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HOW MEN WORSHIP

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by
F. H. HILLIARD



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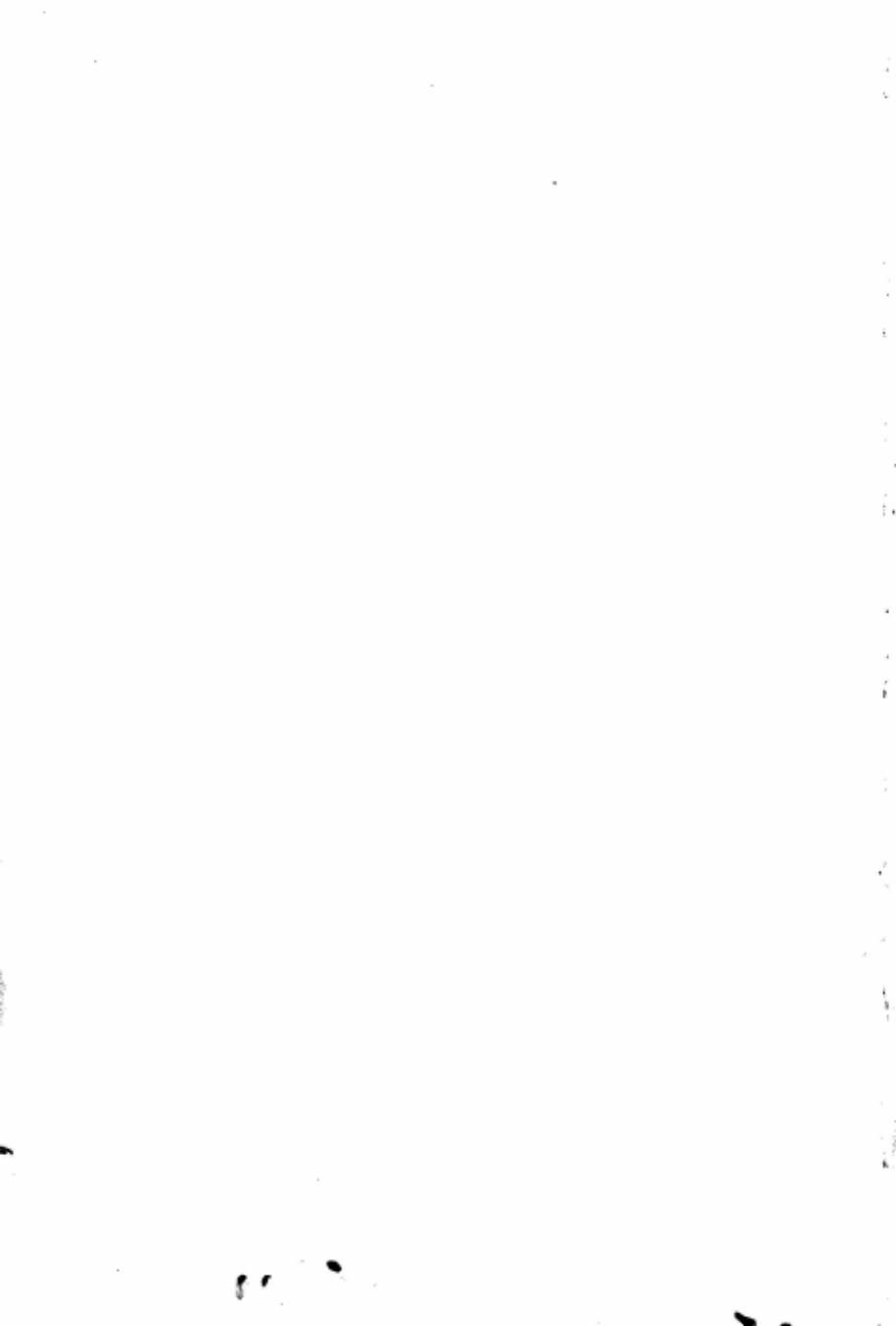
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PREFACE

A BOOK ABOUT How Men Worship will not make much sense to its readers unless it says something, however briefly, about the growth of the different religions and about the beliefs which inspire their rites and ceremonies. This I have tried to do. Because this is also a short book, it has had to confine itself to a description of the main types of belief and worship.

Many readers will already be familiar with the kind of worship which is offered in the various Christian churches. So the chapter on Christianity does not describe present-day worship but shows how Christian worship developed during the first centuries and how it was later affected by the emergence of the main denominations. In the same way I have not thought it necessary to illustrate Christian religious ceremonies.

Years of studying other men's religions have made me a debtor to many authors upon whose works I have drawn in writing this little book. I must, however, acknowledge my particular indebtedness to my friend, Dr. G. E. Parrinder's excellent book, *Worship in the World's Religions*.

F.H.H.



PART I

In Ancient Times



I

PREHISTORIC AND PRIMITIVE MAN

THE GREAT living religions have their own histories of growth and change, but the story of the gods that man has revered and the ways in which he has worshipped them is older still. It takes us back to the religions of those great civilizations which have long since passed away—Babylonia, Egypt, Greece and Rome. It carries us even further back into prehistoric times and the story of primitive peoples.

Whether the first sub-men, like *Pithecanthropus*, who appeared over 500,000 years ago, practised any sort of religion, we do not know, for they left no remains which could provide the clues. But the *Neanderthals*, who existed between 100,000 and 25,000 years ago certainly had some sort of religion. Indications of it had been found in their graves for they buried their dead ceremonially with food, and flint implements, by their side, and this suggests that they believed that the departed lived on in some mysterious way.

The men of the Old Stone Age, between about 25,000 and 10,000 years ago, have left evidence of their magico-religious beliefs and practices both in their burial customs and in their painting and modeling. They were a well-developed race of true men, with skulls a little larger than those of modern man. They buried their dead in shallow graves near the shelters where they lived. Not only did they lay near the corpses flint implements, ornaments and food for use in the next life, they also covered the bodies of their dead with red paint—signifying the redness of life blood—which, perhaps, was intended to assist the departed to live again. And these people also seem to have used magico-religious ceremonial at important stages of their lives—especially to ensure the success of the hunt upon which they depended for food. In the innermost recesses of caves in Central and Southern France and in the north of Spain have been found wall paintings obviously connected with such rituals. They depict the animals of the hunt—bison, reindeer and wild horses—often with spears and darts sticking into them. Clay figurines from the same period have also been found, some showing traces of holes as if spears and darts were thrust into them. These ancient folk clearly believed that by the performance of certain rituals in which they enacted the scenes of a successful 'kill', they could enlist the aid of the awesome forces of nature in their struggles to maintain a supply of food. Evidently an important figure in these magico-religious

hunting rituals was the 'shaman', who combined in himself the functions of priest, doctor, teacher and policeman—for in the famous mural in the cavern of Trois-Frères in the French Pyrenees, the shaman, wearing reindeer's antlers, bear's ears, and the tail of a horse, is in the centre of the scene, and appears to be directing the ritual.

Fresh religious practices seem to have developed among the people of the New Stone Age, between about 10,000 and 3,000 B.C. They had learned to polish stone implements, such as axes and arrow-heads, to till the ground and to build rough houses and boats. They also tried to make pottery, to plait and weave materials and to practise a crude kind of surgery. Their funeral ceremonies were still more elaborate: sometimes wives and servants were sacrificed with a dead chief or king—presumably so that he could continue to receive their services in another existence. Of greater interest still are the huge stone blocks which they erected, like those at Stonehenge. Clearly these were connected with religious ceremonies but precisely in what way can only be guessed. Perhaps they marked a sacred site and a gathering place for worship and sacrifice on special occasions or at particular seasons.

It is tantalizing that we have only these occasional glimpses of prehistoric religion. In an effort to try to fill in some of the many gaps in the story, scholars have made use of their knowledge of the religious beliefs and practices of tribes that have lived away

from civilized areas of the world and whose way of life has apparently remained little changed through many centuries. Such peoples are to be found in several parts of the world—America, Asia, Australia and Africa. They are not primitive in the strict sense of the term, for even they must inevitably have changed and developed in certain ways as compared with people of prehistoric times. Yet because they have remained so isolated they have probably retained some of the characteristics of the real primitives and their religious beliefs and practices may tell us a little more about the religion of primitive man.

Beneath the many differences of religious ideas and ritual which are found among these present-day primitives, certain similarities stand out and appear to be fairly common to them all.

First is the conviction that certain places, persons, things, rituals and events are sacred—to be approached or handled with care, fear and reverence. The word used by the natives of the Pacific Islands to describe this mysterious quality—'mana'—has been used by anthropologists as typical: other peoples have different words denoting this same quality of 'sacredness'. Among the American Indians it is 'manitou' or 'wakonda' or 'orenda': the Bantus in Africa speak of 'mulungu'. If a man is successful in fighting it is because he has obtained the 'mana' of some dead warrior through wearing an amulet or a tuft of leaves, or a tooth. If a man's pigs multiply, or

his garden produces good crops, it is because of the sacred stones full of 'mana' that he possesses. The Bantus say that the rainbow is 'mulunga'; 'mulunga' is also in the wind and the storm, the snake and the tiger.

To harness this awesome power in his service, the primitive uses a variety of magical procedures. He makes use of 'fetishes'—objects which possess power such as pebbles, bones, and sticks of unusual kinds. Or he may call in the aid of the 'shaman', who is himself possessed of sacred power. Witch-doctors, medicine-men, exorcists and sorcerers are examples of the shaman: his powers are especially valued for inflicting or curing sickness and disease. A third type of magic, to be used by common folk, consists in following faithfully certain known procedures. It may be a special kind of dance or a particular type of sacrifice—animal, or even, in dire circumstances, human. By such means, it is believed, evil may be averted or enemies defeated. So forcefully can the sacred power dwell in a particular person or object that he or it is rendered 'taboo' or untouchable. A king or chief is 'taboo'; so is a corpse.

Another common belief is that all sorts of objects have 'souls' or spirits residing in them and that a man's 'soul' leaves his body during sleep and, finally at death. A man must be alert to gain and keep the favour of all these spiritual forces among whom he moves. It is because natural objects may be the homes of spirits that nature-worship is common

among primitives. Certain mountains, stones, trees, plants, and streams are feared and offerings made before them. On a rather different level, however, is the worship of a 'sky' or 'high' god, which is also common. Some African tribes, the Fuegians of South America, and the Australian bushmen, believe that this high god once lived on earth, taught men his laws, and then went back to the sky, where he keeps watch on their behaviour.

As in prehistoric religion, so among modern primitives, the dead are treated with the utmost respect. Their burial ceremonies are carried through with great care and weapons, clothing, furniture and food are placed in or near the grave to assist the dead person in the life to which he has gone.

What can we deduce, then, from the relics of prehistoric times and from the practices and beliefs of modern primitives as to the main features of religion in ancient times? First, that by religion and magic (which in ancient times are often difficult to disentangle) primitive man believed that he could gain the aid of the mysterious and sacred powers which seemed to surround him. Perhaps in so doing he was also able to keep at bay the fear which he must constantly have felt at living in a terrifying world. In this case there is some force in the rather cynical comment of the old Roman writer Petronius—*'primus in orbe deos fecit timor'* ('it was fear that first produced the gods'). Certainly it seems clear that around the most important events of his life

—birth and death, the harvest and the hunt, all of them times when he was brought face to face with his struggle to survive—the magico-religious rituals of primitive man evolved.

Yet this may be only half the story, for primitive man seems also to have recognized the existence of powers greater than himself, not only because he wanted their help, but also because it was fitting that he should acknowledge and respect them. The German scholar, Dr. Rudolph Otto, argued that man has always experienced a sense of holy dread (the sense of the 'numinous'). This is not the same as the old notion that man has a religious 'instinct' but it is a reminder that as far back as we can trace, he seems to experience, in certain moods and at particular times, a sense of creatureliness. He feels that there is 'another' out beyond human consciousness, before whose overpowering, absolute might he must abase himself, while being, at the same time, drawn towards it. Here, it would seem, may lie the real roots of that religious worship which has come to have so important a place in the higher religions of mankind.

2

EGYPTIANS

A FURTHER stage in the growth of religion took place when the smaller tribal units began to come together in larger, national groupings. There was no sudden break between the religion of the later Stone Age and the more impressive and organized religious beliefs and practices of the ancient nations such as Egypt and Babylon. What seems to have happened is that the tribes brought their older religious traditions into the national life of which they came to form a part. It is this which explains the multiplicity of gods that we find in the early period of these ancient national religions. The mingling of the deities and of the worship associated with them becomes refined and sometimes transformed under the pressures exerted by the changing needs of the developing nations.

The process can be clearly seen at work in the religious life of ancient Egypt. Between about 5000 and 4000 B.C. the descendants of the New Stone

EGYPTIANS

Age tribes who had been living on the fringes of the Nile Valley began to move down into the valley itself. Here, during what is called the Pre-Dynastic period, they continued to live a primitive sort of existence, hunting wild animals with arrows tipped with flint or bone, making rough clothes of animal skins, and simple beads, necklaces and bracelets out of shell, ivory and stone.

By about 3200 B.C., however, this state of things had changed considerably. The scattered tribes all along the 750 miles of river valley between Aswan and the Mediterranean Sea had gradually come together to form a single state; they had developed a written language and they had begun to produce skilled craftsmen and builders. We cannot be sure what factors brought about this new sense of national unity and growth in the arts of civilization. But there is some ground for thinking that it may have been stimulated by eastern invaders who settled in the Nile Valley.

Egypt has yielded up to the archaeologist a vast store of information about the customs and beliefs which prevailed at various periods in her history. Some of it comes from papyrus—the writing material made by plaiting the reeds which lined the river banks and which is capable of being preserved for centuries beneath the sand. Some comes from carved ‘palettes’ unearthed in the burial chambers of Pharaohs and other great men. Most of it, however, has come from the writing and elaborate stone

carvings and paintings which adorned the Pyramids—tombs of the Pharaohs and of nobles.

It is quite evident that religion played a most important part in the life of the ancient Egyptians. The first Egyptian gods were, or were thought of as, animals and each community or 'nome' seems to have had its animal cult. At Thebes, Amon was worshipped as a ram; Memphis had two guardian deities—Sekhmet, a lioness, and Apis, a bull. The god who later became Horus was worshipped as a falcon. But these animals were frequently depicted with human bodies, showing that they were worshipped, not only for their animal characteristics, but also for the human or superhuman powers which they possessed.

As the original communities, forty-two in number, became amalgamated by conquest, so their gods were associated. Thus Amon and Ra (or Re, the sun-god with the falcon's head) became Amon-Ra, the greatest of the deities of later times. One focal-point of religious faith and ceremonies was the worship of the life-giving sun, which came to occupy the central place in that part of Egyptian religion which was concerned with the living. The other was the fate of the soul after death.

The great sun-god Ra was depicted in human form, as we have just seen, with the head of a falcon and thus associated with the sun-god Horus (for the mounting falcon rises towards the sun), and sometimes the sun's disk was itself used as his symbol. One

colourful painting shows him standing with the sun's disk atop his falcon's head, from which rays of light stream down on to a worshipper who has come to him with a table loaded with offerings. Ra bestowed upon the Pharaohs the power that enabled them to shield their realm. The later Pharaohs of the age of the Pyramids (2600-2200 B.C.) called themselves 'son of Ra' and it is possible that the Pyramids in which they were buried were so built to suggest a reaching up to the sun—the Pharaoh thus being one with the sun in death, as he had been in life.

Under Pharaoh Amenhotep IV (1379-1361) Egyptian religion came very near to abandoning the worship of all gods except one. The young Pharaoh ordered the one sun-god Aton to be worshipped and changed his own name to Ikhnaton ('Pious to Aton') to emphasize that Aton was the one and only god, the creator and sustainer of all things. Noble hymns were composed in honour of Aton. They are so impressive as to bear comparison with some of the Psalms of praise in the Old Testament. But Ikhnaton's religious reforms did not survive his death. His son-in-law, the celebrated Tutenkamon, who succeeded him, allowed the older forms of worship to revive and Egyptian religion returned to a worship of many gods.

We have noticed how the Egyptians believed that their rulers and nobles lived on after death. Gradually lesser folk also came to hope for a joyful existence hereafter. The practices of embalming, and later, of

mummifying, in which the Egyptians were so skilled, were, of course, important parts of the preparation of the dead for their future life. By such means the body was preserved so that the soul could return to it. Food and possessions were laid in the tomb for the dead man to use whenever his soul chose to re-inhabit the body and live again in it. The celebrated 'Book of the Dead' which used to be enclosed in coffins, was a guide-book of directions to the dead man about his life in the hereafter. It shows how the soul is judged. In the presence of Osiris, the judge of gods and men, the heart of the dead man is balanced by the jackal-headed Anubis in the judgment scales against an ostrich feather. If it is a heart made light by goodness, and so does not weigh down the scale, then the soul is allowed to pass over into the blessed fields of Osiris. If the scales show the heart to be evil, the soul is destroyed.

3

BABYLONIANS

ANOTHER place in which prehistoric ways of life gradually assumed more civilized forms was Mesopotamia, the flat and fertile plains which lay between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers. Here the growth of a civilization seems to have started about 2,000 years earlier than it did in Egypt. About 7000 B.C. a number of village settlements flourished, to be succeeded between 4000 and 3000 B.C. by larger city-states—Uruk, Eridu, Lagash, Nippur and Ur. The inhabitants of the ancient cities lived a comfortable and cultured existence, building houses, shops, stores and warehouses from mud bricks, and huge temples in honour of their gods. They tilled the fertile ground around their cities and practised the arts of the builder, the carpenter, the metal-worker, the spinner and the weaver. Most important of all, they also developed the first writing.

Though independent, these city-states all belonged geographically and culturally to that part of

ancient Mesopotamia which is known as the land of Sumer—in the south-east corner of Mesopotamia—and it was this Sumerian culture that provided a foundation for all the civilizations which were to flourish in Mesopotamia. Archaeologists have uncovered some of these ancient cities and have found not only the remains of some of their impressive buildings and the clay tablets on which the scribes wrote in wedge-shaped, 'cuneiform', letters, but also examples of beautiful vessels in alabaster, and of armour and musical instruments worked in or decorated with gold and precious stones.

Religion played a dominant part in the lives of the people, just as it did in Egypt. Here, too, priests were all-important because they, like the rulers, could understand and control the mysterious forces of nature and human existence. The centre of religious ceremonial was the temple, with its shrine raised from a platform forty feet or more high. These temple towers were called Ziggurats—a word which meant 'to be high' or 'pointed', and seem to have been so constructed to help to bridge the gap between man and god. A temple situated at the top of the tower was intended to provide a welcome for the god when he descended from heaven, and another at ground level was to accommodate him during his stay on earth, the two being connected by a stairway.

The gods controlled every part of life and had to be worshipped with elaborate ceremonials which the priests conducted in the temples. At one time the

Sumerian gods seem to have been nearly 4,000 in number but gradually six became all important—each the god of a great city. Anu, the god of heaven, was the chief deity of Erech and became ‘king’ of the gods. Enlil, the god of Nippur, became a great warrior deity. Sin, the moon-god, had been the principal god of Ur. The others were—Babbar (later called Shamash), the sun-god from Larsa; Ea (or Enki) the water-god, from Eridu; and Nintud, the mother-goddess (later known as Ishtar), from Kish.

