

A PAWNEE MYSTERY.

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[CONCLUDED.]

III.

It is perhaps not too much to say that the ceremony which has thus been described, chiefly in the words of an intelligent and reverential custodian of the mystery, is the most complete and perfect extant example of a type of religious rite worldwide in its development.

The essentials of the rite are a mystic representation of the union of Father Heaven and Mother Earth and the resultant birth of a Spirit of Life, primarily a Vegetation Spirit, vegetation being the basis of animal life. This fundamental cosmical event gathers additional meaning: (1) As an account of Creation, as a Cosmogonic or Theogonic myth. (2) As a forthfiguring and in some sense an explanation of animal procreation, and of human parenthood. (3) As a symbol of the perpetuity of life, tribal and individual; and in the highest developments, as a symbol of rebirth in a life to come.

Thus the rite stands at the center of the primitive conception of the world and of man's life; it stands at the center of what used to be called "natural religion,"—the attitude of the mind without revelation to the divine powers encompassing mortal ways. It is wholly to be expected, therefore, that such a rite would assimilate to itself, as we find that it does, many of the more incidental elements of early mythologies; so that in various centers it would appear in varying form and with changing accessories.

In the New World, the rite or its near analogy appears not only in North America, but also in ancient Mexico and Peru,— wherever, in fact, agriculture had gained a sure foothold. In the Old World we have reason to suppose that it was spread over primitive Europe, while the whole series of Mediterranean mysteries—Isis and Osiris

in Egypt, Ishtar and Tammuz in Babylon, Venus and Adonis in Syria, Cybele and Attis in Asia Minor, Demeter and Persephone in Greece—center about the birth of Corn from Mother Earth.

How remarkable the analogies in two utterly remote localities may be is beautifully illustrated by a comparison of the Pawnee Ceremony with the Eleusinian Mysteries of ancient Attica. The *Hako* represents the mystery in its primitive and pure form, with a minimum of mythic addition. The Mysteries of Eleusis present us with a highly complex version, and one, moreover, in which the highest promise of religion, that of human immortality, had come to be the paramount meaning. Nevertheless, the two are astonishingly similar.

The likeness extends even to the externals. The Mysteries of Eleusis open with the bringing of the *sacra* (*τέρα*) from Eleusis to Athens and with ceremonial purifications of the initiates in the latter city. This corresponds closely enough with the Pawnee preparation of the *sacra* (*Hako*) at the home of the Fathers and the attendant purification of the participants. The correspondence might be yet closer were we to take into account the fact recorded by Miss Fletcher that the Indian *sacra* were often carried from one tribe to another, being preserved through many ceremonies, and that this transmission was the symbol of the establishment of a bond between diverse peoples: which, as scholars agree, is precisely what happened as between Eleusis and Athens, for the participation of the Athenians in the Mysteries was a part of the covenant of agreement between the two cities, originally hostile.

The return of the *sacra* from Athens to Eleusis, in the company of the party of candidates for initiation; led by a "genius of the mysteries," Iacchos, who was at once a vegetation-god and, as Sophocles hails him, "dispenser of men's fate"; the party singing songs by the way: this is surely a striking parallel to the reverential journey of the Fathers to the home of the Sons, under the leadership of Mother Corn, singing the Songs of the Way. Speaking of the journey with the *Hako*, Miss Fletcher says: "If from some distant vantage a war party should descry the procession, the leader would silently turn his men that they might not meet the *Hako* party, for the feathered stems are mightier than the warrior; before them he must lay down his weapon, forget his anger, and be at peace." And in Greece the period of the mysteries was a period for truce in war.

As the Pawnee ceremony, at the village of the Son, comprised public and private rites, so at Eleusis the rites were public and

private. The public rites at Eleusis consisted of sacrifices to the gods and a torch-light dance in honor of Iacchos. Fasting was observed by both the Indian and the Greek initiates, and both observe a kind of sacramental feast in honor of the Earth Mother. The Indians prepare the corn "in the manner of our fathers"; they pound dried corn in a wooden mortar and boil the coarse meal. The Greeks drank from the *kykeon*, the sacramental cup, and partook of cereal cakes, also from sacred vessels.

