Philo, was current in his day, and it has been current ever since that time. It has been extended to include the whole Bible as well as the Old Testament. It is difficult to see how the belief in the inspiration of the Bible, either in its origin or character, differs essentially from the belief in the inspiration of the other sacred books of the world.

#### SUMMARY.

In primitive times the belief arose that all sickness was caused by spirits that entered the body. Hence to cure the sick it was merely necessary to drive out the intruding spirit. Thus exorcism became a world-wide practice to cure disease.

<sup>70</sup> Drummond, *Philo Judæus*, I, p. 14.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 16. See also the belief, explained above, regarding the Koran, the Zend-Avesta and the Vedas.

Dreams and visions produced by fasting or other means, or by the use of various drugs like soma, mescal, opium and others, were believed to be caused by the action of intruding spirits, and to bring men into communion with the gods, lift the veil which hides the future, and give glimpses of the future life. Plants which yielded such drugs were often worshiped as divine, because a spirit (god) dwelt in them, as in the case of the soma, the mescal and others.

So, also, all abnormal mental phenomena, like those resulting from insanity and intoxication, were believed to be caused by spirits which took possession of men. The broken utterances of such men were regarded as the utterances of these possessing spirits.

The spirits (gods) which thus entered men might speak through them. Such utterances were not those of the man himself, but of the indwelling spirit (god). Men thus possessed were often called "seers" or "prophets," and were regarded as inspired. They were supposed to be able to predict, or foresee and foretell future events. Their utterances were treasured as divine, and people shaped their actions accordingly. This belief was unquestioned, and almost universal in ancient times, and it is common to-day among the lower or undeveloped races.

Growing out of this belief, oracles arose, like those at Delphi and Dodona in ancient Greece, where utterances of the gods took place. Hundreds of oracles, more or less similar, have existed in the world. Living in a world of which they knew little, tossed about by mighty forces which they did not understand, harrassed by all the disasters and uncertainties of life, and desiring light on the future, men sought the advice of the gods where they believed it could be obtained. As the primitive belief that all disease is caused by spirits which enter the body, gives place to more scientific medical conceptions, and as men acquire more accurate knowledge of the general processes of nature and the causes of phenomena, they cease to consult oracles and prophets, because they no longer entertain the ancient belief that spirits enter objects and speak through them; hence their belief in the prophetic power of such objects declines. But the lower and undeveloped races still retain the primitive misconceptions regarding the origin of disease, and spirit possession, and they have full faith in the divine origin of the utterances of their oracles and prophets, regard them as inspired, and flock to them, much the same as people did in ancient times.

The belief in prophecy and inspiration is of great antiquity, and it arose in the world hundreds, possibly thousands, of years before the art of writing was invented. After that art was developed

the primitive belief was expanded, so that written as well as oral utterances were viewed as dictated by a spirit (god), either dwelling within or talking to the writer. Books thus written were regarded as inspired and sacred. There have been many such books.

Among the legacies which the past has bequeathed to the present are the sacred books of the world. They contain much of the accumulated wisdom of the race. Some of them contain material which dates back to the dawn of civilization, and historical records of great importance. They have preserved for the world primitive legal codes, showing early society trying to substitute law for the sword, and peaceful for violent methods of settling disputes. They contain psalms and hymns giving voice to the hopes and aspirations of men, and touching appeals for help in hours of distress. And they contain moral precepts evolved as the result of centuries of experience, and at the cost of untold suffering. Born out of the struggles and trials of life, wrung from the hearts of men in the bitterness of their strife, they appeal to the hearts of other men, going through similar struggles. These records would not have been treasured for centuries by millions of men unless they had contained precepts which appealed strongly to them, and much truth which they could not afford to ignore.

This brief inquiry into the origin and development of the belief in prophecy and inspiration, which has been world-wide, may serve to shed some light on the problem of why the believers in the great world religions have regarded their sacred books as verbally inspired.