Yet it was another god altogether who eventually became the most important of all the deities of Babylonia—Marduk, the chief deity of the city of Babylon. When King Hammurabi, the king of Babylon (1792–1750 B.C.), established an empire which extended from the Persian Gulf to the central area of Mesopotamia, the god of Babylon became all-powerful too. He became more important than the ancient Sumerian gods and eventually assumed the position of Lord of the Heavens.

Here then, as in Egypt, advanced forms of religion retained one of the important functions of prehistoric times—that of gaining for man the aid of the mysterious powers which control the universe. This fact is made very plain in the myths and epics which Babylonian poets told and which later provided the framework for some of the Old Testament stories. The best-known are the stories of the Creation and the Flood. We are told how Marduk fought against Tiamat, the dragon of the salt-water chaos,

finally killed her and then split her body into two. Out of one half he formed the canopy that holds back the waters above the heavens, and with the other, the covering which lies over the waters that are under the earth. He then fixed the movement of the stars and created plants, trees, animals and man.

My blood will I take and bone will I fashion,
I shall create man who shall inhabit the earth.

Unfortunately, the cuneiform tablets which originally contained the details of Marduk's creation of the world are incomplete and we do not have the full story. But here is enough to show that the Babylonians believed that the whole world was created by the power of the gods.

That the gods also controlled the forces of nature is seen in the story of the Flood. One version of the story forms part of the Epic of Gilgamesh which told of the wanderings and adventures of this ruler of the city of Uruk on his way to the realm of the departed. The gods decided to punish man's sin by a flood and their plan was told to one man only, Utnapishtim, whom the god Ea liked. Utnapishtim built an ark—

120 cubits high were its sides,
140 cubits reached the edge of its roof.

Then follows the account of the deluge, the survival of the ark and its grounding on Mount Nisir. Utnapishtim releases a dove, a swallow and a raven, and when the raven does not return, he opens the ark

and offers sacrifice to the gods in thanksgiving for his deliverance. This Babylonian story also was known in some form or other to the Hebrews and they re-wrote it in their own fashion, bringing it into harmony with their beliefs. Its immediate interest for us, however, lies in the manner in which it so plainly reflects the Babylonian belief that the forces of nature and man's own destiny are ultimately under the control of the gods.

We may notice another link with the older religious ideas of prehistoric times in the customs and ceremonials connected with the burial of kings and nobles. Among the discoveries which Sir Leonard Woolley made in 1923 on the site of the ancient city of Ur was a cemetery which included the graves of sixteen distinguished persons—perhaps kings and queens of Ur. These sepulchres were made of stone and within each chamber the body lay in full regalia, often with drinking vessels by its side. On some of the ramps which sloped down to these chambers lay the bodies of scores of men, women and animals who had been buried with their master or mistress, the men and women clothed and holding musical instruments. It seems possible that these attendants had sacrificed themselves to die with their lord or mistress. We cannot be sure that they hoped by doing this to continue to serve him or her in the life to which they were to go after death, for the Sumerians did not share the assurance of the Egyptians that there was a life after death. What we can say is that

the burial ceremonies which prehistoric man practised seem to have continued in more elaborate form among the Sumerians.

4

GREEKS

THE OLDEST truly European religion of ancient times of which we have any knowledge is that of the ancient Greeks. We know it best, from the writings of Homer and Hesiod and from the remains of Greek temples and the sculptures which once adorned them. But we must be on our guard against thinking that the religion of which we learn from these sources was the earliest form in Greece. Scholars now believe that the religion of the Homeric Age, which could not have been much earlier than about 1000 B.C., represents a fairly advanced level of religious development.

Unfortunately, the earlier stages of Greek religion, like the origins of the Greeks themselves, are still obscure. It seems that the country which later became known as Greece, together with the islands in the Aegean Sea and the coast of Asia Minor, were invaded by peoples from the lands to the north. The

first of these invasions probably took place about 2000 B.C. and was followed at intervals by others until about 1200 B.C. All these invaders brought with them gods and goddesses and the religious beliefs and rituals which formed part of their worship. Thus we have to imagine a gradual coming together of many different deities and rituals and a slow amalgamation of them in Greece during these centuries. In other words, when we meet Greek religion in Homer, it is the product of a long process of intermingling and adaptation and not the outcome of the growth of the religion of a single people.

Archaeology has given us two glimpses of religion in the pre-Homeric period but they are tantalizingly incomplete. Excavations on the site of the ancient city of Knossos, in the island of Crete, have brought to light the remains of the Minoan civilization (so called after the legendary King Minos of Crete) which flourished there between about 1800 and 1500 B.C. At Mycenae, on the Greek mainland, discoveries have been made of the remains of the so-called Mycenaean civilization which seems to have grown in part out of the Minoan, and to have succeeded it and spread its influence over other parts of Greece. It declined after Dorian invaders destroyed Mycenae about 1100 B.C.

Religion in both these ancient civilizations seems once again to have been concerned with gaining the help of the mysterious forces which controlled birth, death and the supply of food. Both at Knossos and

at Mycenae evidence has been found of the worship of the mother-goddess, or earth-mother, symbol of reproduction and fruitfulness. One statue found at Knossos shows the goddess with bare breasts, as the one who succours mankind—a piece of artistic symbolism which is repeated in frescoes showing women dancing with bare breasts to invoke the mother-goddess who is seen descending to them. Later Greek religion continued to give prominence to the mother-goddess under various names—Demeter, Aphrodite, Athena and Artemis.

The bull also figures largely in Cretan religious art. In the Near East the bull symbolized masculine potency and some of the frescoes showing men leaping around a charging bull may be relics of ritual dances once practised in Crete.

Both at Knossos and Mycenae evidence has come to light of the care with which these ancient people, like the Egyptians and the Sumerians, and their distant ancestors, used to bury important people. One fresco from Crete shows women bringing offerings of various kinds to a dead man.

An extremely interesting inscription from Mycenae takes us, however, much nearer to the religion of the Homeric Age. It mentions the names of gods and goddesses whom we meet in Greek literature—Poseidon, Zeus, Hera, Athena and Hermes. This suggests that by the time the Dorians swept down into Greece, many of these deities who had been brought to the Greeks by invaders, had begun to as-

sume functions which were to be theirs in the Homeric Age.

In Homer we meet these many gods and goddesses who between them control the various mysterious forces of the universe and the fates of individuals and peoples. In their common home on the summit of Mount Olympus in Thessaly, Zeus, father of gods and men, rules over them, though at times not without some difficulty. Hera is his queen; Athena, his most loved daughter, is the goddess of wisdom. Apollo, whose arrows could make men sick, was also the god who later could make important revelations to men through his oracle at Delphi. Aphrodite is the goddess of love; Hermes the swift messenger of the gods; Poseidon the god of the sea and Hades the god of the underworld.

These deities are in charge of the various forces which control the world but are no longer identified with the forces themselves. Homer pictures them as distinct, almost human personalities—immortal but no longer awe-inspiring. When the great Greek sculptors, a few hundred years later, gave sublime form to the gods of Greece, it was to the Homeric gods that they turned for inspiration. They created them as men and women—lofty and perfect, yet human. Thus the gods of the classical age of Greece, though powerful, are rather like super-men. Zeus can shake Mount Olympus so that gods and men tremble; the gods have power to influence human lives; they control the fortunes of nations. But in the last resort Fate

controls even the gods: their power is not unlimited.

To these gods then, the people of the Greek city-states offered prayer and sacrifice for several hundred years and besought their assistance in all the affairs of life—in peace and war; in the great moments and events of their civic life as well as in the ordinary affairs of home and family—birth, death, seed-sowing and harvest time. This type of religion, however, soon proved itself unequal to the demands which were made upon it. It lacked the power to arouse and give an outlet to age-old and deep religious emotions and so many Greeks turned, from the sixth century onwards, to the 'mysteries'. These were rites kept secret from all except the initiates who underwent a period of careful preparation and were eventually admitted to the sect in an impressive and moving final ceremony. In the process tension was released and the initiate enjoyed the sense of mystical participation in supernatural things. Some mysteries, such as the Eleusinian, were moderate and restrained; others, like those of Dionysus, were more violent and unrestrained.

Thoughtful men found the mysteries little more satisfying than the traditional religion, because they encouraged men to be virtuous for the sake of the material rewards which would follow. Yet it would be wrong to think of Greek philosophy as being only critical and negative. It was passionately interested in discovering the true nature of human existence and of the universe as a whole. For men like Plato

and Aristotle, philosophy was a way of life based upon what appeared to be true knowledge.

Here, then, in the later stages of Greek religion, we can see emerging an exceedingly important new element in man's religious experience—the attempt to think rationally about religious beliefs, worship and practices. This was the distinctive contribution of Greece to European religion. The Hebrews were not greatly interested in speculation, but when in the Roman Empire Christianity came into contact with Greek philosophy, it was inspired to develop its theology, not along bare dogmatic lines, but in a way which enabled it to appeal to reason as well as to emotion and will.

5

ROMANS

THE Romans about whom we learn from Latin writers were, like the Greeks, people of mixed origins. The tribes which settled along the River Tiber and on the hills to the east were descended from Indo-European peoples who had invaded Italy from the north between 2000 and 1000 B.C. They were the Latins whose settlements came to be called Latium. In the eighth century B.C. they were joined by their kinsmen, the Sabines, from the mountains to the east. At about the same time the Etruscans conquered and settled in that part of Italy which we know as Tuscany; the area between the Apennine mountains and the sea as far as the Tiber River. We do not know precisely where the Etruscans came from—perhaps from Asia Minor or still farther east. But we do know that they developed a high degree of civilization which, by the time Etruria became part of the Roman Republic in the fourth to third centuries B.C., had exerted considerable influence on the develop-

ment of Roman life generally, including its religion. The Etruscans were a vigorous people who enjoyed life to the full. At the same time, they were a deeply religious folk, whose life was governed at every turn by ritual regulations. They went in fear of offending the divine powers and paid great attention to the practice of divination as a means of avoiding neglect of the gods or giving offence to them. They believed in numerous demons and spirits and their chief gods were Tinia, Uni and Menerva whom we know better by their Latin names Jupiter, Juno and Minerva.

The religion of early Rome included a good deal of magic and centred around the farm on the one hand, and the home on the other. The word 'religion' has in fact been given to us by the Romans. It comes from a Latin root meaning 'to bind fast in mutual obligation' and denoted an essentially business-like, legal attitude to religion. There was little place for affection in Roman religion. The business of men was to carry out, especially through the priests who knew exactly what was required, the exact ceremonies which the divine powers ordained, and the spirits were then expected to give their favours in return.

The Romans did not, at first, think of these supernatural powers as gods in a personal sense. The word they used to describe them was the impersonal word 'numina'—denoting a force which, when it comes into operation, makes all the difference between success and disaster in human affairs. They made no

pictures of the gods until they later learned, from the Etruscans and the Greeks, how to think of their gods in human form.

At first, then, they revered the spirits who were powerful over the different parts of life. In farming, Saturnus presided over the sowing, Ceres over growth, Consus over the harvest and Ops over the storing. Over all the numina of the country-side was Jupiter, who was the great sky deity, controlling the rain and the sun. So also every part of the home was in the power of a different spirit. Janus was the guardian spirit of the threshold; Vesta of the hearth and the flame; the Penates were the guardians of the larder; while the Lar Familiaris watched over the whole household.

All these spirits were honoured by a vast number of ceremonies on special days, sometimes carried out by the 'pater familias' or head of the house, at others by the priests. Funeral ceremonies once again were elaborate and important. The Romans practised both cremation and burial but had no belief in personal survival after death. The dead man's spirit went to join the 'Di Manes'—the vague collective term used for all those whose spirits existed in a pit below the centre point of the city. Three times a year priests raised the stone slab which marked the intersection of the two main streets of the city and released these spirits to return to mingle for a time with the living.

A third group of spirits presided over the for-

tunes of the people in battle. Of these Mars and Quirinus later became the most important. Sacrifices to Mars were made at an altar on the Campus Martius with its sacred symbols of the lance and the shield.

Numa was the traditional law-giver, the 'Moses' of Roman tradition, whom later writers credited with having prescribed religious as well as other customs of their people. Hence they often referred to the religion of this early period as 'the religion of Numa'.

It was not only the Etruscans who introduced many fresh ideas into the religion of early Rome, but also the Greeks who, after the Dorians had forced many of them out of the Greek Peninsula, settled in that part of the south of Italy which became known as 'Magna Graecia'. We have noticed already that one result of this Greek influence was that the Roman deities gradually became personalized. Jupiter and Juno became husband and wife. Minerva became identified with the Greek goddess Athena and became goddess of wisdom and patron of arts and crafts. Temples were erected and in the great temple on the Capitoline Hill in Rome statues of Jupiter, Juno and Minerva were set up. In the sixth century B.C. the books of the Sybilline Oracles were brought from Greece to Rome and two priests installed whose duty it was to consult the oracles from time to time. Since the oracles were of Greek origin, this practice led to further intermingling of Greek

and Roman religious gods and practices. Temples were built to the God Apollo, who was identified with the Roman Neptune. Hermes was worshipped under his Roman name, Mercury. The Greek Aphrodite became the Roman Venus. There came also the Greek Epics, and many of the Greek myths were given a form which suited Roman tradition. Virgil's great Epic, the *Aeneid*, is the outstanding example of this kind of fusion of Greek and Roman literary, mythical and religious traditions.

Nevertheless, during the last century of the republic (150-49 B.C.) Roman religion had lost most of its vitality and had degenerated into a series of largely meaningless rituals. Educated folk were either sceptics, like Cicero, or followed one of the philosophies of the time, which ranged from materialism to a rather vague belief that there is an element of 'divinity' in all things. Augustus attempted to revive the old religion but failed to do so. But because he knew how important it was for the new Empire to have some sort of spiritual unifying force at its centre, he encouraged the veneration of Julius Caesar, who had been declared a god ('*Divus Julius*') by the Senate in 42 B.C. He also allowed shrines to be erected in which his own 'genius', though not himself as a living person, was worshipped. After his death, however, he too was worshipped and eventually emperors were worshipped as divinities in their lifetime.

Behind and beneath this rather formal state

emperor-worship, personal religion, where it existed, generally took the form of one of the mystic cults of the East, like those of the worship of Cybele, Bacchus, Isis and Osiris or Mithras. They were accompanied by rituals which provided outlets for emotion, sometimes of a degenerate kind, but also held out the hope of immortality. From about A.D. 50 onwards, of course, Christianity was making its presence felt within the empire, and established itself, by the early part of the fourth century, as one of the most powerful among the various religions which were officially allowed to be practised ('licita'). We noticed earlier that Christianity was greatly influenced by Jewish, and partly by Greek, ideas. Perhaps not surprisingly, in view of the nature of Roman religion, it was largely uninfluenced by Roman ideas. Indeed, some of the terrible persecutions which marked the first three hundred years of its history arose out of Christianity's opposition to the state emperor-worship which it regarded as blasphemous. And when the great Roman Empire later crumbled away under the invasions of the barbarians from beyond its borders, the remains of the old Roman religion disappeared with it, but Christianity survived to enter upon a new period of vigour and expansion.

PART II

In India and South-East Asia



6

HINDUS

HINDUISM is a religion of contrasts, even contradictions. Belief in many gods, in one god, in none. Asceticism or calm meditation and exuberant, even frenzied ritual-worship. Its sacred writings reflect a similar multiplicity of religious ideas and practices—simple, primitive nature-worship at one extreme, a profound philosophical contemplation at the other, and other varieties of religious thought and worship in between.

This bewildering variety is to be explained by two facts. First, Hinduism is the most tolerant and accommodating of all the world's great religions. Secondly, it has grown, not like a deliberately designed building, but rather like a huge tree—in more random fashion, keeping within itself all the main religious traditions which have emerged during the 4,000 years and more of the history of the Indian peoples. Perhaps it is easier for the European to begin to understand Hinduism if he learns to think

of it, not so much as a religion, but as, more broadly, *Indian* religion.

Hindu society itself is the result of the mingling of many races and cultures. The name 'Hindu' is derived from the Sanskrit name for the great Indus River (Sindhu)—the river which through the centuries has always greatly affected the lives and the sustenance of the peoples of the Indian sub-continent. Just over forty years ago, archaeologists found traces of a civilization which flourished in the Indus Valley about 2500 B.C. Not enough of it has so far been found to convey a clear picture of its religion, but it seems likely that its people worshipped male and female deities which have some connection with later Hindu mythology.

Between about 2000 and 1500 B.C. there came down into northern India groups of Aryan invaders who were connected with the peoples who, as we saw earlier, made their way down into the Greek and Latin peninsulas. These folk gradually attained a dominant position in northern and central India and seem to have maintained it by either introducing or strengthening a strict system of divisions within the community as a whole. They seem to have had little respect for the dark-skinned Dravidians whom they found in the country, and the caste-system, which may have existed before they arrived, expressed the sense which these Aryan settlers felt of their own superiority.

We get our first clear glimpse of the earliest phase

of Indian religion from the ancient hymns, called the Vedas, composed by these Indo-Aryan inhabitants of India between about 1700 and 1300 B.C. The hymns were gradually collected together between about 1000 and 800 B.C. and later arranged in four collections by the Brahmins¹ for use in connection with the offering of sacrifices. The Rig-Veda was the 'Praise' Veda for the sacrificing priest; the Sama-Veda ('Chant' Veda) for the chanting priest; the Yajur-Veda ('Formula' Veda) contained formulae to be mumbled by the working-priest. Later a fourth Veda (the Atharva) was added, containing spells for counteracting misfortune.

Of the four, the Rig-Veda is the oldest as well as the most sacred. It contains a thousand or more hymns in which honour is paid to numerous gods and goddesses of sky and nature generally. Indra is the most prominent of the gods. He was a warrior god who manifested his power in the storm and the thunder. Rudra is the god of the storm in its destructive aspects. The Maruts, storm-gods, are his followers. In later centuries Rudra became Shiva who is still widely worshipped in India at the present time.

Varuna is the god of the wide sky and is chief of the gods; he upholds 'right' among mortals. Mitra is connected especially with the sun and is also in-

¹ This is the usual English spelling of the word 'Brahman', meaning priest. Though incorrect, it is a useful way of avoiding confusion with the other meaning of 'Brahman'—the One Supreme Reality.

terested in the way men behave; he is the guardian of agreements and alliances. Also connected with the sun (which has clearly played a most important part in the lives of the Indian people) are Surya, the disk of the sun as it came up in the sky, and Savitur, the sun in its warmth and so the giver of life and immortality. Vishnu, the sun in movement, who took three 'strides' to cross the heavens, was also to become a most important deity in later ages.

Ushas is the lovely goddess of the dawn, seen in the beauty of the sunrise. With her appear the twin 'Asvins'—the twilight and morning stars—who ward off sickness from man.

Finally we may notice the earth deities, Agni, Soma and Yama. Agni is the fire-god, especially connected with the sacred flame of the sacrificial fire which carries men's prayers up to heaven. Soma is the god of the sacred plant-juice, used in sacrifice and drunk by the gods. Yama was the divine hero who first ventured into the realm of the dead and opened up heaven to man.