In the Eleusinian Mysteries it is supposed that the myth of the rape of Persephone was dramatically presented to the *mystae*, or initiates of the first degree. With this there is no parallel in the Hako, though curiously enough the Algonquian myth of Manabozho and Chibiabos offers a striking duplication of the main elements in the story of Demeter and Persephone,—as has been pointed out by Andrew Lang (who wrongly attributes the story to the Pawnees). This Algonquian myth, too, was made the subject of a mystery.

But there was yet another mystic drama at Eleusis, that which seems to have been reserved for the *epoptae*, or initiates of the second degree. This second degree was identical in meaning with the central mystery of the Hako: the Holy Marriage of Heaven and Earth and the Birth of a Sacred Child. At Eleusis it was Zeus and Demeter; among the Pawnees it was Tirawa-atius and H'Uraru: but the two pairs of terms carry an identical meaning, Father Sky and Mother Earth. The Child was in each case a symbolic child, typifying at once the fruitfulness of the Earth and the promise of continuing life.

A part of the ancient ritual of Eleusis is preserved. The initiates looked up to the Heaven and cried, "Rain!" They looked down to the Earth and cried, "Conceive!" And we know that the Corn was the Child that was brought forth, for the symbol that was displayed was an ear of corn fresh reaped. Said the Kurahus: "The life of man depends upon the Earth, the Mother. Tirawa-atius works through it. The kernel is planted within Mother Earth and she brings forth the ear of corn, even as children are begotten and born of women."

The union of Heaven and Earth is symbolized over and over again in the Pawnee ceremony. Each of the principal *sacra* typifies it: the feminine ear of corn is capped with the blue of the masculine sky, so, too, the feminine brown-plumed wand is painted blue, while the masculine white-plumed mate to it is painted the green of Mother Earth. Finally, in the Sixteenth Ritual, the Kurahus wraps the feathers of the two stems together, male with female, and

holds them with his two hands over the child, pointing the stem towards it, and this movement, he says, "means that the breath of life is turned toward the child." Surely here is a parallel to the union symbolized in the Greek mystery.

There are a number of minor parallelisms. The sacred child Triptolemos, in his winged chariot, bearing the cereal gift of the goddesses, Mother Earth and Daughter Corn, to bless and succor mankind, is a parallel to the Hako child and perhaps also to the winged messenger who plays so great a rôle in the Indian ceremony. Another child whose rôle in the Eleusinian festival recalls that of the Hako child was the boy, or girl, who (as Farnell interprets) "comes to the mysteries from the city's hearth, the hearth in the Prytaneum," and "by proceeding thence was representing the future hope of the state of Athens, and by his initiation was supposed to specially guarantee the favor of the goddesses to the younger generation of the community." So, it will be recalled, the Hako child comes from the sacred hearth-altar of the ceremonial lodge adorned with the signs of the promises which Mother Corn and Kawas bring, signs, says the Kurahus, "not merely for that particular child but for its generation, that the children already born may live, grow in strength, and in their turn increase so that the family and the tribe may continue."

Of course the Pawnee Ceremony lacks the great and central aim of the Mysteries of Eleusis in their Classical development, viz., the promise of happiness in a future life. Possibly the Pawnee's faith in such future stood in less need of mystic revelation than the Greek's; and in all probability the Greek mystery in prehistoric days conveyed no more of this than does the Pawnee ceremony,—for it is the briefest step from the symbolism of Birth and the Perpetuation of Life to symbolism of Re-birth and Immortality. But it is worth noting that even without this great promise the ceremony brought to the Indian a joy wholly comparable to that rapture of the Eleusinian initiates which has proved so puzzling to moderns. "Happy those men living upon Earth who have seen the Mysteries," says the Homeric hymn,—words reechoed while Paganism endured. Miss Fletcher says of the Hako symbols: "I have seen manifested among the tribes not only reverence toward these sacred symbols, but an affection that was not displayed toward any other object. Few persons ever spoke to me of them without a brightening of the eyes. 'They make us happy,' was a common saying." And Tahirusawichi, in giving the ceremony, said to her: "Just before I came to Washington I performed this ceremony, and now as I sit here and

tell you about the meaning of this song, I can hear the happy shouts of the people as I heard them some weeks ago. Their voices seemed to come from everywhere! Their hearts were joyful. I am glad as I remember that day. We are always happy when we are with the Hako."