These, then, were the most important of the gods who were propitiated in the sacred sacrifice at this early stage in the history of Hinduism. The religion of this period was obviously a form of nature-worship not so vastly different from that which was typical of the early religion of other ancient peoples. Indeed, we can see direct links between the religion of these Indo-Aryans and their kinsmen who settled in Iran and in Greece and Italy. The name for another god

of the sky in the Vedas was Dyaus, sometimes called Dyaus-pitar, and he is none other than the Greek Zeus, the Latin Jupiter. Similarly, the Hindu god Mitra is the same as the Iranian god Mithra, whose worship spread in the Roman Empire.

Many modern Hindus continue to revere the Vedas and to make use of them for meditation and prayer, for they are capable of being understood in a symbolical sense. Traditionally they are the most sacred of all Hindu 'scriptures', heading the list of books which are classified as 'sruti' ('revelation'). The Sanskrit text was fixed about 600 B.C. and has been preserved since then with faultless accuracy. Their allusions to the various gods and their activities have formed the subjects of temple sculptures, images, dances and paintings, which are widely known and loved by many Hindus. Some of the Vedic prayers form part of the daily worship of the pious Hindu—particularly the sacred sentence known as the 'gayatri':

Let us meditate on the most excellent light of the Creator,
May he guide our intellects.

This is as popular in India as the Lord's Prayer is among Christians and is said by a pious Brahmin over two million times during his life.

Two points about Vedic religion should be noticed for their bearing upon later developments in Hinduism. 'Brahman', which later is the word denoting the One Reality behind all things, is not among the

names of gods in this early period. There is, however, one verse in the Rig-Veda which seems to hint at the idea of one great Reality:

They call him Indra, Mitra, Varuna, Agni,
And he is heavenly, noble-winged Garutman.
To what is one sages give many titles.
They call him Agni, Varuna, Matarisvan.
(I.164.48)

We should also notice that the first mention of the four 'castes' occurs in one of the latest of the Vedic hymns, showing that the beginnings of the traditional division into four castes dates from the late Vedic period. In the tenth hymn of the Rig-Veda we read:

The Brahman¹ was his (ie. Purusha's, the primal man) mouth,
of both his arms was the Rajanya made.
His thighs became the Vaisya, from his feet the Sudra was
produced.

(X.90.12)

This verse, then, claims that the division of men into the four castes—Brahmins (priests), Kshatriyas (warriors), (here called Rajanya), Vaisyas (settlers), and Sudras (slaves)—goes back to the beginning of the universe itself.

SECOND PHASE OF HINDUISM: THE UPANISHADS, BEGINNINGS OF RELIGIOUS PHILOSOPHY

By about 800 B.C. the Brahmins, the aristocratic and

¹ i.e., Brahmin, priest.

priestly class, had come to dominate Hinduism and under their influence the sacrifices had become all-important. This period is usually distinguished by scholars as the 'Brahmanic' age of Hinduism. The directions for offering sacrifices were contained in commentaries called 'Brahmanas', which gradually became attached to the four Vedas. The Brahmins came to regard themselves as super-men, or even, semi-divine, and this helped to reinforce the notion that the Brahmin is a superior person—an attitude which persisted in India for many centuries but which is gradually being broken down under the pressure of new social forces which now are at work. The modern Brahmin still sometimes claims that he was born superior to other men though by no means all of them perform a priestly function; indeed, the majority follow other occupations. The Brahmin priest is not a teacher; his main task is to study the sacred texts and to recite them at family ceremonies, such as births and marriages. A certain number work as temple priests but the chief class of priests are domestic priests, employed by a well-to-do family to officiate for the household. Though most temple priests are Brahmins, some, especially in South India, are not. The status of the funeral priest is lowest of all, since his work involves his becoming polluted through contact with the dead.

From about 700 B.C. onwards there appeared the first of India's early religious philosophers—men who pondered deeply on the meaning of life and the

nature of the great Reality behind and beyond all things. The conclusions of some of them became widely known and respected, and in time were written down and added to the Vedas and the Brahmanas to form a third group of sacred writings. They were called 'Upanishads', a name which originally meant the 'sitting' of pupils around a teacher and then came to mean 'secret teaching'. There were once probably more than three hundred Upanishads, but only thirteen of the really old ones have come down to us. They are together sometimes called the 'Vedanta' ('Veda-end') on the assumption that they teach explicitly what is already implicit in the earlier Vedas. In them we find the beginnings of that great stream of religious philosophy in Hinduism which for centuries has seemed to the more thoughtful Indians the most satisfying aspect of their religious traditions. Indeed, one of the most able European students of the Vedanta, Professor Deussen, has described its value thus:

No people on earth took religion so seriously, none toiled on the way to salvation as they did. Their reward for this was to have got, if not the most scientific, yet the most inward and immediate expression of the deepest secret of Being.

He also believes that the Upanishads mean as much to the Brahmin today as the New Testament does to the Christian.

Many volumes have been written about the

Upanishads and their teaching and we must content ourselves with noticing only one or two of their most important ideas. The first undoubtedly, and one which is found in all of them, is the belief that there is One Supreme Reality behind and beyond all things. In one Upanishad there is found this prayer,

From Unreality, lead me to Reality,
From darkness, lead me unto Light,
From death, lead me to Immortality.

This great Reality is called 'Brahman' in the Upanishads:

Verily in the beginning this was Brahman, that
Brahman knew (its) Self only, saying, 'I am Brahman'.
From It all this sprang.

Man has within himself something of this same Reality, usually called 'Atman' (Self).

The Atman which pervades all things. . . . This is
Brahman, the highest mystic doctrine.

The true aim of man's life should therefore be to realize for and in himself the One-ness of the Atman and the Brahman, for this will bring him release from the endless round of births, and bliss. In a well-known passage in the Chandogya Upanishad a father tells his son to put some salt in water. The salt disappears but is tasted in every part of the water. That, the father says, shows that the One Self is everywhere in the universe and is also present in each individual:

That which is the subtle essence, in it all that exists has its own self. It is the True. It is the Self, and thou, O Svetaketu, art It.

In this last sentence occur the words 'That art thou' (or 'Thou art That') in Sanskrit, 'tat tvam asi'. This short sentence is the kernel of the 'gospel' proclaimed in the Upanishads. Once a man can say this with full insight and understanding he has indeed become one with the Supreme Reality. According to Hindu philosophy this is the supreme discovery of man's life and his greatest blessedness. To reach this goal he must discipline his mind and spirit by meditation and self-discipline.

This 'gospel' of the Upanishads has to be seen against the background of their other teaching about the nature of human life. They declare that until he is 'released', man is destined to be reborn into an endless series of lives from which he cannot escape. The Sanskrit word for 'rebirth' is 'samsara', which means 'wandering', and one of the best-known passages in the Upanishads describes it thus:

As a caterpillar, after having reached the end of a blade of grass, and after having made another approach (to another blade of grass) draws itself together towards it, thus does this Self, after having thrown off this body and dispelled all ignorance, and after making another approach (to another body), draw himself together towards it.

Moreover, the shape of a man's next existence is

determined by his deeds (literally, his 'karma', 'work') in this one. Another famous passage tells how Artabhaga ask Yajnavalkya what happens to a person when his body ceases to live. Yajnavalkya says:

'Take my hand, my friend. We two alone shall know this; let this question of ours not be (discussed) in public.' Then these two went out and argued, and what they said was karma, what they praised was karma, viz. that a man becomes good by good work, and bad by bad work.

A verse of another Upanishad is more explicit:

Those whose conduct has been good, will quickly attain some good birth, the birth of a Brahmana, or a Kshatriya, or a Vaisya. But those whose conduct has been evil, will quickly attain an evil birth, the birth of a dog, or a hog, or a Chandala.¹

In India the prospect of rebirth has always seemed unpleasant because the material world has been held to be unreal—'illusion' ('maya'). This attitude is reflected in a verse from the Svetasvatara Upanishad which says:

Now one should know that Nature is illusion and that the Mighty Lord is the Illusion Maker.

The influence upon later Hinduism of the teaching contained in the Upanishads has been very great indeed. The Atman-Brahman ideal, as it is sometimes called, was expounded with great power by the

¹ Chandala—outcast.

philosopher Shankara in the eighth century A.D. and today continues to appeal strongly to thoughtful Hindus. The 'samara' and 'karma' beliefs are commonly accepted by all Hindus, whether they be gifted scholars or simple village farmers, in northern and central parts of India where Brahmanic influence has been strong. In some areas the belief in rebirth is so strong that divination is used when a man dies to try to find out what his next life is. Thus ashes are put out overnight; if they are found later with marks resembling human footprints, it means that the man has been reborn as a human being; if the marks are like claws, he is a bird—and so on. In the region of Bombay some Hindus believe that a man who died in debt has been reborn as a servant of his creditor.

THIRD PHASE—WORSHIP OF A PERSONAL GOD (BHAKTI)

At this point it may perhaps be asked: 'If the difficult teaching of the Upanishads appeals to comparatively few Hindus, how does Hinduism attract over 300,000,000 adherents?' Part of the answer is that at least 150,000,000 of them are worshippers of God in a more personal form—worshippers that is, of either Vishnu or Shiva, the gods whom we particularly noticed when we discussed the Vedic hymns. This type of Hinduism, so different in many ways from the philosophical religion expounded in the Upanishads, appeared first at about the beginning

of the Christian era and soon attracted large numbers of Hindus.

Like the earlier movements in Hinduism which we have glanced at it, too, has its roots in part of the sacred writings—the long poems called the 'Ramayana' and the 'Mahabharata'. The Ramayana (career of Rama) is a tale of northern India. It tells how king Rama rescued his faithful wife Sita, when she was carried off by the demon Ravana and Hanuman the monkey-god. In time the story was amplified to show that Rama was really the god Vishnu himself in human form. The idea that the great God could 'descend' to earth and take material form thus becomes an important part of this type of Hinduism.

The Mahabharata is even longer than the Ramayana. It tells the story of the war between the house of Bharata and a neighbouring north Indian tribe. The most important part of it is found in a section of the Sixth Book called the 'Bhagavad-Gita', the 'Song of the Blessed One'. The Gita, as it is often called, has become one of the most widely-known and loved of all the Hindu scriptures. It is in the form of a discussion between the warrior Arjuna and Krishna his charioteer. Krishna is gradually seen in fact to be the god Vishnu, again incarnate as a man. Arjuna is repelled by the idea that he must slay his kinsmen in battle. Krishna encourages him to do his duty as a warrior, but comforts him by telling him that those whom he must kill will not be destroyed because man is immortal. He also says that all dutiful actions must

be done without thought of reward. But his final message is the most important of all because it provides the basis for a new religious attitude. Whatever Arjuna does, let him do it out of devotion to Krishna: that will bring him the highest reward:

Have thy mind on me, be devoted to me, sacrifice to me, do reverence to me. To me shalt thou come; what is true I promise; dear art thou to me. Abandoning all duties come to me, the one refuge; I will free thee from all sins; sorrow not.

So while the message of the Gita was in line with earlier Brahmanic teaching that the material body is not a man's real self but only part of illusion, and that a man must work without desire or thought of reward, at the same time it added a new idea to the old—the idea of serving God out of devotion to Him and so finding refuge in Him.

From this addition to (or re-interpretation of) the 'gospel' of Hinduism sprang the powerful movement known as 'Bhakti'—'loving devotion' to a personal God—which persists to the present day as one of the strongest forces in Hinduism. It is expressed especially in the worship of Vishnu (and his 'avatars' or 'incarnations') and of Shiva. The worship of Krishna is one of the most popular among the Vaishnavites. Many legends have sprung up around his name and have formed a popular subject of Hindu art in its various forms. Krishna is associated with all forms of love. This has sometimes led to the growth of most

undesirable sexual rites which have brought discredit on the cult. But some of the best writers have interpreted the 'love' of Krishna in a higher, mystical sense. Some of the noblest Indian poetry was written by Vaishnavite worshippers in north-west India between the thirteenth and seventeenth centuries A.D. Here is a part of a poem by Tukaram, an outcaste grain seller, who was born in 1608 in the village of Dehu, about 18 miles north-west of Poona. It is addressed to Krishna:

Grant me to taste how sweet thou art;
 Grant me but this, I pray,
 And never shall my love depart
 Or turn from thee away.
 Then I thy name shall magnify
 And tell thy praise abroad,
 For very love and gladness I
 Shall dance before my God.
 Grant to me Vitthal,¹ that I rest
 Thy blessed feet beside;
 Ah, give me this, the dearest, best,
 And I am satisfied.

Psalms of the Maratha Saints, p. 66.
 ed. Macnicol, Oxford, 1919.

Shiva, as we saw earlier, was once connected with the storm-god Rudra. Since the storm is both beneficial and also destructive in its effects, it is not surprising to find that in Shaivite temples Shiva is worshipped in both these aspects. The goddess Shakti,

¹ Name given to one of the forms of Krishna.

in her various forms, is frequently associated with Shiva in worship. Shakti is a sort of Hindu Divine Mother-goddess and, like Nature itself and like Shiva, she too both creates and destroys. One of her less pleasant forms is Kali, the goddess of epidemics, earthquakes, floods and storms. From time to time ugly and bloody rites have taken place in connection with her worship. But, as with the worship of Vishnu, Shaivite worshippers have often interpreted their devotion to the god on very high levels. This was especially true of some of the Tamil-speaking peoples of south India between A.D. 600 and 1000, from whose hymns this one is taken. It is by Manikka Vasahar (tenth century ?) and addressed to Shiva:

Fool's friend was I, none such may know

The way of freedom; yet to me

He shewed the path of love, that so

Fruit of past deeds might ended be.

Cleansing my mind so foul, He made me like a god.

Ah who could win that which the Father hath bestowed?

Hymns of Tamil Saivite Saints, p. 127.

ed. Kingsbury & Phillips, Oxford, 1921.

There have been other Bhakti poets since, and Tulsidas in the sixteenth century is one of the best known. His poetry is still widely read and loved by many people in northern India. Bhakti has also had its philosophers, the greatest being Ramanuja (eleventh century) who opposed Shankara's teaching, saying that both the world and God are real, and that

devotion of man to God could be a reality too. The Bhakti movement and all that it stood for had such a strong appeal because it answered certain needs of the Indian people which Hinduism had till then failed to satisfy. It spoke of God as personal and said that men could love and serve Him and find in Him a refuge from the cares and evils of the world. The ordinary people of India (as of all lands) could easily understand this kind of religion. Secondly, Bhakti stressed the emotional side of religion and so provided for another need which till then Hinduism had failed to meet.

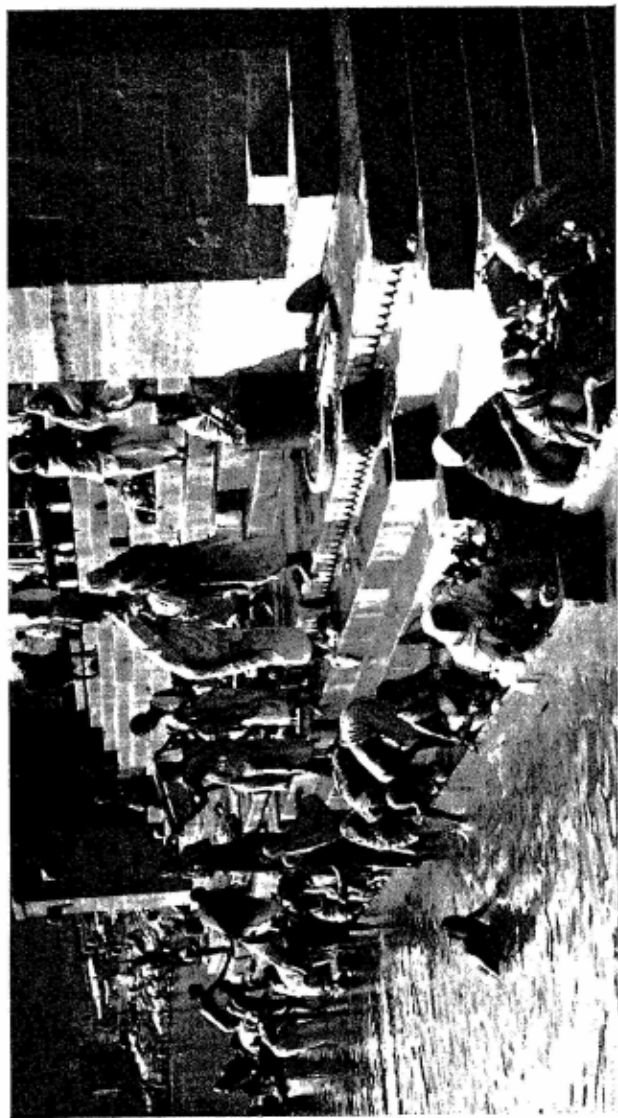
By the beginning of the Christian era then, the most important of the 'tributaries' had joined the 'main stream' of Hinduism to swell its flow and make it the broad stream of Indian religious life which it has remained ever since. There have been periods of decay and fresh revival and there have been various reform movements in the last one hundred and fifty years which have revealed the continuing strength of this great religion. In the main, however, Hindu religious life has continued to move along in the channels made for it by the earlier movements which we have noted.

Religious worship in India continues to be offered mainly in the prayer-room of the Hindu house where stand the images or symbols of the gods. The image may be in human form and is often treated as though it were a real person—fed, washed and dressed. Or it may be simply a stone. Worship is offered not only

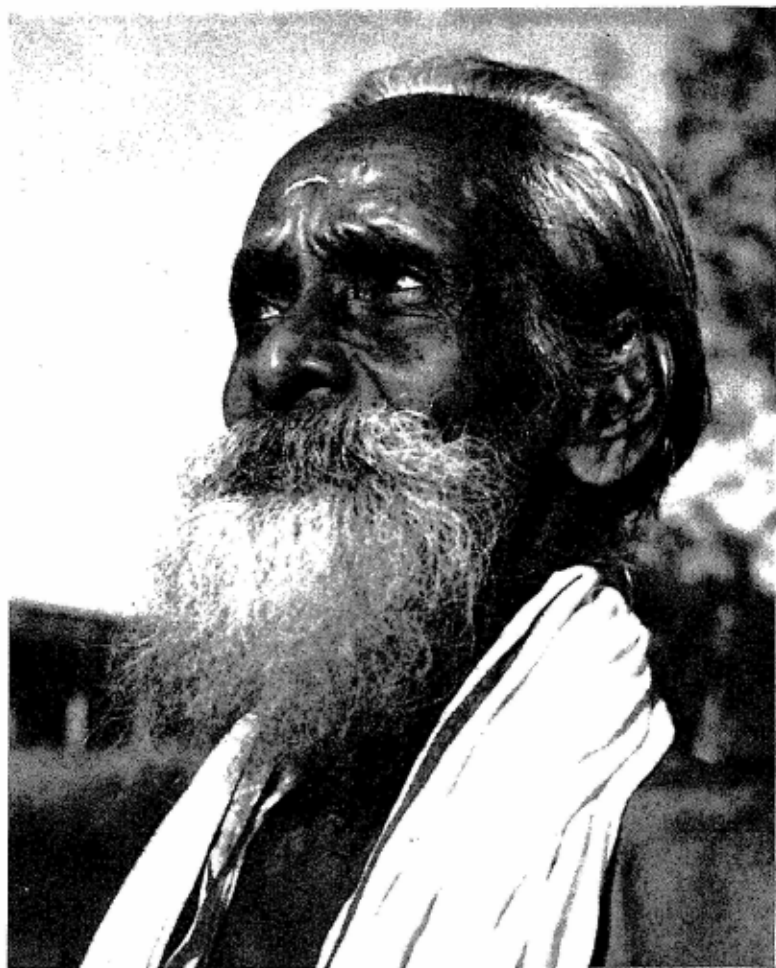
by reciting of the sacred sentences from the Vedas but also by the placing of flowers and the lighting of lamps before the god's image. Here, too, and not in the temple, the rituals connected with family life, birthdays, initiations, marriages and funerals, are carried out. A boy born into a family which belongs to one of the three upper castes, Brahmins, Kshatriyas or Vaisyas, assumes his full religious responsibilities in his eighth year when he is invested with the sacred thread in a ceremony called 'upanayan'. This marks his second, spiritual, birth—he becomes 'twice-born', able thereafter to participate fully in religious worship.

The knowledge of religious ritual and of the sacred scriptures in general is kept alive by devout and scholarly Brahmins who spend much time studying them. Holy men and ascetics practise the life of self-denial and meditation. There are numerous Hindu temples in India today—especially in the south. They are used for congregational worship only on the occasions of the great festivals held to honour particular gods or goddesses, or to commemorate important events in their religious traditions, or the seasons of the year. At other times the temples are visited by individuals who go at least once or twice a year to make their offerings.

Much of the old nature-worship still persists from earlier centuries among the simple village folk. More widespread survivals of the same kind are the beliefs in the sacredness of the cow and of the waters of the



1. Hindu pilgrims beside the waters of the sacred Ganges river at Benares.



2. This high-caste Brahmin priest lives in a village in Madras State.

River Ganges. Every year crowds of devout Hindus make pilgrimages to Benares and other places on the Ganges to bathe in its waters and so obtain merit. It is the hope of every pious Hindu that after death, his body may be cremated on the banks of the sacred river and his ashes cast upon her waters.

Thus it is that Hinduism manages to attract to itself all types of people in India, the simple villager, the busy merchant, the able politician and administrator, and the learned thinker. Every man, woman and child may practise those aspects of the religious life which appeal to them. To some extent this has been true of all the great religions of the world. Even Islam, which is on the whole the most dogmatic and authoritarian of them, has found room for its profound philosophers and deeply-feeling mystics, while at the same time satisfying the religious needs of many a simple village farmer. But in none of the great religions of the world is this comprehensiveness more marked than in Hinduism. This is because, as Professor Radhakrishnan, one of the greatest of modern Hindu philosophers, puts it:

Hinduism is a movement, not a position; a process, not a result; a growing tradition, not a fixed revelation.

The Hindu View of Life, p. 129. London.

7

JAINS

SOME of the more splendid temples to be seen in India, belong, not to Hindus, but to the Jains. Though they now number no more than 1,500,000, the Jains have had considerable influence upon the life of India. They have built hundreds of beautiful temples. They have preached and practised 'ahimsa', non-violence—a principle Mahatma Ghandi practised assiduously in the struggle for Indian independence. The pious Jain also understood 'ahimsa' to mean that he must at all costs avoid destroying any form of life, even the insects. This led the Jains to avoid agricultural occupations and others which had directly to do with animal products, and so many of them entered banking and commerce. In time they thus became successful business men, with all the influence which such positions carried with them.

The odd thing about this religion with its many impressive temples, is that it does not believe in gods as superior beings or worship them for their superior

qualities. The temples are mostly places where honour is paid to the twenty-four 'Jainas' ('conquerors') or Tirthankaras ('ford-finders') who have appeared at different periods of history, to teach men, and lead them over the 'ocean of transmigration' to the haven of 'Isatpragbhara'—the place of bliss. The last of this long line was Mahavira, the traditional founder of Jainism, who is believed to have lived from 599–527 B.C.

The Jains believe that Mahavira (Great Man or Hero) was, like Gautama, the Buddha, a member, not of the highest or Brahmin caste, but of the second the Kshatriyas. Like Gautama also, he grew up in luxurious surroundings but left his family when he was thirty-one, to become an ascetic. After twelve years of extreme self-denial and zealous meditation, he finally won true insight into the meaning of life and became a 'Jina'. The next thirty years he spent travelling about India preaching and helping others to take the same spiritual road which he had taken. He died in his seventy-second year and so 'cut the final ties of birth, old age and death'. He now enjoys supreme bliss in Isatpragbhara, the place of reward.

It will be clear from what has been said of this religion so far, that it shares the basic view of Hinduism about the nature of human existence. That is, that any living creature, man included, is living just one existence in a long chain or cycle of births and rebirths (samsara), and that a man's deeds determine the nature of his next existence. Indeed, the Jains

carried the idea of Karma even further, declaring that they are of two principal types—good works, which collect like a deposit on the soul, make it light and so help it to rise upwards towards the place of reward; and evil deeds, which form a heavy deposit on the soul and keep it tied down to the material world in the endless cycle of existence.

In other respects, however, Jainism was opposed to Hindu beliefs and practice. It denied that the offering of sacrifices could avail to win release and so opposed the traditional authority of the Brahmins. Though it conceded that gods exist, it denied that there was a single, Supreme Reality, called Brahman-Atman and refused to accept that the world had come into existence through the activity of such a Being. Indeed, it looked upon the 'gods' of Hindu tradition with pity rather than reverence, declaring that before they can win release they must be re-born as men, since the path to the place of reward can be successfully trodden only by those souls who have attained a human existence.

Mahavira encouraged his followers to form themselves into communities of monks, so that they could forsake the world and practise the austere discipline of body and mind which, he said, was the only way in which they could hope to get to the place of bliss. He enjoined upon them five sacred vows—not to kill (ahimsa), not to speak untruth, not to steal, to practise continence, and to renounce pleasure in all outside things.

Of these vows, 'ahimsa' is perhaps the most striking because, carried out to the letter, it involves the Jain monk in the most exacting care every minute of his waking life. Not only must he be a strict vegetarian but he must also strain every drop of water he uses for fear of destroying insects; refuse to eat honey and some kinds of vegetables; and examine all food to remove from it completely any eggs, worms, or cobwebs which it may contain. As he walks about he must cover his mouth to prevent him from inhaling insects, and must sweep the ground before him with a broom (of peacock's feathers) to avoid treading on any tiny creatures. One practical and valuable outcome of all this has been that the Jains have set up several animal hospitals in which they lavish care upon cattle and birds.

The layman is obviously not able, nor is he expected, to carry out these vows as fully as the monk is required to do. Nevertheless, he has to observe a less exacting set of rules. He must never knowingly take the life of any living creature and so he cannot till the soil, nor engage in butchering, fishing, brewing, or any occupation involving the destruction of life. He must not lie or steal; he must be chaste, faithful to husband or wife, and pure in thought and word. He must check greed, by putting a limit on his possessions, and giving some away if necessary. He must set aside regular periods for meditation, spend occasional days as a monk, and give alms, especially to support the monks. While, as we

noticed, the practice of 'ahimsa' by the Jain laymen has led them to become influential bankers, lawyers, merchants and landowners, their strict discipline and unselfish lives have earned them great respect in the communities in which they have lived.

The sayings of Mahavira and numerous traditions about him have come down through the centuries in the form of 'scriptures' which exist in different forms in the main sects of the Jains. The two most important sects are the more liberal Shvetambaras, who admit women to their monastic orders, and the more conservative Digambaras, who remember Mahavira's saying that women are 'the greatest temptation in the world' and 'the cause of sinful acts'. They not only refuse to allow women to join monastic orders, but debar them from the temples as well. They believe that women cannot win salvation until they have been reborn as men.

In the earlier centuries of its existence, Jainism flourished in many parts of India, as is evidenced by the existence of Jain temples in places where its influence has since dwindled. Today its main strongholds are mainly in the north of Bombay, especially in Gujarat and Rajputana, but a few centres are still to be found in the south also. The most sacred city of Satrunjaya (or Politana) in Gujarat is a city of Jain temples only—863 in all—and no other buildings whatever. They stand, we are told, in 'street after street, and square after square, . . . with their stately enclosures, half palace, half fortress, raised, in marble

magnificence upon the lonely and majestic mountain'. Other famous temples are to be seen in Gwalior, in the United Provinces, and at Mount Parasnath in Bihar, which was once the centre of Jain worship in eastern India.

Mahavira was emphatic that praying to the gods was pointless:

Man, thou art thine own friend. Why wishest thou
for a friend beyond thyself?

Yet, as time went on, his followers came to believe that he was a divine being, as were the twenty-three teachers who had preceded him. Gradually temples were erected in honour of these Tirthankaras, whose images came to occupy a central place in the ceremonies which took place there. The principal image is often made of white alabaster, to symbolize the purified state to which the Tirthankara has attained, and it is regularly washed and adorned to the accompaniment of song and offerings. The Jain sometimes defends these apparently anomalous practices by saying that the image itself is not an object of worship but a means of stimulating his efforts towards a passionless renunciation of the world.

The main plan of the Jain temples follows a fairly regular pattern—a portal and colonnades, an open courtyard or nave, and a main shrine to house the images. The principal image in the temple will be of the Tirthankara or Jina in whose honour it has been erected, but it will be surrounded by smaller images

of the other twenty-three Jinas. Another sacred object is the saint wheel—a round tray made of brass or silver, on which are carved figures of the Tirthankaras and other holy men.

The rituals for daily meditation and special festivals in the temples vary from one sect to another. A pious member of the Shvetambara sect meditates in the temple daily on the Three Jewels of his faith—Right, Knowledge, Faith and Conduct. The chief images are washed and anointed and an offering of rice presented before them. Rosaries are sometimes used to assist in meditation. In the Digambara temples, on the other hand, it is more usual for the ritual to be conducted on behalf of a whole group of the faithful by a minister whose principal task is also to maintain the temple.

Because the Jain communities in India today tend to form closed circles of believers, they do not grow in numbers. Yet their numerical insignificance nowadays is no measure of the influence which their faith has exerted upon the life of India as a whole. The simplicity and the clarity of Jainism, like that of Indian Buddhism, has appealed to many to whom the teaching of the Brahmins seemed complex and even confusing. Unlike Buddhism, Jainism refused to be driven out of India. Because it remained there and survived as a separate faith, it has been able to contribute in no small measure to both the architecture and to the social ideals of India as a whole.

8

SIKHS

IN THE FAR NORTH of India, where four great rivers flow southwards to join the Indus, is the Punjab. There it was that, only about four hundred and fifty years ago, the Sikh religion attracted its first followers. Its adherents are not very numerous today, as numbers go in the vast continent of India. There are about 6,000,000 of them altogether—mostly in the great cities of Amritsar and Lahore and other smaller towns and the villages of the Punjab. The chief temple of the Sikhs is the Golden Temple in Amritsar, built on an island in the middle of the artificially constructed lake: it is approached by a causeway some 200 ft. in length, and is three storeys high, the gilded upper half surmounted with a copper dome.

This very young Indian religion combines in itself something of both the Muslim and the Hindu faiths. It is also a scriptural religion, which holds its sacred writings in even greater reverence than Christians do

the Bible and Muslims the Qur'an. At heart it is a faith which extols the virtues of quietness, peacefulness and humility. Yet, as we shall see, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries it changed into a fiercely militant religion. When the British finally subdued them in 1849, the Sikhs became loyal allies of Queen Victoria and it was their last ruler, Maharaja Dhulip Singh, who presented to the queen the famous Koh-i-noor diamond as a token of his esteem and friendship.

'Sikh' means 'disciple' and the first of the Sikhs were followers of Guru (teacher) Nanak who preached that salvation comes by belief in God the 'Kindly', the True Name. Nanak was the son of a Hindu village accountant and farmer. He eventually became the manager of a government store in the north Indian town of Sultanpur and spent much of his time in meditation and hymn-singing. Before long he had attracted a small group of men who became the nucleus of his early followers.

Like other great religious leaders, Nanak experienced a crisis in his religious life. Alone one day in the forest, he felt that he was transported into the very presence of God. God told him: 'I am with thee. Go and repeat my Name and cause others to do likewise.' At the end of this unforgettable experience of being 'called' by God, Nanak is said to have uttered the famous Hymn of Adoration, the Japji, the prayer with which every pious Sikh opens his morning devotions:

'There is but One God, whose name is True, the Creator, devoid of fear and enmity, immortal, unborn, self-existent, great and bountiful;

The True One was in the beginning, The True One was in the primal age.

The True One is, was, O Nanak, and the True One shall also be.'

For three days Nanak remained alone in the forest and then emerged but remained silent for yet another day. But on the next day he uttered the words which showed the type of message he was to proclaim throughout a long and arduous preaching tour in north and west India and beyond, which aimed at winning men to the knowledge of the true God:

'There is no Hindu and no Musalman.'

Startling as Nanak's message must have been to the Hindus and Muslims who first heard it, it was not altogether new. Nanak himself made no secret of the fact that he had learned much from the teaching of the contemporary poet-preacher Kabir, who travelled through north India attacking the ritualism of both Brahmins and Muslims, and declaring that men could be saved by the love of God.

It was not until Nanak and his followers reached the Punjab that their preaching had any notable success. Here they attracted groups of disciples and the towns and villages of the Punjab gradually came to be, as they remain to this day, the main centre of the Sikh religion.

It must not be thought that Nanak denounced all the beliefs of Hinduism and Islam. It was their rituals that he attacked—idols, ceremonies, fasting and ascetism. He had a Quaker-like distrust of all external forms of worship, because he felt that they distracted men from God instead of leading them to him. He also disliked the giving of many different names to the one God—names like Allah, Rama, Shiva and others. For God, the True Name, though he is known in many ways, many places and by many names, is eternally One. If any name is to be used, then it should be Hari (the Kindly), because that best describes God's character.

He believed, with the Muslims, that there is only one True God, but taught in Hindu fashion, that God is within, not wholly beyond man. He agreed with the Hindus also, that the material world is unreal; that deeds determine the nature of men's re-births. To win release, man needs only to purify his heart and rest in God within him:

'The Lord who created the world and again drew it within himself, is known by his omnipotence.

'Search not for the True One afar off: He is in every heart, and is known by the Guru's instruction.'

The 'instruction' which Nanak imparted to his followers was contained in the poems which he composed. It was natural that, after his death, the poems should have been carefully collected and used regularly by those who survived him. It was in this man-

ner that the Sikh religion gradually began to attach more and more importance to the preservation and knowledge of its sacred scriptures. The 'Granth', as these scriptures are called, also includes many hymns composed by later Gurus, especially those of Guru Arjun (1581-1606). Arjun set himself the task of making a complete collection of the Sikh scriptures so that they would be preserved for future generations. To the poems of Nanak, and his own, were added some from Kabir and other Indian poets, including, of course, some composed by the three other Gurus who had preceded him.

A copy of the Granth is kept in the Sikh temples and greatly honoured by the worshippers. It is wrapped in the finest cloth, and a fly-switch, decorated with silver, is kept near it with which it can be protected from insects. A worshipper in a Sikh temple always pauses before the Granth with bowed head and folded hands as an outward sign of reverence for the teaching it contains. In the morning, the Granth is carried ceremonially into the temple from the treasury where it is kept overnight and in the evening it is escorted back in similar fashion. At Amritsar the treasury stands at the opposite end of the causeway from the temple and is guarded by soldiers. There the Granth is carried to and fro in a large ark of silver, covered with fine cloth and flowers, borne on the shoulders of six men. Every devout Sikh keeps a copy of the Granth in a special room in his house and reads a portion of it each day. Copies

of it can be bought freely in the Punjab and at other places in India and Sikhs are often to be seen reading it in public.

Worship in a Sikh temple is congregational in character. In this it follows Muslim practice rather than Hindu which, as we saw earlier, mostly encourages the use of the temples for individual worship. Services begin with a procession around the temple to pay respect to the Granth; they also include a sermon and prayers, and the recital of a passage from the Granth, together with the distribution of 'communion food'. This food is a sweetmeat made from butter, sugar, and flour. The regular distribution of it is believed to have been instituted by Guru Nanak in order to emphasize that all Sikhs are brethren and can eat together—in direct opposition to the Hindu practice which forbade men of different castes to eat together. For the same reason every Sikh will make a point of sharing his own food with others and will often contribute towards the cost of running the 'Free Kitchens' at which all visitors are lodged and fed freely for three days, whatever their religion may be.

Entry into the Sikh brotherhood is by means of an initiation ceremony, called Amrita, which is a form of baptism. The ceremony takes place before the Granth and in the presence of five baptized Sikhs. The initiates, having bathed, present themselves wearing the five 'K's, the marks of the Khalsa—the Pure. (1) The Kes or long hair on head and chin,

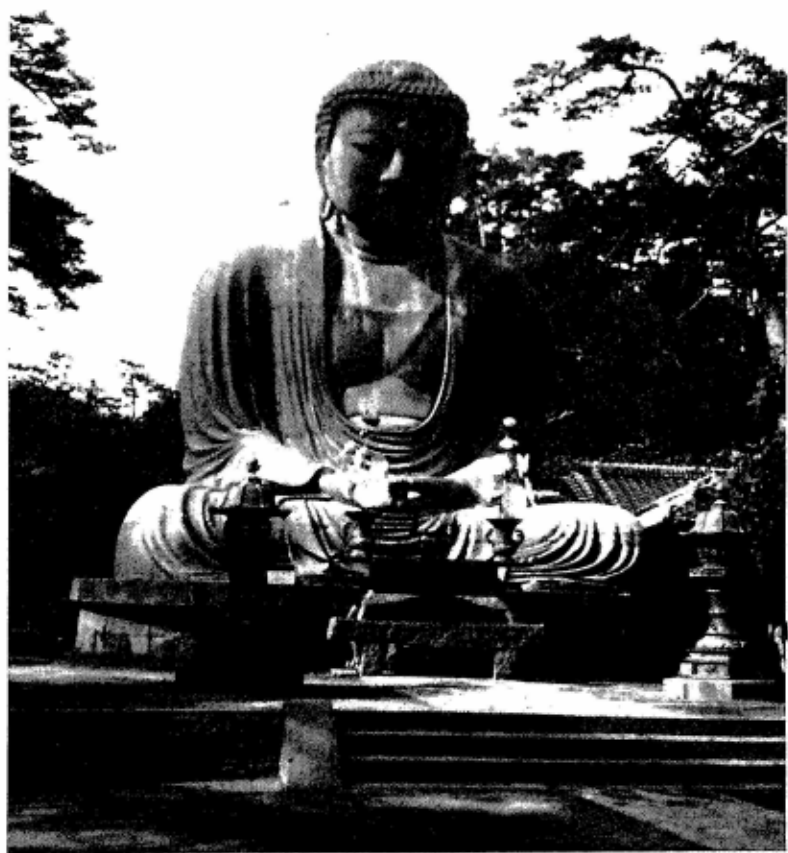
(2) the Kangha or comb, (3) the Kachk, short drawers, (4) the Kara, a steel bracelet, and (5) the Khanda or steel dagger. They are reminded of the Sikh faith and declare their acceptance of it. Then the amrita, or necta of immortality, is prepared in an iron vessel and the leader stirs it with a two-edged sword. The candidates kneel and repeat part of the Japji and come, kneeling, to receive into their cupped hands, five handfuls of the amrita. Their eyes and hair are also sprinkled with it and they utter the sacred and ancient war-cry of the Sikh warrior—the Wahiguru—"The Pure are of God". They take a vow of obedience and promise to pray, pay tithes, and to observe the dress and customs of the Sikh community. Then the sacred food is distributed and all the newly-initiated Sikhs eat it from the same dish to emphasize their brotherhood in the community. The initiate is now entitled to bear the name 'Singh', 'Lion'.