IV.

The Ceremony of the Hako is throughout symbolic, but the symbolism employed is so elemental that it must seem the very portrait of truth as truth appears to the mind untaught in science. Further, it is a symbolism that is not merely Pawnee, not merely American Indian, but in its main features it is world-wide. Hardly a hint is required to make it intelligible to any human being who has breathed the free air of the open country, who has looked up to the blue sky, to sun and moon and stars and moving clouds, who has looked about him at the green earth and growing fields. Indeed, we may fairly say that the Pawnee conception of the frame and governance of the world is nearer to the ordinary thinking of even educated men than is the conception which the science of astronomy presents. For however honestly we may believe astronomical doctrines they are still doctrines that must be intellectually mastered and held; they are not instinctive in human experience. Our senses tell us each day that the blue heavens are above and the green earth below and that the sun and stars in their daily courses journey through the arc of the skies. And our senses are powerfully fortified in their interpretation by language and literature—the props and says of our ideas—in which are embalmed the conceptions of sense as they have come to expression throughout the course of human history.

In the *Cratylus* Plato makes Socrates to say: "I suspect that the sun, moon, earth, stars, and heaven, which are still the gods of many barbarians, were the only gods known to the aboriginal Hellenes." When we reflect that primitive man's revelation of Divinity must be through nature, we can clearly see how every early pantheon must be headed by the Sun, the Moon and the Stars, under the leadership of Earth and the shining Sky. But it is not only to primitive men that this is so,—or, perhaps I should say, that even the most civilized and the best instructed of men, in all ordinary experience of the world, are primitive in their ways of thinking.

The simplicity and truth to sense of the Indian conception is beautifully shown in the words of the Kurahus:

"If you go on a high hill and look around, you will see the sky

touching the earth on every side, and within this circular enclosure the people dwell. So the circles we have made represent the circle Tirawa-atius has made for the dwelling place of all the people."

The conception of the Heavens as a roof, standing, as the Kurahus elsewhere says, "on the edge of the hills that, like the walls of a lodge, inclose the land where the people dwell," and of the Earth below as a floor, a fold,—this conception is as ancient as thought and as inevitable as sense. Caedmon expresses it in his dream hymn:

"He, the Eternal, established a world:
First for Earth's children reared as a roof
The high dome of Heaven—Holy Creator!
Made, then, the Mid-Earth—Warder of Men,
Lord Everlasting! Thereafter the land,
A fold for us fitted—Father Almighty!"

And centuries before Caedmon, in that literature which was his inspiration, Isaiah calls:

"Who hath measured the waters in the hollow of his hand, and meted out heaven with the span, and comprehended the dust of the earth in a measure, and weighed the mountains in scales, and the hills in a balance? . . .

"He that sitteth upon the circle of the earth, and the inhabitants thereof are as grasshoppers; that stretcheth out the heavens as a curtain, and spreadeth them out as a tent to dwell in!"

The analogies between the Pawnee conception of the universe and the Hebrew are not limited to this general framework. Heaven is the abode of the Father. Men are His Children. But in each case there is intermediation through the winged beings that pass to and fro between the Upper and the Lower Worlds. Kawas and the visions that dwell in Katasha, the Lower Heaven, are surely analogous to the Angel and Vision Messengers of the Old Testament. When the Heavens were opened to Ezekiel, so that he saw "visions of God," among the four faces of the winged creatures one face was that of the eagle, while the author of Revelation, also gazing into Heaven, beheld among the four beasts before the throne one "like a flying eagle."