This initiation ceremony was first instituted by the tenth and last Guru, Govind Singh (1675-1708) as a means of testing the sincerity of those of his followers upon whom he could depend to fight against the Muslims. For a hundred years the Gurus who succeeded Nanak were peaceable men, spiritual leaders in the full sense of the term. But from the beginning of the eighteenth century the Sikhs had to face increasing hostility from the Muslims and the sixth Guru, Har Govind, became a military as well as a religious leader, who encouraged his followers

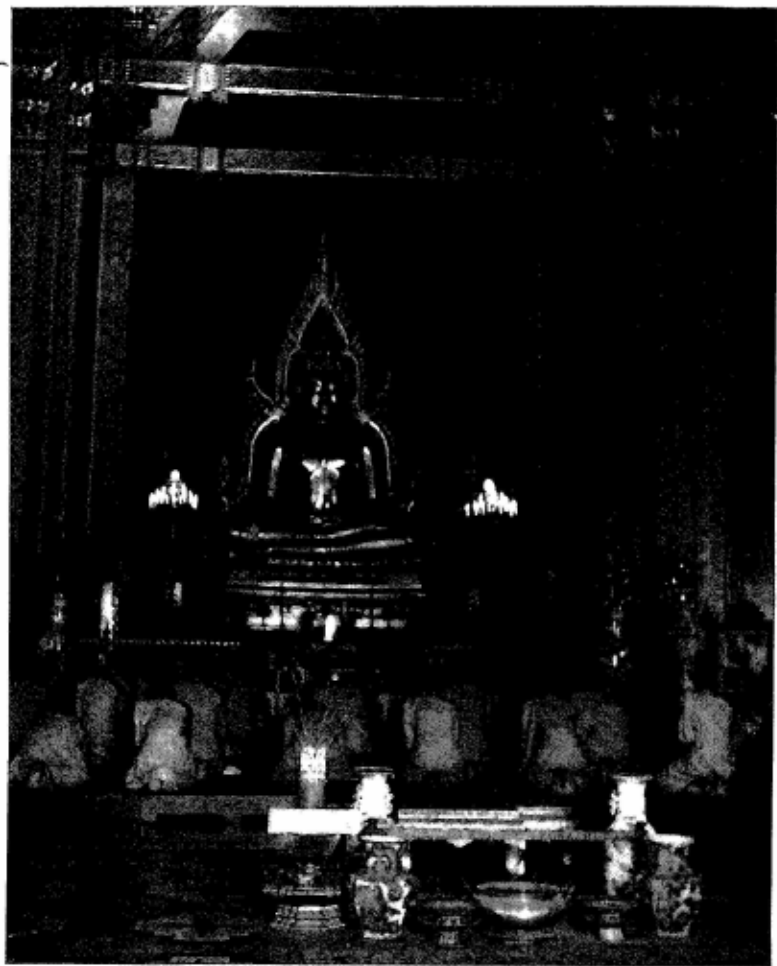
to fight against the Muslims. This state of affairs continued under the last four Gurus, though before Govind Singh died at the hand of an assassin, he convinced the community that henceforth the only Guru that they needed was the sacred Granth. This did not affect their military successes: they won many battles and eventually dominated the Punjab.

After their surrender to the British, they remained loyal supporters of British rule in India. When India was partitioned in 1947, their homeland was divided between India and Pakistan and this caused the Sikhs great bitterness and led them to attack both Hindus and Muslims. Since then, nearly all the Sikhs have left Pakistan and settled in India, where the government has given them full religious freedom.

It is impossible not to feel that the transformation of the original gospel of Nanak into a militaristic religion was a calamity. However strong the provocation which led the Sikhs to take up arms in defence of their religious and social freedom, this period in their history reveals a sad decline from the spiritual and unifying principles which were so strongly at work in the early days. In fairness, it has to be remembered that this same kind of tragedy has overtaken other and greater religious movements also, at certain periods in their history—notably Islam and to a lesser degree Christianity. This is one of the great calamities in man's religious history, that he has sometimes sought to defend his right to worship



3. Statue of the Buddha—Kamakura, Japan.



4. Buddhist monks engage in meditation in a Temple in Bangkok, Thailand.

SIKHS

or to spread that worship, by resorting to practices which were contrary to the kind of life which the worship itself was meant to foster. Perhaps some of the reform movements which are at work at the present time in the Sikh communities will eventually bring about the kind of spiritual transformation which is essential if the Sikh religion is to make a lasting contribution to the religious life of India.

9

PARSIS

THE PARSIS form another and very small religious minority in India. There are only about 100,000 of them living in various parts of the country and about half are to be found in and around the city of Bombay. Visitors to this city very soon notice them for Parsi men wear remarkable hats—either a round stiff grey felt with a coloured rim, or else the high varnished, paper-covered ‘cow-heel’ hat, which slopes back from the forehead. The ladies are also conspicuous in their brightly coloured saris, which they wear folded daintily across their black hair over dresses in European styles. The Parsis form separate communities in the cities of India, holding to their own religious beliefs and worshipping in their distinctive fashion.

The home of their religion was Iran, where some 11,000 of their co-religionists, called there the Gabars, are still to be found living in scattered groups. In the eighth century A.D. their country was

overrun by the Muslim armies and to escape from the sword of Islam the ancestors of the Parsis fled for refuge to India. Here, down the centuries to the present day, the Parsis have been able to keep alive this ancient Persian religion which we in the West know as Zoroastrianism.

Zoroaster, or more correctly Zarathushtra, was a prophet who tried to reform the religion of Persia which, as we have already noticed, was historically connected with the ancient religion of Greece and Rome on the one hand, and to the Vedic religion of India on the other.

When we try to extract from the Zoroastrian scriptures information about the life and work of the prophet, we find that most of it is legendary and probably unreliable and that we are left with very little solid information. The little that can be discovered about Zarathushtra and his message comes from those few sections of the scriptures which seem to have come down to us from the time of the prophet himself—The Gathas, the approximate equivalent in Zoroastrianism of the Gospels in the New Testament. There has even been some disagreement among scholars as to the time at which the prophet lived. The traditional date of his birth is 660 B.C., but some scholars think that he may have lived much earlier, possibly about 1000 B.C.

The Gathas ('Songs' or 'Odes') resemble the Gospels in the New Testament not, of course, in detail but in so far as they contain the teaching of Zoro-

thushtara and practically nothing about the prophet himself. There are five Gathas in all, containing seventeen poems totalling in all nine hundred lines. To the Gathas were later added two other collections of sacred writings—the 'Yashts' or 'Sacrificial hymns', and the 'Vendidad', the 'Law against Demons'. Together these make up the 'Avesta' ('Scriptures'). The Parsi scriptures today also include some later writings in the language called 'Pahlavi'. This was a dialect of Persian and was in use during the time of the Sassanian kings of Persia (A.D. 226–641). So these sections of the Parsi scriptures tell us something of the beliefs and practices of Zoroastrianism at this later time and after the Muslim conquest.

The Avesta must once have been much larger than it is today. It was jealously guarded by the priests, but it is said that when Alexander the Great was celebrating his victory over the Persians, he allowed his followers late one night after a banquet, to set fire to the buildings in Persepolis where the most precious of the sacred books were kept. This was in 330 B.C. and it was six or seven hundred years later before serious efforts were made to try to collect together and edit what were left of the sacred books. By then, alas, many of them had been irretrievably lost.

Zarathushtra was probably born in western Iran, and grew up in an agricultural community whose chief means of livelihood was cattle-breeding. He

seems to have believed that the Great God, whom he called Ahura Mazda (Wise Lord), was calling him to proclaim a simple message of comfort to his people in the hardships of their daily life, and to urge them to live upright lives.

Zarathushtra stands high above his contemporaries in the religious sphere because his faith and message stemmed from his conviction that there was but One God who demanded that men should live and work for the good as against the evil. Like the great Hebrew prophets, the prophet of Iran was called to his work by God Himself:

‘I was ordained at the first by Thee: all others I look upon with hatred of spirit.

‘As the Holy One I recognised Thee, Mazda Ahura, when Good Thought came to me and asked me, “Who art thou? To whom dost thou belong? by what sign wilt thou appoint the days for questioning about thy possessions and thyself?”

‘Then I said to him: “To the first (question) Zarathushtra am I, true foe to the Liar, to the utmost of my power, but a powerful support would I be to the Righteous, that I may attain the future things of the Infinite Dominion, according as I praise and sing thee, Mazda.”’

The prophet called his people to live just lives characterized by good speech, good thought and good deeds and in doing this to oppose all falsehood. He believed that evil forces were at work in the world which derived from the evil spirit, Angra Mainyu.

In later Zoroastrian writings the evil spirit seems to be almost as powerful as Ahura himself. In these writings also both the good spirit Ahura, and the evil spirit, are served by numbers of ministering spirits. In the Gathas, however, Ahura Mazda seems supreme and is endowed with six attributes but not attended by ministering angels.

At all events, the prophet's message is quite clear. Those who serve Ahura Mazda will be rewarded with a happy hereafter, but those who follow the Lie will be punished. Heaven is described as the place of 'Best Thought', 'Best Existence', 'The House of Song'.

Man possesses a Self (Daena). The prophet declared that when a man dies this Self survives the death of the body and so carries over into the hereafter a man's essential character. The Gathas speak frequently of the 'Cinvant Bridge', The Bridge of the Separator, across which men have to go on their journey from this world to the next. When a man crosses it he finds his Self awaiting him on the other side. The later scriptures say that the Self of the good man comes to meet him in the form of a beautiful maiden, while that of the bad man comes to him as an ugly old hag.

We can see therefore just how strong was the call of Zarathushtra to live the good life. Each man was free to choose whether to side with Right or Wrong and to shape his own character. At the end of this life God would judge each man by the character he

had made for himself and reward him accordingly.

Parsism today keeps alive much of the spirit and outlook of the great Persian prophet, but its faith and religious ceremonials also include a good deal from later Persian religion, including the belief that fire and earth are sacred. This belief has been perpetuated and forms the basis of two of the most prominent parts of the Parsi religious ceremonial. In even the smallest of the Parsi communities, a fire temple—called Dar-i-Meher, Door of Mithra—exists in which the sacred flame is kept burning continuously, and forms the focal-point of the worship of the community. Because earth is so sacred, the Parsis will not bury their dead nor, because of the sacred nature of fire, will they follow the Hindu custom of cremation. Instead, they expose the corpses of their dead at the top of specially constructed 'Dakhmas' or Towers of Silence, so that the flesh may be consumed by vultures. Later the bones are collected and cast into a central well, where they are allowed to crumble away.

It must not be thought that Parsis worship the fire any more than Christians worship the cross on the altars in their churches: fire is to the Parsi a symbol of the purity of God. Since the Parsi communities vary in size, not all the fire temples are of the same type. A house or very small temple in which burns the sacred fire is the most inferior type. Then there is an intermediate type of temple which can be erected where there are at least ten Parsi families

living. And in the largest communities, temples of the first grade are erected, but there are less than a dozen of them in existence altogether. The distinguishing features of the sacred fires in these three types of temples concern the manner in which they are prepared and for the temples of the top grade the process is long, complicated and expensive.

The fire itself burns in an urn which is set on a raised stone beneath the domed roof of the temple and on the roof above the urn is a 'crown' of bronze, reminding the worshippers that the sacred fire also symbolizes the 'kingly' character of God. The urn is arranged in such a way that the sun's rays do not fall on it and so seem to dim its light. The urn reposes in a sanctuary which can be entered only by priests, who come barefoot to put fresh sandalwood on the fire and to remove the cinders. This is done five times a day or more and the priest must have his mouth covered to prevent his breath from defiling the fire.

The priests watch over and hand down, through their teaching, the traditions of the religion. Priesthood is hereditary and at the head of the order stands the Dastur or high priest, whose opinions are sought on all questions which arise concerning doctrine and ceremonial. It is not obligatory however for the son of a priest himself to enter the priesthood and many choose to remain laymen and enter a profession or commerce. The high priest can easily be recognized when he is performing his sacred functions by the handsome shawl which he wears.

Boys and girls are initiated into full membership of their religion by means of a ceremony known as 'Naojote', which is a kind of 'confirmation' service. It takes place between the ages of seven and fifteen years and the most important feature is the investing of the young candidate with the 'kusti' or sacred thread and the shirt ('sudrah'). The ceremony is held in a room adjoining the fire temple, so that immediately afterwards, the priest may take the child to do reverence before the sacred fire. The 'kusti' is a thread specially woven by the women of priestly family and worn around the waist. Once invested with it, the devout young Parsi wears it every day beneath whatever clothes he puts on. He learns to fasten it each morning, and untie it at night, in the traditional manner, saying awhile certain prescribed prayers. The service of initiation is one of the most solemn moments in the religious life of a boy or girl of a devout Parsi family. At the appropriate moment he or she recites the confession of faith:

'O Almighty, come to my help. I am a worshipper of God. I am a Zoroastrian worshipper of God. I agree to praise the Zoroastrian religion, and to believe in that religion. I praise good thoughts, good words and good deeds. I praise the good Mazdayasnian religion which curtails discussions and quarrels, which brings about kinship of brotherhood, which is holy, and which, of all the religions that have yet flourished and are likely to flourish in the future, is the greatest, the best and most excellent, and which is the religion given by God by

Zarathushtra. I believe that all good things proceed from God. May the Mazdayasnian religion be thus praised.'

This creed is recited every day by a pious Parsi and it is also used frequently in the course of his worship in the temple. He may visit the temple daily: certainly he will do so on the sacred days of the month. He worships in the temple as an individual, for the temple worship is not of a congregational type. As he approaches the door of the temple he removes his shoes, washes his hands and feet, and then approaches the sanctuary, confessing his sins as he goes and there receives into his hands from the priest ashes from the sacred fire. His prayers may include the recitation of certain well-known passages from the scriptures but certainly will also include prayers in his own tongue about the affairs of daily life. A worshipper leaving the temple remains facing the sacred fire as he walks backwards towards the exit. Because worship is thus individual and not congregational, it is not therefore conducted by priests nor does it include the preaching of sermons.

The special festivals of the Parsi religion are celebrated on the sacred days of the year, of which New Year's Day is especially important. There is some difference of opinion within the Parsi communities as to its precise date, some observe it in August and others in September. Other special occasions are concerned with anniversaries of various kinds and among the most important of these are the days on

which the departed are remembered. This is the Farvardin festival, which lasts for ten days. On these days it is believed that the departed return to visit the homes of their descendants. The worshippers welcome them by attending special ceremonies for the dead which are held near the Towers of Silence. The birth and death of Zarathushtra are also celebrated among the sacred days of the Parsi year.

Thus the message of the ancient prophet of Iran is still kept alive in the Parsi communities in India. It is well to remember, however, that his preaching may possibly have had some influence also upon the Jewish religion and hence, through the Old Testament, upon Christianity itself. About this we cannot be absolutely certain, but since Jewish religious writings from about 200 B.C. onwards do contain statements about Satan as the adversary of God, about the great archangels Michael, Gabriel, Raphael and others, and about God weighing men's deeds in the balances in the 'Last Judgement', it does seem possible that these notions may have been given fresh importance in Jewish thought as a result of the contacts between the Jews and their Persian overlords during the preceding centuries. Some scholars indeed have argued that King Cyrus, who allowed the Jewish exiles to return to Palestine in 536 B.C. was himself a follower of Zarathushtra's reform of the old Persian religion. Whether this be so or not, it seems fairly certain that his successor Darius, who is also frequently mentioned in the later books of the Old

Testament, was a follower of the prophet. For there has come down to us one of his inscriptions which seems to contain his creed:

A Great God is Ahuramazda, who created this earth,
who created yon heaven, who created man, who created
welfare for man, who made Darius king, one king of
many, one lord of many.

This seems strongly to bear out the suggestion that some Jews were brought directly into touch with Zoroastrianism.

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IN NORTH-EASTERN INDIA, about a hundred miles south of Benares, lies a village called Bodhgaya. Those who are able to visit this place are shown a great tree and told that it is the famous 'Bodhi Tree' or 'Tree of Enlightenment', beneath which Gautama sat and, after a long period of meditation, finally perceived clearly those truths about man's existence which he afterwards spent his life passing on to others. There is little doubt that the original Bodhi Tree has long since disappeared, but the one that stands there now may well have sprung from it. Be that as it may, we can be pretty sure that this was the place where Gautama became the 'Buddha' or 'Enlightened One' whom millions of Buddhists were to revere as the one who taught them the truth and showed them the way of salvation. So far as we can tell, there are something like 500 million Buddhists today, and when we remember that Buddhism is 2,500 years old we get some idea of the tremendous

influence which the life and teaching of Gautama the Buddha has had upon a very large part of the human race.

From quite early times Buddhist beliefs and practice developed in two distinct ways. The religion which we shall consider in this chapter is that which is practised nowadays in Ceylon, Burma, Thailand, Cambodia and Laos, and is known by its followers as 'Theravada'—'the doctrine of the elders'. Until recently it was more often called 'Hinayana', 'lesser vehicle', but this was a rather derogatory title used by members of the various sects of the other type of Buddhism, the 'Mahayana', 'greater vehicle'. The Theravadins naturally resented the implication that their form of Buddhism was inferior and at a great gathering in Ceylon in 1950, agreed to use the name 'Theravada' instead of 'Hinayana'.

GAUTAMA'S EARLY LIFE

From the sacred scriptures of the Buddhists we catch glimpses—but no more, alas—of Gautama, the Buddha, from whose life and teaching the religion developed. He taught between about 590 and 544 B.C. in the two kingdoms of Kosala and Magadha, which lay to the north and south respectively of the Ganges. This was about the time that away to the east, in China, another great sage, Confucius, was at work among his countrymen, while to the west the Jews were struggling to settle down again in their

land and rebuild their Temple and their whole way of life.

The names of four places are often referred to in the stories of Buddha's life and ministry—the Lumbini Grove near Kapalivastu, where he was born; Bodhgaya, where he achieved enlightenment; the deer park outside Benares, where he preached his first sermon; and Kusinagara, where he died. The sites of these villages and towns have been identified.

Gautama was the son of a powerful and wealthy prince of the Clan of the Sakyas in Kosala. In later years he was sometimes called by the name 'Shak-yamuni' which means 'The Sage of the Shakyas'. His father was the Rajah Suddhodana and his mother was Princess Maya. He seems to have received the usual education of an Indian noble and in due course married and had a son named Rahula. His life in those days seems to have been a pleasant one indeed, for we read:

In my father's dwelling lotus-pools had been made, in one blue lotuses, in another red, in another white, all for my sake. I used no sandal-wood that was not of Benares, my dress was of Benares cloth, my tunic, my under-robe, and cloak. Night and day a white parasol was held over me so that I should not be touched by cold or heat, by dust or weeds or dew. I had three palaces, one for the cold season, one for the hot, and one for the season of rains. Through the four rainy months, in the palace for the rainy season, entertained by female minstrels, I did not come down from the palace.

Gradually, however, the young prince became dissatisfied with this life of luxury. Disobeying his father's orders to stay within his palace, he rode out one day to see the world outside and was appalled by the suffering that he found there. He saw men who were old and miserable, men who were ill, and he saw what death was like. He returned convinced that he must change his whole way of life and try to find an answer to the problem of human suffering which now greatly troubled him. He finally decided to give up his wealth and high position and to go out and live a hard and simple life:

While yet a boy, a black-haired lad in the prime of youth, in the first stage of life, while my unwilling mother and father wept with tear-stained faces, I cut off my hair and beard, and putting on yellow robes went forth from a house to a houseless life.

HE LEARNS THE TRUE MEANING OF HUMAN LIFE

By now Gautama was about twenty-nine years old and for the next six years he tried to quiet his troubled mind by following one or other of the teachings and practices of the holy men of his time. He studied with two famous teachers but found no answer from them. He passed through the country of Magadha to the town of Uruvela where he lived with five ascetics in a grove of trees. With them he forced himself to go without food for days on end and spent the days and nights in meditation. After some time he felt that he

had subdued his body, overcome fear and learned control of the mind, but knew that he had still not found what he was really seeking. So he decided to abandon the ascetic way of life and take food again. At this his five companions left him, disgusted at his failure to keep to the rules they had all agreed to live by. A young woman whom he met gave him a bowl of curds and having eaten it, he bathed himself and then sat himself down at the foot of a tree determined to stay there until he really understood the meaning of life.

The Buddhist scriptures say that for forty-nine days and nights Gautama sat there and that more than once Mara, the Tempter, came with his angels to try to turn him from his path. But he remained steadfast. At last, after this long period of deep and painful meditation, he began to see things more clearly. The feeling of depression and pain began to give way to a new sense of happiness and certainty such as he had not known for a long time. At last he knew that he was seeing life as it really was. Now he could understand why men suffered. More important still, because of this, he had discovered the way to free himself of suffering.

To an Indian holy man like Gautama this was not just the end of a chapter in his own struggle to come to terms with life. It was the discovery of that deep insight into the meaning of human existence for which countless others besides himself had been seeking all their lives. Others too, then, must be told

what he had found. He was now the 'Buddha', the Enlightened One, and must henceforth give up his life to the work of helping others to see life as he had learned to see it and so live as all men ought to live. Some ancient verses found in the Buddhist scriptures try to describe how the Buddha felt about this great mission to which his life was now to be dedicated:

I am an arhat in the world,
 I am a teacher most supreme;
 Alone am I the All-enlightened,
 I have won coolness, won Nirvana.
 To set going the Wheel of Doctrine¹
 To Kasi city now I go;
 And in the blinded world the Drum
 Of the Immortal Will I beat.

THE FIRST PREACHING OF THE BUDDHA

The first sermon which the Buddha preached was delivered to his five former companions in the deer park in the suburbs of Benares. It described the insight which had come to him under the Bodhi Tree and which was now to be the kernel of his gospel. He declares that he has discovered four important truths about life, they are:

1. That Suffering is everywhere and in everything.
2. That the cause of Suffering is selfish desires.

¹ This is a phrase used frequently to describe the preaching of the Dhamma or Buddhist message.

3. That the cure for Suffering is to cut away these desires.
4. That the way to cut them off is by following the Middle Path between strict asceticism on the one hand and indulgent living on the other.

These truths the Buddha's followers came to know as The Four Noble Truths. The Path they called The Noble Eightfold Path. By this they meant that their Master had taught them that the right kind of life had eight ingredients in it. They had to know clearly, to aim at the right kind of purpose, to speak and to behave in the right way, to adopt the right means of getting a living, to make the right effort, and to learn to practise continually the right kinds of recollection and of meditation. If, said the Buddha, you follow me in living this kind of life, you too will become enlightened, and will win 'Nirvana'—release from the bondage of suffering.

THE ORDER FOUNDED

The preaching of the Buddha seems to have won an instant response and since every convert was charged to preach the gospel too, the number of his followers increased rapidly. Those who were accepted and ordained to full membership of the Buddhist Order became monks. The Buddha used to address them as 'Bhikkhus'—'Monks'. In the Buddhist scriptures the monk is also called 'Arahat', a word which means

'Worthy' or 'Saint'. It would seem that the Buddha received them into the Order by means of an ordination service. When he sent them out to preach the 'Dhamma' or 'Law', as he called the Buddhist 'gospel', he gave the Bhikkhus the power to admit new converts into the Order. Candidates had to shave off their hair, put on the yellow robe of the Buddhist monk, and recite three times a simple formula:

'I take my refuge in the Buddha,
I take my refuge in the Dhamma (Teaching),
I take my refuge in the Sangha (Order).'

To the Bhikkhus whom he sent out at this time he gave a charge:

Go ye forth, O Bhikkhus, on your journey, for the profit of many, for the bliss of many, out of compassion for the world . . . devas (a word meaning angels or gods) and mankind. Go not any two together. Proclaim, O Bhikkhus, the Dhamma, goodly in its beginning, goodly in its middle, goodly in its ending. In the spirit and in the letter make ye known the perfect, utterly pure, righteous life. There are beings with but little dust of passion on their eyes, who perish through not hearing the Dhamma. There will be some who will understand.

At different times various wealthy converts presented lands and money to the Order so that monasteries could be built. We do not know for certain when the first of these monasteries was created and used, but three of the most famous of them, at Rajagaha, Kapilavastu, and at Savasti, must have

been in use fairly early in the Buddha's ministry. The building of the monasteries made it possible for the members of the Order to gather together for instruction and meditation, especially during the rainy season, when for three or four months in the year travelling was impossible. When the monks entered the Order they left behind them all their possessions, and were entirely dependent upon other people for gifts of food, clothing and shelter. The begging-bowl which the Buddhist monk carried with him became just as much a mark of his calling as the yellow robe which he wore continually.

It was in the fifth year of the ministry, so it is said, that the Buddha admitted women for the first time to full membership of the Order. We are told that when he was first asked to admit them as nuns he refused. Eventually he agreed, on the understanding that before being admitted as a nun, a woman should take upon herself strict rules.

Gautama lived, then, to see his way of life adopted by many men and women and when he died, at the age of eighty, he knew that his followers would carry on the work which he had begun. We are told that before he died he spoke a final message to his followers, which seems to sum up his teaching:

Be ye islands unto yourselves.
 Take to yourself no external refuge.
 Hold fast to the Dhamma as an island.
 Hold fast as a refuge to the truth.
 Look not for refuge to anyone beside yourselves.

NIRVANA

The scriptures never speak of the Buddha as having 'died', they say that he passed into 'full-Nirvana'. There is no single English word which gives the meaning of Nirvana and scholars have written volumes on the subject. It means 'sanctity', and also it means the state of the saint after death—when he leaves behind the physical body and, with it, the last of those things which keep him tied down to rebirth and suffering. Gautama had attained 'Nirvana' when he was enlightened under the Bodhi Tree and when the last flickerings of his bodily life died out, he attained 'full Nirvana'. This idea of a state of life which the Saint attains during his earthly life but completely on the death of the body, is not entirely foreign to us here in the West. St. John's Gospel in the New Testament thinks of 'eternal life' as a quality of life which those who 'believe' in Christ begin to experience even while they live and to which they pass more fully when they die. Yet we must at the same time remember that 'eternal life' does not mean quite the same as Nirvana. The idea which is common to both is that the new life of the Saint begins on earth and so death is but an incident on the way. The difference between them, so far as we can understand Nirvana properly (and this is not easy), lies in the fact that to the early Buddhists Nirvana meant 'release' from all that ties a man down to existence and suffering, whereas to the Christian

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eternal life means the full flowering of all that is noblest in his life as a person and as a child of the Heavenly Father.

BUDDHISM IN INDIA

For about 800 years Buddhism seems to have flourished in India, especially under the patronage of King Asoka, who ruled over the greater part of India between 273-232 B.C. Asoka seems to have been a devoted Buddhist and is said to have made a pilgrimage to all the sacred sites associated with the life and ministry of the Buddha. At these sites he is said to have ordered the erection of rock pillars and large mounds (stupas) as memorials to the Buddha. The ruins of some of them can still be seen at Sanchi, near Bhopal in central India, and at Sarnath, near Benares. And in the cave shrines and monastery halls at Ajanta near Bombay, can be seen some of the loveliest remains of Buddhist sculpture in India, in the form of statues and frescoes of the Buddha, but they belong to a time much later than King Asoka, probably A.D. 200-300.

Not long after this date Buddhism waned in the land of its birth. A famous Chinese pilgrim, Hsuan-tsang, who visited the holy places of India between A.D. 630-643 found many Buddhist temples in ruins and the monasteries deserted, and from then on the main centres of Buddhism were outside India—especially in Ceylon and in China, where it had been welcomed and had flourished.

Yet the influences which India had exerted upon Buddhism itself had been so great that nothing could eradicate them. We have seen some of them already—the beliefs in rebirth, the effect of deeds (karma) upon man's next existence, and the need for strict discipline of mind and body. We must briefly notice another, before we leave the story of Indian Buddhism, because it is important for answering a question which is often asked—whether Buddhism is really a religion at all, or simply a method of self-discipline which has no place for belief in God.

It is clear as we read the scriptures of Theravada Buddhism that Gautama seems to have urged his followers to depend upon themselves for salvation, rather than upon the gods. Yet there are frequent references to the gods, especially to Brahman. We are also told that just before his enlightenment, the Buddha was tempted by the evil deity to abandon his efforts to win enlightenment. There is no doubt then that the early Buddhists believed that the gods existed, but they also believed that the Buddha was greater than all of them, and so they tried to follow the 'path' which he had marked out for them. And as the centuries passed, it seems that the Buddhists came to regard Buddha himself as a supernatural being to whom they should offer adoration and worship. We shall see in the next chapter that this is especially the case with those who belong to some of the sects of the Mahayana. But it is also evi-

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denced in the temples with their images of Buddha which were erected in India itself.

It is time to look more closely at the way the modern Theravada Buddhists practise their religion.

MONKS AND LAYMEN

We have seen how Gautama organized his followers into monkish communities in order that they could better learn complete detachment from material things. In countries where the Theravada holds sway, the life of the monk or nun is still regarded as the highest form of the religious life. It is true that the majority of Buddhists are laymen, and that they do not practise the strict discipline which is demanded of the monk, but concern themselves, like the laymen of other religions, with worship on special occasions, and with private meditation and the practice of the Buddhist virtues in so far as seems good and necessary. But in some Buddhist countries, like Thailand and Burma, nearly all the men live for a period as 'monks' in a monastery, returning to ordinary life afterwards.

In these countries the four-year-old son of a devout Buddhist family is introduced to his first taste of the religious life in an initiation ceremony which is meant to teach him about the Buddha's path of renunciation. The boy is first dressed in rich robes, a reminder of the Buddha's early life as a

prince. After a while the rich clothes are removed, he is dressed in the yellow robe and his head is shaved. Thus he is taught both about the Buddha's renunciation and also about the vanity of earthly possessions. Clothed in the yellow robe and carrying the begging-bowl, the boy is taught to say in all solemnity: 'I seek the refuge of the Buddha; I seek the refuge of the Dharma; I seek the refuge of the Sangha (Order).' Then he spends at least one night in a nearby Buddhist monastery to give him his first taste of the life of a monk. Later, at the age of twenty, most of these initiates will enter a monastery for about three months and a few of them will decide to become monks permanently.

In these lands the Buddhist monk is held in high esteem. In 1954 the Burmese Government sponsored a great gathering of Buddhists in Rangoon which was attended by over 2,500 monks and many other devout Buddhists from all over south-east Asia. This was the two-year-long 'Sixth World Buddhist Council' which met to purify and translate the ancient Pali scriptures which are so greatly revered by Buddhists of the Theravada School. In November 1958, it was announced in Rangoon that the recently retired Burmese Prime Minister had entered a Buddhist monastery for a week to fulfil a vow he made when in office. With other monks he went out with a begging bowl to collect alms.

The monk lives a life of strict self-denial and spends a great deal of time in meditation. His only

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belongings are the yellow or orange robe which is his characteristic dress, the wooden bowl with which he begs for food, a needle, a string of 108 beads which he counts as an aid to meditation, a razor with which to shave his head, and a filter with which to strain his drinking water, so that he does not swallow a tiny insect and so cause suffering to any living creature.

Ten rules are prescribed for the monks: to refrain from taking life, from taking what is not given, from incontinence, falsehood, and strong drink (these 'Five Precepts' must be observed by the layman as well), from over-eating (often he eats but one meal a day, before midday), from dancing and music, from using scents or wearing garlands, from sleeping on a high or a large bed, and from touching gold or silver.

Buddhist teaching about the good life also includes a good deal more—exhortations to control thoughts, to be zealous and calm, to eschew lust and hate, and to avoid gambling, laziness, drunkenness and bad friends.

TEMPLES AND SHRINES

There are three kinds of sacred buildings connected with the religious practices of the Theravada—temples, shrines and monasteries. Both monks and lay folk worship at the temples and shrines: indeed, it is usual for the ordination of a monk to be held in

a temple, from which he then proceeds to his hut in the monastic enclosure. The temples and the shrines house images, and sometimes relics of the Buddha, and images of Hindu deities as well. In the famous Temple of the Tooth in Kandy, Ceylon, is housed what is held to be the sacred tooth of the Buddha. It is said to have been brought secretly out of India by a princess and is widely regarded as one of the most sacred relics. It is kept in a miniature pagoda made of gold and jewels in the Temple precincts. Other relics in Ceylon are housed in the huge Dagobas, high buildings shaped like a bell, sometimes standing as much as 300 ft. high. They are completely solid in structure, except for the room built at the side of the main edifice, to house the images and relics.

In Burma, temples and shrines are known as pagodas. They resemble a large cone in shape and to the top is attached a metal casket, to which are fastened delicate brass strips which move with the breeze and emit a series of mellow tinkling sounds. Perhaps the best-known of all the pagodas is the celebrated Golden Pagoda in Rangoon. It is very old—some say over 2,000 years—and like a huge Buddhist cathedral. Its spire is covered in gold leaf, brought and placed there by pilgrims. Many of its Buddha images are also of pure gold bedecked with precious jewels. The courtyards which surround it contain numerous chapels and rooms which are used by monks and laity for worship, meditation and study.

In Cambodia and Laos the shrine is known as 'That'. The building which actually houses the relics is usually covered with a rather bulbous-shaped tower tapering up into a spire. It is said that Vientiane, in Laos, once contained over eighty pagodas, but many were destroyed when the Siamese sacked the city in 1827, and today only a quarter of them remain. The most important is the That-Luong, a mile and a half outside the city, built in 1567. Laotian temples are called 'viharas' and are rectangular in shape, brick-built and whitewashed. The roofs are high and steep, and inside the walls doors and shutters are lavishly decorated and furnished with images of the Buddha. At Angkor, in Cambodia, are to be seen the remains of the once renowned and beautiful city of Angkor Thom, whose temples, palaces and sanctuaries seemed to a Chinese official who visited it in 1296, to make it one of the most inspiring 'holy cities' of Buddhism.

Monks and lay folk go to the temples and shrines with gifts—incense, flowers, bells and other objects—which they place before or near the Buddha-images, and invoke the Buddha in the ancient words of the Theravada scriptures:

'Homage to the Blessed One, the Venerable One, the All Enlightened One. I go to the Buddha for refuge, I go to the Dhamma for refuge, I go to the Order for refuge.'

This is said three times, the worshipper having

joined his hands before his face, bowed, knelt and prostrated himself with face to the ground. Other invocations are used as well as prayers for particular needs. The outward expressions of worship are to be accompanied by an act of faith in and devotion to the Buddha.

As in many other parts of the Far East, worship is individual, not congregational. There are, of course, occasions when a communal service takes place but these are most commonly connected with the great festivals—such as the Perahera festival in Kandy, when the sacred relics are carried in procession, or the festival of Wesak to commemorate the Buddha's birth, enlightenment and entry into Nirvana.

Regular daily worship takes place, of course, in the monasteries, which are usually situated near a temple or shrine. Lay folk are able to attend certain services which usually take place in a central hall containing a Buddha image raised above an altar. The yellow-robed monks squat on their mats, watched from above by the abbot in his golden throne. Together they chant passages from the scriptures in a low monotone. Sins are confessed and periods of meditation take place, since meditation forms, as we have seen, one of the most important duties of the Theravada Buddhist. Sermons are delivered on certain occasions.

We may feel that much of these religious beliefs and practices is far removed from the kind of religious life which Gautama encouraged his disciples to

lead. Up to a point this is true. The custom of venerating relics of the Buddha and of other great religious figures, and the practice of praying to the Buddha as a divine being, are expressions of spontaneous religious tendencies which have gradually attached themselves, over the centuries, to the 'original gospel' of Buddhism. Yet, as we have also noticed, beneath all these accretions a great deal of the traditional point of view and teaching of the Buddha has been preserved—the importance of discipline of mind and body, the ideal of poverty, of detachment from material things, a deep concern for the welfare of all living things, for chastity and truthfulness. Perhaps it is hardly surprising that just because the Buddha's life and work have had such a wide and lasting influence upon so many millions of people, he himself, as the centuries passed, should have come to be venerated as a divine being by some of his followers.



PART III

In China, Japan and Tibet



I I

MAHAYANA BUDDHISTS

THERE is a tradition that it was the emperor Ming-Ti (A.D. 58-75) who first encouraged Buddhist monks to bring their sacred scriptures and statues and teach in China. Whatever the truth behind the details of the story, we do know that this was about the time that Buddhism first appeared in China. To begin with it made little or no progress there because the Theravada seemed too austere and unattractive to the Chinese, who traditionally were devoted to family life and by temperament were happy and cheerful.

Between about A.D. 200 and 500, however, great upheavals took place in the political and social life of China, and in the north especially, many people turned to Buddhist teaching in the hope of finding a way of life which could take the place of those older Chinese beliefs and customs which had been abandoned. By this time a different sort of Buddhism had made its way to China, so different that it made an

instant appeal to the Chinese and as time went on proved flexible enough to adapt itself in a way which further increased its attraction.