Nor is there want of resemblance between the Pawnee conception of Tirawa-atius and the Hebrew idea of the Lord of Heaven. "The white man," said the Kurahus, "speaks of a heavenly Father; we say Tirawa-atius, the Father above, but we do not think of Tirawa as a person. We think of Tirawa as in everything, as the Power which has arranged and thrown down from above every-

thing that man needs. What the Power above, Tirawa-atius, is like, no one knows; no one has been there."

When Kawas explains to the Kurahus the meaning of the signs in the East:

"She tells him that Tirawa-atius there moves upon Darkness, the Night, and causes her to bring forth Dawn. It is the breath of the new-born Dawn, the child of Night and Tirawa-atius, which is felt by all the powers and all things above and below and which gives them new life for the new day...."

Is not this a Genesis in the making?

"In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.

"And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.

"And God said, Let there be light: and there was light.

"And God saw the light, that it was good: and God divided the light from the darkness.

"And God called the light Day, and the darkness He called Night. And the evening and the morning were the first day."

The conception of the earth as the Great Mother to whom the Sky-Father or the Sun-Father is united for the bringing forth of Life is, of course, not prominent in a monotheistic religion like the Hebrew. Nevertheless, this idea, too, underlies many Old Testament passages, showing clearly enough that it was familiar to Israelite as to pagan. In the 65th Psalm we read:

"Thou makest the outgoings of the morning and evening to rejoice.

"Thou visitest the earth and waterest it: thou greatly enrichest it with the river of God, which is full of water: thou preparest them corn, when thou hast so provided for it.

"Thou waterest the ridges thereof abundantly: thou settlest the furrows thereof: thou makest it soft with showers: thou blessest the springing thereof.

"Thou crownest the year with thy goodness; and thy paths drop fatness."

Paths dropping fatness is a sign of plenty to the Indian as well as to the Psalmist. The bits of fat used in the Hako represent, says the Kurahus, "the droppings that mark the trail made by the hunters as they carry the meat home from the field. This trail is called the path dropping fatness, and means plenty."

Again in the 19th Psalm: "The heavens declare the glory of God....In them hath he set a tabernacle for the sun, which is as a

bridegroom coming out of his chamber." Here we get the image of the nuptials of Earth and Sun which is the most ancient and universal figure of the generation of life, represented as perfectly as anywhere in the one prayer of the pagan Saxons which has been preserved to us: "Hail be thou, Earth, Mother of Men, wax fertile in the embrace of God, fulfilled with fruit for the use of man!" So the Eleusinian mystics called upon Heaven to rain, Earth to conceive. So Ezekiel makes the Lord to say: "I will cause the shower to come down in his season; . . . and the earth shall yield her increase." So the Zuni prays the Earth Mother to invoke the Sun Father's embrace to warm her children into being. And so the Pawnee gives thanks to Tirawa-atius who "causes Mother Earth to lie here and bring forth."

In passing, it may be noted that much of the Pawnee symbolism lends itself beautifully to a yet nobler meaning. For surely in the search for a Son, who is at once the Child of the Father of Heaven and the promise of Life unto Men, whose heralds are the Morning Star and the Winged Messenger of Heaven, whose coming is with gift of Peace and Joy and widening human Fellowship,—surely in all this we have a shining image, not of the Old, but of the Christian dispensation.

It is not to be understood that we credit the Pawnee with this spiritual meaning. We cannot even credit him with a pure and exalted religion, for certain of his rites were of the darkest of heathendom. But in this ceremony of the Hako, singularly pure and exalted, we do find so much that is common to the best in all religion that it cannot but bring the Indian closer to the White if once we permit it to command our sympathies.

V.

It is with a sense of the larger meaning underlying the symbols of the Indian rites, with a feeling that the Hako is not merely a Pawnee ceremony but a form of the universal Mystery of Life, that I have undertaken to give a poetical interpretation of it.¹ My purpose in doing so is twofold.