This form of Buddhism was the 'Mahayana'—'The Greater Vehicle', a name which we noticed in the last chapter, and which its exponents used in order to signify that it was more important than the Theravada type. And it was in its Mahayana form that Buddhism became one of the powerful religious influences not only in China, but in Korea (from about A.D. 500), in Japan (from the sixth century onwards), and in Tibet (from the seventh century) and, last of all, in Mongolia (from the thirteenth century). To this day it remains influential in all these countries, though, of course, in China, and more recently, in Tibet, Communist domination has led to some repression of Buddhism, in common with other religions.

How then, does Mahayana Buddhism differ from the Buddhism of the Theravada? It is perhaps well to say, at once, that any attempt to answer this question briefly runs the risk of being an oversimplification, chiefly because, just as Theravada Buddhism differs from country to country, so does the Mahayana. What is more, in China and Japan, there are several sects of the Mahayana itself, each of which pays special attention to a certain part or parts of the sacred scriptures and encourages beliefs and practices of a distinctive kind. Thus a Zen Buddhist

monk strives, by severe physical and mental discipline, to attain insight into the true nature of things which, he believes, comes as a sudden flash of intuition. But the disciple of the Jodo Sect believes that simply by devotion to Amida-Buddha, he can go to Paradise. All this helps to make it clear that Buddhism, like Hinduism, is not so much a religion as a family of religions. The members of a family are all different but they also possess certain family characteristics. So with Buddhism, and the Mahayana particularly. We will first notice the family characteristics which the Mahayana sects have in common and then see how they differ one from the other.

The Mahayana did not appear at first in the Buddhist communities as a rival to the Theravada. It arose out of the concern of some Buddhists to give new emphasis to certain points of Buddhist belief which had hitherto been little noticed. So the Mahayana shares with the Theravada all the background and tradition of Buddhist faith but develops it in its own characteristic way.

This can be illustrated by the example quoted earlier of the attitudes of the Zen and Jodo sects. Zen monasticism and meditation and its goal of enlightenment, have a great deal in common with Theravada teaching and practice. The monastic life was, as we saw, instituted by Gautama and he laid great stress upon the need for meditation as a preparation for winning the true insight which could bring enlightenment and the attainment of Nirvana.

But the Buddha also enjoined his followers to 'go to the Buddha for refuge'. The Jodo Sect has chosen to lay special emphasis on this part of the Buddha's teaching, declaring that it is by dependence upon Amida-Buddha and not upon himself that a man will attain the Pure Land or Paradise which is also Nirvana.

There are, then, certain strong 'family resemblances' between the Mahayana and the Theravada forms of Buddhism. There are even stronger resemblances, however, between the Mahayana sects themselves.

The Amida-Buddha in whom the member of the Jodo sect puts his trust, is not the Gautama who became enlightened under the Bodhi Tree and taught in India. He is another, like Shakyamuni (as the Mahayana prefers to call Gautama), who attained Buddhahood but, out of compassion for mankind, chose to postpone his final entry into Nirvana so that he could help others to attain it too.

According to the Mahayana there are numerous beings who have helped others to attain Nirvana. There are those who, like Shakyamuni appeared on earth as human beings, attained enlightenment, preached the truth to others, and then entered Nirvana. These are Buddhas. All Mahayana Buddhists revere Shakyamuni as the latest and perhaps the greatest of Buddhas of this sort, but, unlike the Theravada Buddhists, believe that there have been other Buddhas besides Shakyamuni.

Then there are the Bodhisattvas—beings who, many existences previously, vowed to become Buddhas and have so lived that they could enter Nirvana but out of compassion for suffering mankind, postponed their entry into Nirvana so that they can transfer some of the vast store of merit which they have accumulated to those who call upon them. The Theravada scriptures also speak of 'Bodhisattvas', but of two only. Gautama was one before his enlightenment, and they speak also of Maitreya, another Bodhisattva.

In Mahayana scriptures, however, there are references to many Bodhisattvas and there they form a great company of heavenly beings who come to mankind at different times. Among the Mahayana sects, some of the Bodhisattvas have come to be especially revered. Maitreya had been honoured in India as the next Buddha-to-be, and has been known at different periods all over the Buddhist world, though not held in such popular esteem as some of the others. Manjusri, the Bodhisattva who assists those who desire to know and obey the Buddhist Law, was much revered in China, as Wen-yu. Images of him show him as a noble figure, bearing a sword and a book. Avalokitesvara, known in China as 'Kwan-Yin', has been one of the most popular of all. His name means 'The Lord who appears to this Age', and he has a special concern for those alive at a particular period. He is one of the most compassionate of all the Bodhisattvas, and is believed to pre-

vent all kinds of catastrophes from falling upon mankind. He, too, is shown in his images as a lordly figure, but with his right hand extended in compassion. Other images depict him with four or more arms, all bearing gifts for men.

The concerns of women have also found expression in the Mahayana conception of these supernatural helpers. In China Kwan-Yin, mentioned above, has also been thought of as a goddess of mercy and images of her often show her carrying a child, for among her mercies is the bestowal of a child upon the women who supplicate her for this favour. In China also, the Buddha Ti-Tsang (in Japan, called Jizo), is believed to have been a woman in two previous incarnations. His characteristics include kindness and tenderness and he helps women in childbirth. He is, in fact, a many-sided character—in Japan at one time a war-god, and as such a favourite with soldiers; at another, the particular friend of little children, depicted as a simple, kindly monk.

The third and last group of supernatural beings is the Dhyani or 'Contemplating' Buddhas—full Buddhas who have never been men but have always dwelt in the heavens. They, too, have postponed their final entry into Nirvana to succour men on earth. Two of them have been widely revered—Vairocana and Amitabha. Their images all depict them as being wrapped in the calm of deep meditation. Vairocana is connected with the sun and is known in Japan as Dainichi, where he is honoured above all other

Bodhisattvas and Buddhas by the followers of the Shingon sect. Amitabha (O-mi-to in China and Amida in Japan) is, as we noticed, the Buddha revered by the Jodo sect, who claim that he admits to the Western Paradise all who repeat in adoration his sacred name.

In a sense, the idea of a multiplicity of supernatural saviours of mankind has its origins back in the earliest Buddhist teaching. The Theravada maintains that Gautama's appearance on earth was the culmination of a long series of previous existences and it was not difficult to go on from here to the belief that Gautama was but one manifestation of the mercy and succour which heavenly beings are continually bringing to mankind.

The basic idea is contained in one of the earliest and best known of the sacred writings of the Mahayana tradition—the 'Lotus of the True Law' (*Saddharma Pundarika*) a poem which was probably composed early in the first century A.D. In it Shakyamuni is a very different sort of being from the historic Gautama who lived in north India. He is not in fact a human being, but the eternal Buddha. He is seen on the legendary 'Vulture Peak', in deep contemplation, while about him are gathered hosts of Buddhas, saints and lesser beings, down to the lowest spirits in hell. When he comes out of his trance, Shakyamuni discourses about the One Way by which men may attain enlightenment—by faith in the Buddha. He tells of the former Buddhas whom

he remembers millions of years ago, of the many Bodhisattvas who, like himself, still preach the 'Good Law' so that men may be enlightened.

It is not difficult to see why this poem became an important piece of 'Scripture' to the Mahayana Buddhists. It makes Shakyamuni himself say that, though he is indeed a Buddha, he is not the only one. Before him, and working with him still, are other Buddhas and Bodhisattvas who are all guiding and helping others towards the enlightenment which they themselves have already found. And it is easy to see why such a belief has had such a strong appeal over many centuries to the millions of Asia. Man is not alone in his struggle with life and his efforts to gain salvation. The whole universe is populated with wise and powerful and kindly beings who are ready and even anxious to give him succour and guidance. To be able to live with this kind of assurance is to put an end to the loneliness and helplessness which men sometimes experience, especially when life is difficult, and to find instead a new faith and confidence. No wonder that the Lotus scripture has been called 'The Gospel for Asia'!

Besides the 'Lotus' scripture, other writings appeared in which the Mahayana beliefs were expounded and these too came to hold a special place in the affections of followers of the Mahayana. The Lalita-vistara seems to have been composed at about the same time as the 'Lotus' and tells the story of Shakyamuni's previous existences down to the time

that he appeared. It is a mixture of poetic and prose passages and the version of it which we have is in Sanskrit.

Greatly revered by followers of the 'Pure Land' sects in China and Japan are the sacred books ('Sukhavati-vyuha') which teach that men can be re-born in the Western Paradise by faith in Amida-Buddha. We know them now in their Chinese translations, which seem to have been made between A.D. 200 and 500.

These are but a few of the numerous sacred books which, over the centuries, have come to be greatly treasured by Mahayana Buddhists. The study of all the Buddhist scriptures is a most complex business, not only because they are so numerous, but also because the earliest collections of them vary as to their actual contents and are in several languages—Pali, Sanskrit, Chinese and Tibetan.

All the important Buddhist sects have their priests but not all have a place for monastic communities in their way of life. In Japan, for instance, only three sects—the Tendai, Shingon and Zen have monastic orders connected with them.

Tendai was founded in A.D. 804 by a Japanese noble, who became known as 'Priest Dengyo' (Dengyo Daishi) who had visited China and been instructed by priests there. Today the Tendai possesses over 6,000 temples and monasteries and its priests number between 11,000 and 12,000. It teaches that

all men are capable of becoming Buddhas and is tolerant of the beliefs and practices of other sects. Its temples sometimes contain images of Buddha particularly revered by other sects. Dengyo founded an order of monks whose task it was to serve the whole community. His teaching was deeply rooted in the 'Lotus' scripture.

Shingon, or 'True Word', had also developed in China and was brought to Japan by one of the most greatly honoured Japanese saints, Kobo-Daishi, at about the same time as the Tendai was founded. It has almost as many temples, monasteries and priests as the Tendai has. In its basic beliefs it closely resembles Tendai, but it attaches greater importance to the ritual of its worship. The low chanting of the priests as they advance into the temple in solemn procession, clothed in brocaded silks; the precise and deliberate movements of the officiating priest; the sound of the gongs which are struck at appropriate points in the ceremony, and the sight and scent of the burning incense, all mingling with the murmur of the prayers and responses by the body of the priests and the lay people assembled, combine to make a powerful impression on one who sees and hears them for the first time.

The Zen sect is in many ways the most remarkable of all and it has become a source of great interest in recent years to many people in European countries. 'Zen' is an abbreviation of 'Zenna' which means 'contemplation'. There are three branches of Zen in

Japan, all of which agree in their beliefs and practices but were started at different times between about A.D. 1200 and 1650. There are something like 20,000 Zen temples and monasteries in Japan and a correspondingly large number of priests (it is said, nearly 50,000). It, too, had an earlier history in China before it was introduced into Japan. Because the practice of meditation is vitally important in the Zen way of life, the life of the monk in a monastic community away from the cares and distractions of the world occupies an important place in Zen religious life. The meditation hall is the very heart of the monastery where occasionally the master of the monks may actually use physical violence to assist a monk to discipline his mind. The Zen Buddhist believes that enlightenment (Satori) can be won only by intense mental concentration, and his body must be disciplined to this end. Worship plays its part as well and each monastery has in its main hall a Buddha-shrine, with an altar severely but beautifully draped, before which a dignified ritual takes place to the accompaniment of chanting and the burning of incense.

Except in Zen, most of the priests who are masters of temples are married, but in the three sects we have glanced at here, abbots of temples (called 'masters' in Zen) do not marry. A young monk attends an ordinary school with other boys and later enters a special college to prepare for his priestly work. The Zen monk has a special training. He serves as a junior in a temple and then enters a monastery,

where he trains for three years or more. Only after that can he become a priest.

It is important to remember that the aim of the priest and the monk is to help other people—lay folk—to gain enlightenment: they are not concerned only with their own salvation. This is one of the important differences between the monks of the Theravada and those of the Mahayana sects.

Lay folk often keep a shrine in their house, with a statue of a Buddha or Bodhisattva. Every day a pious Buddhist offers flowers, tea, cake and incense at this shrine and recites a passage from the scriptures morning and evening. He will also visit a nearby temple on the occasion of the special anniversaries of the sect to which he belongs—to commemorate some traditional event connected with the story of the Buddha whom he worships or the history of his sect. He may also make a special pilgrimage to visit other temples of the sect in other parts of Japan—especially the famous temples connected with its early history—rather as some Christians like to visit famous and ancient cathedrals or churches, or as Muslims make a pilgrimage to Mecca.

Services to commemorate the dead play an important part in the practices of all the sects and the holding of them is one of the principal duties of the temple priests. Such memorial services are held not only in memory of some great individual—a saint or an emperor—but also to commemorate a man's an-

cestors or some relation who has recently died. In Japan, the death-day of a person is remembered rather than a birthday. The death-day of the Buddha is widely observed each year on February 15th, and the deaths of the saints who founded the various sects also have their fixed annual memorials.

Of the great festivals of Japan, Bon is an important three-day commemoration when the spirits of the dead are believed to be reunited with the living. It is observed on July 13th-15th in cities and a month later in the villages. There are two festivals of the equinox which are also connected with the remembrance of the dead. Another widely observed ceremony is called 'Jukai', when members of several sects, priests and laymen, engage in a renewal of their religious vows. Some folk go to stay in a monastery for this purpose.

This very brief outline of the religious life of the Mahayana sects must include at least some mention of the important social and educational work which is undertaken by their members. Visits are paid to prisons, special efforts are made on behalf of the poor and the sick, and many schools and colleges have been supported. All these enterprises are the practical expression of that compassion which is one of the most important of the Buddhist virtues.

BUDDHISM IN TIBET

Up to the time when the Chinese Communists began

to exert a control over the country in 1950, Tibet had been a country whose whole way of life was intimately bound up with its devotion to Buddhism. Missionaries of the Mahayana first penetrated into the rugged mountainous country in the seventh century A.D., but at first met with hostility. About 150 years passed before Buddhism began to make progress, but by the end of the eighth century temples had been built and translations of the Buddhist scriptures into Tibetan had begun to be more widely studied. Monasteries sprang up—some of them in the most inaccessible valleys high up between the mountain ranges. Tibet has fascinated Europeans ever since news of its strange and remote civilization was brought by explorers who had managed to cross its borders.

The Dalai Lama is the political and religious head of Tibet, though at present he is in exile in India. He is the supreme head of the monks or lamas, as his name implies ('Dalai' means 'the sea', that is, measureless and profound). It has been believed by the Tibetans that when a Dalai Lama dies, he is reborn at that same moment in a baby who is to be the next Dalai Lama. So the custom was that high lamas of the court, on the death of a Dalai Lama, began to search throughout the land to discover which child had been born at the precise time of the death of the ruler, and after getting various proofs, they proclaimed the child the next Dalai Lama.

Buddhism in Tibet is markedly different in this

and other ways from the Mahayana Buddhism which we have noticed in China and Japan. It has allowed, and even encouraged, the use of magical and semi-magical beliefs and practices of various kinds—rosaries, prayer-scarves and incantations were used by the laity and some of the priests in a fashion which implied that these things had a power of their own.

The fact is that the earlier magico-religious beliefs and practices of the ancient 'Bon' religion which the first Buddhists found in Tibet when they arrived, were not frowned upon but allowed to be incorporated into the new religion. This has been especially true of the more conservative groups of Tibetan Buddhists who are called the 'Red Hats', as opposed to the 'Yellow Hat' order which has been a reforming movement.

Before the Communist invasion of Tibet, about a fifth of the total population lived in the monasteries, or lamaseries, and it was hoped that at least one son in every family would become a lama. So little dependable information about the conditions of the country has since come out of Tibet, that it is impossible to tell what is the present state of religious life there. It may well be as the roots of Tibetan Buddhism go down so deeply into her history and her life, that its influence will continue to be strong, in spite of efforts that may be made to weaken it.

12

CHINESE: CONFUCIANISM AND TAOISM

IT IS AS DIFFICULT to describe the complex religious influences which have been at work through the centuries in China as it was to summarize religious life in India, and for the same basic reason.

The Buddhist sects of the Mahayana in China which were mentioned in the last chapter do not exist as completely separate 'churches'. A room attached to the Buddhist temple, for instance, could be used for Taoist ceremonies, while in pre-Communist China the great festival of the winter solstice at Peking, when the emperor sacrificed to 'heaven', was an occasion of importance to all Chinese, whatever their main personal religious attachments. Again, the veneration of departed ancestors—sometimes misleadingly referred to as ancestor-worship—was common to the Chinese people as a whole, whether they were Buddhists or not.

Some writers have spoken of the 'three religions of China', meaning by this Buddhism, Confucianism

and Taoism. Whether the original teachings of Confucius and Laotze, who were contemporaries living at about the same time as Gautama, can strictly be called 'religious' some have doubted. It is true that Buddhist, Confucian and Taoist thought have exercised a more powerful influence than any others upon the religion and philosophy of educated folk in China. But among the uneducated masses the old nature-religion of China exercised quite as strong an influence—even up to recent times. So it seems as if it might be more correct to speak of the 'four' rather than the 'three' religions of China.

The life of the people in the villages depended on agriculture, and so the traditional worship was concerned with the earth spirits whose favour guaranteed the harvests. Every village had a mound or a temple where offerings were made, especially at the times of sowing and harvesting. Since the weather obviously played an important part in the success or otherwise of the harvest, the deities associated with the wind, the thunder, the clouds and the rain were also honoured. The dragon had a particular place in such ceremonies. Festivals were held in honour of the Dragon King, at which paper models of dragons were carried in procession to the accompaniment of prayers for rain. There were also gods of villages and cities, whose aid was sought in warding off evil and bringing good fortune to the community. Family and household spirits played a similar part, especially the

kitchen god—a deity not unlike the god of the store-cupboard whom we noticed in connection with early Roman religion.

All this nature-worship found a culmination in the solemn national ceremonies held at the great Altar at Peking. The Altar was dedicated to Land and Grain, and here every summer the emperor, on behalf of the whole country, conducted a ceremony of earth-worship, ploughing a furrow in a mound of earth and making offerings to the gods of earth and agriculture. This ceremony continued until the empire came to an end in 1911.

We saw in earlier chapters how important a place rituals connected with the dead occupied in early forms of religion. Ancient China was no exception. What is slightly unusual in her case is the fact that ceremonies in honour of departed ancestors have continued to take a prominent place in Chinese life right up to recent times. This had gone hand in hand with a great sense of respect for the family as a whole, and of the young for their elders.

The customary way of commemorating a dead ancestor was to inscribe a memorial tablet, which was set up in his home. The ceremony at which this was done was performed by Buddhist and Taoist priests, to the accompaniment of readings from the ancient classical writings and the intoning of prayers. The tablets of all members of the family who had died comparatively recently were set up in a special room

in the house, with an altar before them on which offerings of rice, fruit or incense were made on special days of remembrance, and sometimes Buddhist or Taoist images stood near by. In due course the tablets would be moved to ancestral halls, in order to make room for more recent additions. The halls would be shared by larger groups who were related to one another, and were cared for by those members of the clan who lived near and whose task it was to make periodic offerings of candles and incense in the chambers where the tablets were housed.

The emperors bore the title 'Son of Heaven', and were regarded as head of the larger 'clan' of the whole Chinese people. This sense of national unity, and of the dependence of the whole nation upon the favour of 'Heaven', found expression in the other great annual ceremony in Peking. The emperor officiated at solemn rites before the Altar of Heaven, the purpose of which was to invoke the blessing of Heaven for the coming year.