First, I wish to present thought common to Indian and white man in a form which may prove attractive apart from any merely anthropological interest, and in a form which will emphasize resemblances and sympathies of ideas of the two races. For this rea-

¹This poetical expression of the universal meaning of the Pawnee ceremony was published in *The Monist*, July, 1912, under the title "The Mystery of Life."

son, I have avoided the use of Indian names, such as Tirawa, H'Uraru, Kawas, choosing rather their English equivalents,—and I believe that the connotations of the English expressions, “Father of Heaven” and “Mother Earth,” and the symbolism of the Eagle as the King of Birds, is not far removed from the truth of the Indian conceptions.

Second, there have been many efforts to stimulate an “American art” by use of aboriginal materials. To me it appears that the road to success in such endeavor lies in assimilation of what is elemental and common, rather than in adaptation of what is remote in Indian expression. In this ceremony of the Hako we have a superb example of a universal experience in a concrete and individual setting. That setting belongs to us who are born and reared in the land where the ceremony is native as truly as it belongs to the Indian; and if we can sufficiently abstract from Old World traditions to be true to our own experiences, we can certainly find here in America an imagery of expression at once genuine and original,—genuine without being strained, original without being bizarre. Of course, this does not mean that we can, or should wish to, cut away from the culture traditions of our race where these are still our living experience; but assuredly we ought to dispense with the unnatural atmosphere which Old World imagery gives to our expression.

I hasten to qualify that my present effort is not one of ambitious achievement but of fruitful indication. It is obvious that a work which is purely symbolic, no matter how natural the symbol, cannot stand beside the ideal portraiture which gives the final quality of greatness. But on the other hand, it is worth remembering that the greatest art of the Old World literatures sprang from just such symbolism as is presented in the *Hako*. There is a resemblance between the choir-song of Dionysus from which Greek tragedy and modern opera alike take their rise and the choir-songs of Indian ceremonials which is obvious to any investigator; and there is again likeness of the Hako mystery to the Medieval Mystery Plays which preceded Shakespearean drama.

The form of the interpretation here undertaken was dictated in part by these resemblances. A drama with choric songs performed upon a sward before a simple screen,—this goes back to the origins. The drama is designed for musical accompaniment: music which shall be a background of interpretative sound as the scene is a background of interpretative color and form. In this again we are true to the most primitive form of drama, the choral chant, as to the most advanced and complex, the opera. Nevertheless, effort has

not been spared to enable the "book" to stand by itself,—and, indeed, there is no more reason why a libretto should not be readable than that a drama should be known only through stage performances. We read drama and allow our visual imaginations to supply scene and action; we should be able to read libretti and allow the auditory imagination to supplement the visual with tonal background. If libretti have heretofore proved poor literature it is the fault of the authors rather than of the genre.

How near the interpretation is to the form of the Indian original must be judged by comparison of the structures of the two. The great problem, of course, is compression in time. The Indian ceremony occupies days; the dramatic performance is designed for some two hours. This necessarily means elision and rearrangement. It means also, for the sake of the spectacle, certain new elements, and again new elements to emphasize continuity. But conceding so much—and it must be remembered that I am offering an *interpretation*, not transposition or translation, of the *Hako*,—I believe that I have none the less given a picture true to Indian thinking except in the one matter of greater generality. The ideas presented are all, either fully or incipiently, presented in the Indian version.

In the matter of poetic expression there is little dependence upon the Indian songs. Those songs are far more primitive than the thought represented in the explanations of the Kurahus. For the greater part they consist of ejaculatory phrases unintelligible to the Indians themselves without the accompanying action and the teachings of the Kurahus.

But while in my work there is little direct dependence upon the Indians' song phrases, I have very freely made use of the fine rhythmic versions made by Miss Fletcher and presented in her *Report*. Miss Fletcher, in her rhythmic renderings of the Indian songs has carefully followed the metric forms of the original, incorporating the sense given by the explanations of the leader as well as the literal sense of the Indian texts. The result is a series of admirable translations, abounding in telling phrases, yet too close in form to the primitive originals and too limited in interpretation to have independent literary value.