CONFUCIANISM

'Heaven' is a term whose significance to the Chinese needs explaining and can best be understood in the light of the teaching of Confucius, for he used it frequently.

The teachings of Confucius have profoundly influenced the attitude and behaviour of the Chinese people, not so much because he produced a highly

original and impressive philosophy of his own, but because he so well expressed all that was best in traditional Chinese life and thought.

It seems that Confucius lived between about 550 and 480 B.C. and became a teacher of moral and social doctrines, spending most of his life in his native state of Lu in central China. He believed that the lack of law and order which was too often typical of the Chinese states in his day would be remedied if men in general, and the rulers in particular, would allow their private lives and public policies to be governed by the right principles. He never claimed that there was anything new in what he taught. He described himself as 'A transmitter, not an originator, a believer in and lover of antiquity.' The teaching which he 'transmitted' was to be found, he believed, in those writings which had come down from distant ancestors and which contained the wisdom of ancient days.

He taught that no man ought to govern others 'who is not able to govern himself'. The true ruler would conduct himself like a 'gentleman'. He would observe all the proper rules of conduct and traditional ceremonies (the Chinese word 'li' includes all this). 'The basic stuff of the character of a gentleman', he said, 'is Right; he carries it out by means of "li".' The 'gentleman' will therefore strive to be self-reliant, strict with himself, modest, not talkative, be dignified, unselfish, sincere.

Many of Confucius's sayings have been preserved

for us in the collection of writings which we know as the Analects of Confucius. In them he often referred to 'Heaven', a term with which he and his contemporaries were familiar. It had been used by Chinese thinkers long before Confucius's time to denote the great power which controlled the universe and shaped men's lives for good. But though he accepted without question the fact of this supernatural power which directed the world and ordered men's lives, Confucius saw little point in the religious ceremonies and sacrifices which his contemporaries offered to various gods. When one of his followers once asked him how to serve the spirits, Confucius replied:

'You are not yet able to serve men; how can you serve spirits?'

And when the same disciple asked about death, he was told:

'You do not understand life; how can you understand death?'

His concern, then, was with the present and its wrongs and he believed that here lay the work which Heaven was urging him and his followers to do. One of the best-known sayings attributed to him was the famous 'Golden Rule':

'Do not to others what you would not like yourself.'

These moral precepts, and the virtues of respect for family, for law and order, as aspects of an ideal pattern of life which Heaven ordains for mankind,

became permanent parts of the traditional way of life in China. It is ironical, though from what we have seen occurring in other religions, not altogether strange, that 500 years after his death, Temples were built, and sacrifices offered in honour of the great Sage. There are, however, no statues in a Confucian temple but only tablets in his honour, and in Korea and Formosa sacrifices are still offered there on the Teacher's birthday.

It is some indication of the extent of Confucius's influence in modern China that the Communists have made open attacks upon his teaching and declared that it is incompatible with the aims of the Communist society. Most recently there have been signs that, unable to eradicate Confucian ideals by direct attack upon them, the Chinese Government is trying to control it, along with Buddhist and Taoist and other religious movements, by permitting them to operate under strict conditions.

TAOISM

Confucius's famous contemporary, Lao Tzu, seems to have preached an ideal way of life which was more obviously religious in character. He is believed to have been an important official in the southern state of Ch'u, but we know no more about him than about Confucius, since traditions about him are not always trustworthy and since the collection of writings attributed to him, known as the Tao Te Ching ('Book of

the Way and its Power'), tell us practically nothing about their author.

The notion of 'Tao' is the centre of Lao Tzu's teaching. It means a road, a path, or way, and so comes to mean the principle or doctrine which decides the way a thing is done. Each school of philosophy in China has its Tao—its doctrine of the way that life should be understood and lived. But in Taoist teaching Tao means more than this. It refers to the principle or reality behind all things—the way in which the universe works—and in the end came to mean something very near to the idea of God, but 'God' in the abstract sense of the philosopher and not in any personal sense.

Tao is passive; it never strives; and it is this quietness which gives it its great power:

Tao never does;

Yet through it all things are done.

It is the way of Heaven not to strive but none the less
to conquer,

Not to speak, but none the less to get an answer,

Not to beckon, yet things come to it of themselves.

If a man really penetrates to the very heart of things—to ultimate reality itself—he will discover not a busy, purposefully active God who is exercising his will over creation, as does Yahweh in the Old Testament. He will find, on the contrary, a calm, inactive, unstriving, self-contained power which is all the more powerful because it does not

strive. Tao just 'is', and because of this all things which share its nature just 'are'. It is as though the Taoist is saying to man, rather like the modern Quaker and indeed, like the modern 'Quietists' of all races and times—'Be still—and know!'.
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Moreover, once a man has really come to understand this quiet, inactive power which lies at the heart of all things, he sees that his own life, which is derived from Tao as well, must follow the same lines. He, too, must cease from purposeful striving after this and that goal and practise inactivity—not to be idle, but to allow himself to express this same spirit of inner quietness in all that he thinks, says and does:

Learning consists in adding to one's stock day by day;
 The practice of Tao consists in subtracting day by day,
 Subtracting and yet again subtracting
 Till one has reached inactivity.
 But by this very inactivity
 Everything can be activated.

Taoism in China in recent times, however, bears only a faint resemblance to the teaching of Lao Tzu. Quite early on it developed along superstitious and magical lines, and for centuries has been characterized by a claim to be able to confer immortality on those who practise certain ritual exercises. Some of the old Taoist temples were beautiful buildings, often carved out of the solid rock high up amid lovely mountain scenery. The temples in the towns were usually smaller and less attractive, containing numer-

ous images of gods and deified heroes, their walls adorned with scenes depicting the sufferings of those who had been condemned to one of the ten hells which figure prominently in Taoist teachings. Taoist priests played their part in the various Chinese nature festivals and family rites, but their chief concern has been the practice of sorcery and alchemy, fortune-telling, and the sale of charms.

Yet there are those who insist that beneath this heavy weight of magic and superstition, the original, spiritual message of Lao Tzu has not been completely lost. They cherish the hope that the old belief in the power of mysticism and inward calm will one day come again to the surface of Chinese life, and that Taoism will cease to be a set of superstitions and become, like Buddhism, a spiritual religion.

13

JAPANESE: SHINTO

SIDE BY SIDE, and even mingling closely with, Buddhism in Japan, exist religious traditions, beliefs, practices and sects which have their origins mainly in an essentially Japanese type of religion called 'Shinto'. 'Shinto' is a word of Chinese origin, 'Shen Tao', 'the Way of the Gods'. The Japanese term for it is 'Kami no Michi'.

The word 'kami' is the key-word in understanding the essence of Shinto. To translate it 'God' is misleading, because it does not necessarily carry the meaning of personal, supernatural being, but rather whatever may be holy or sacred. 'Ka' used in a sentence in Japanese expresses a question and 'kami' probably denotes anything that arouses in people a sense of questioning wonder. Such a feeling may be experienced at the sight of a mountain peak, a slinking fox, a flash of lightning, or the wonder of birth or death. The Japanese, then, has always been profoundly aware of the 'divinity' which can be experi-

enced in many aspects of nature and of human life. All this he refers to as 'kami'.

All over Japan the traveller constantly comes upon shrines—the place of the Kami. To distinguish Shinto shrines from Buddhist temples and the buildings where numbers of other religious sects gather, the Japanese call the shrines 'jinja' (temples are called 'tera' and 'churches', or 'chapels', 'kyokai'.) The 'jinja' is the holy place where the 'kami' of the particular place may be found and communicated with.

It may be a small god-house of wood or stone set amid the trees by a country road or an impressive national shrine like those at Isé and Tokyo, which include several acres of the surrounding land and numerous buildings of an impressive and expensive kind. But there are two features which all the shrines, whether simple or elaborate, possess in common—the house of the shrine itself and the 'torii' or distinctive gateway through which one must pass to get to the shrine.

The torii consists of two uprights, made of either wood or metal, supporting a cross-piece which extends for a foot or more at each end beyond the uprights. Thus the whole is shaped rather like a huge letter π of the Greek alphabet. There may be two or three 'torii' marking the approach to a shrine, or even a whole line of them forming an avenue.

The shrine proper may consist of one or a number of buildings where the 'kami' are housed and cere-

monies conducted. In many shrines the first building which the worshipper enters, the 'haiden' or 'worship sanctuary', is separated from the 'honden' or 'chief sanctuary', the 'holy of holies' where the 'kamis' (two or more) dwell and which only the priest may enter.

The sacred objects housed in the 'honden' are known by the collective term 'shintai'—a difficult word to translate, but which denotes an object in which the 'kami' resides. The objects themselves vary greatly in character—stones, old scrolls, jewels and pictures, and occasionally images of men and deities. But perhaps the commonest of all is a mirror. This may be because the great shrine at Isé housed a sacred mirror and the example of this important 'Shintai' was copied when many Shinto shrines were restored as part of the revival of Japanese religion which took place in the second half of the nineteenth century. The mirror also has associations in Japanese mythology with the sun-goddess Amaterasu—the traditional divine ancestress of the Japanese emperors. But some Japanese have also explained that the mirror carries a profoundly important symbolic meaning—it is clear and reflects things precisely as they are, and so symbolizes truth and honesty.

The fact that shrines have frequently been set up in quiet places well away from the noise and bustle of the cities, is itself evidence of the part which the veneration of nature played in early Japanese religion. Further evidence is to be seen in the names of 'Kami' worshipped at some of the shrines. There

were numerous shrines to Uke-Mochi, the Food-Possessor, who watched over the supply of food and drink; and to the rice-god, Inari, whose messenger was the fox. There are also shrines devoted to the worship of the forces of wind and storm, mountains and trees, the sea, and birth and death.

When a Japanese goes to worship at his local shrine, as distinct from making a pilgrimage to one of the two big national shrines, he goes as a member of the local community, on whose behalf the shrine has been erected. He does not go in order to receive instruction or to engage in congregational services, but as an individual with a sense of belonging to the community of that place. And he gains from his worship there, among other things, a renewed sense of belonging to this group with its common origins, heritage and outlook.

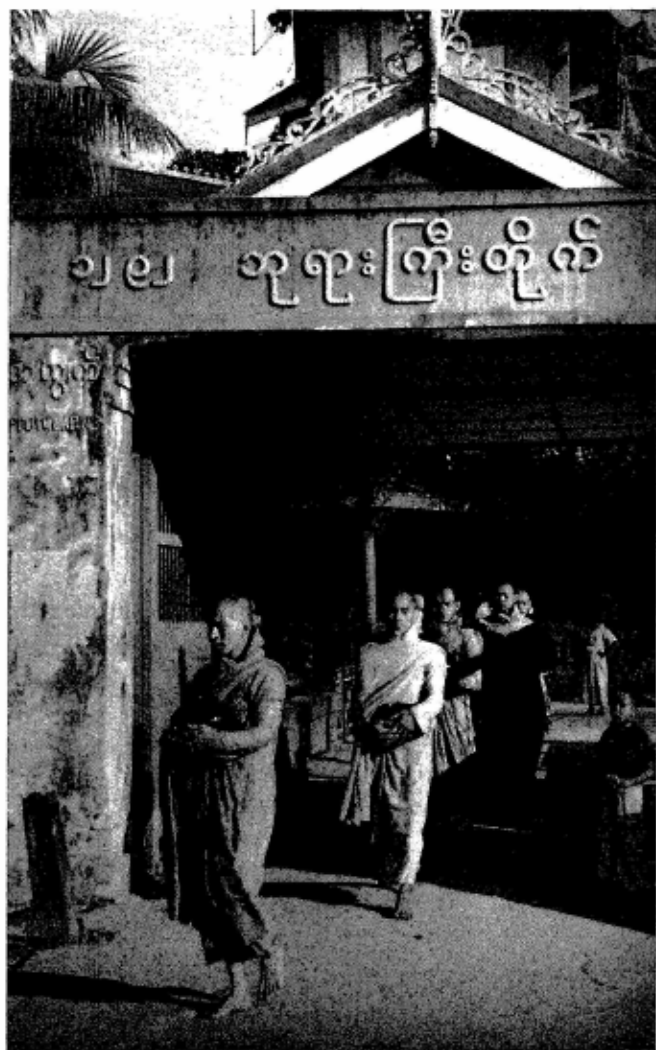
The religious ceremonies are of a simple kind. Offerings of grain, fruit and vegetables, and perhaps fish or fowl are made on special occasions as a token of respect for the 'kamis' to whom the shrine is dedicated. Such occasions include events or anniversaries of importance in the lives of individuals, such as births and deaths, or of the community as a whole, for example at springtime, harvest, or New Year's Day. Thanksgivings and prayers accompany the offerings. If some special act of devotion seems to be called for, the worshipper may pace backwards and forwards many times up and down the avenue formed by the torii leading up to the shrine, or bathe in the

icy water in a nearby stream. At some shrines the priests sell charms, which are believed to be efficacious in bringing good fortune or averting evils of various kinds.

In the homes of many devout Japanese a 'kami-dana' or 'kami-shelf' is kept, as a kind of house shrine. On it are put sacred objects of various kinds which have been obtained from the shrine and morning and evening offerings are made before it and prayers said. Before devotions of any kind, whether in the home or at the shrine, the worshipper usually washes his mouth and his hands as an outward sign of the need for inward purity. Worship is also accompanied by certain ceremonial gestures—bowing and a clapping of the hands.

Mingling closely with this old nature worship, are traces of the worship of ancestors and heroes. The ancient Japanese classical mythology, contained in the legendary chronicles known as the Kojiki and the Nihongi, provided a traditional foundation for this aspect of Shinto. The written form in which these works have come down dates from the eighth century A.D., but they almost certainly incorporate traditions of an earlier kind.

The aim of the Nihongi is to show that the Japanese Imperial family is of great antiquity and that it is of divine origin and imbued with a divine purpose. The first emperor, Jimmu (whose date is given as 660 B.C.) is said to have been a descendant of the sun-goddess Amaterasu herself.



5. Burmese Buddhist monks set out with begging bowls.



6. Interior of a mosque. The recess points the direction of Mecca.

JAPANESE: SHINTO

The great shrine at Isé is dedicated to Amaterasu, as the divine ancestress of the ruling house, and the shrine housed, as we saw, the most sacred mirror, which must therefore have seemed an appropriate earthly 'shintai' perhaps because it could reflect and so symbolize the sun's brightness and warmth. From 1868 up to the defeat of Japan in the Second World War, the emperor led a nationalized form of worship which was based upon reverence for the ancestors of the Japanese people and the country itself. All Japanese were ordered to worship at the Shinto shrines as part of this attempt to make Shinto a national religion. But the New Constitution of 1946 put an end to all this and article twenty of the Constitution declared that:

Freedom of religion is guaranteed to all—No person shall be compelled to take part in any religious act, celebration, rite or practice. No religious organisation shall receive any privileges from the State or exercise any political authority. The State and its organs shall refrain from religious education and other religious activity.

The emperor broadcast a statement denying that he was divine:

The bonds between us and our countrymen . . . do not have their basis in the fictitious ideas that the emperor is manifest god.

From now on Shinto existed as a form, or forms of religion with no more support than tradition and

popular appeal could grant to it and its priests and shrines were dependent for their maintenance on voluntary donations instead of state subsidies.

Since then, Shinto has undergone a revival and today displays a vigour that few would have thought possible. This is most noticeable in connection with the Shinto sects, who existed, as some of them did in the last century, as 'churches' distinguishable from the national forms of the state Shinto. Indeed, the 142 sects together claim between them about 80 million adherents.

Though it is sometimes asserted that these sects embody the true, non-Buddhist religion of the Japanese people, many of them have been influenced by Buddhism, and some by Christianity, for Christian missionaries came to Japan first in the fourteenth century and many more came in the nineteenth.

Two of the most prominent sects are over a hundred years old—The Konko-kyo (Teaching of the Golden Light) sect, and the Tenri-kyo (Religion of the Divine Wisdom). The Konko-kyo was founded by Kawate Bunjiro, a farmer, who claimed to be the mouthpiece of the god of Gold, a god who looked for goodness of life and sincerity of purpose. He emphasized the value of spontaneous worship and condemned ceremonial and ritual. His followers pay great attention to 'love of mankind', pray for the peace of the world, and engage in philanthropic activities of various kinds, especially among the poor, the blind and the orphans.

The Tenri-kyo was founded by a woman named Nakayama Miki who likewise claimed that God had elected to speak through her. She gave away all her possessions to the poor and preached a type of faith-healing gospel. She declared that evil and disease could be disposed of by the exercise of a pure faith and by the observance of certain rituals. Dancing, drumming and the reciting of special sacred verses figure prominently in the colourful ceremonies of the sect. Its headquarters are at Tenri City, near Nara in the Province of Yamato, from where its considerable social and educational work is directed. Its missionaries have carried their gospel to other parts of the Pacific.

Besides these and other older sects, a number of newer ones came into existence during the first half of the present century. Some of these claim to teach a faith which is drawn, not from one, but from all the main religions which have been at work in Japan. Not surprisingly, considering how much Japan suffered from the first shock of atomic warfare, many of them also lay great stress upon the need that men should pray for world peace and work for brotherhood among men. Two or three of these 'New Religions' of Japan, however, seem to regard a fusion of religious and political aims as their main purpose and are already beginning to acquire a certain amount of political influence.

With all this great variety of religious activity, it is understandable that those who know Japan well

speak of its being in a state of 'religious ferment', and in this burst of renewed religious activity there has even been a revival of the national, or 'Shrine' Shinto. Even without state support and the prestige which that gave, the shrines have nevertheless attracted a growing number of worshippers. Many Japanese value the sense of continuity with the past and of social solidarity which this type of Shinto worship can still give them. On a New Year's Day, for instance, over half a million people worship at the Grand Shrine of Isé, and between 4 and 5 millions attend the Great Shrine at Tokyo, while attendances at Shinto shrines generally on this day have increased by leaps and bounds in recent years. Indeed, it is clear that among thoughtful Japanese there are some who, like Professor Genchi Kato, a distinguished student of and writer on Japanese religion, would like to see a national type of Shinto revived in a modernized form so that the essentially Japanese element in Japan's religion, as distinct from what is Buddhist, Christian or 'Western'—could be preserved and adapted for the needs of a modern, industrialized Japan.

PART IV

In the Middle East, Africa and
the West

FOR CENTURIES, three great religions have dominated the religious life of the people of the Middle East, and the West—Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Nowadays, of course the last two are world-wide, with communities of worshippers in Africa and the Far East as well. Judaism has never sought to become a world-religion. Nor could it without radically changing, since a full Jew has to be born a Jew.

But these three religions have other close connections with one another. They all originated in roughly the same place—namely, the lands bordering the eastern and south-eastern Mediterranean. So they are closely related in their outlook for they all come from the family of people we call 'Semitic' and of whom the Jews and the Arabs are the best-known types.

They are all three, 'religions of the Book', as the prophet Muhammad put it. The Torah or Old Testament Law-Books, are the foundations upon which Judaism is built, the Old and New Testaments are sacred to Christians and the Qur'an is the most holy book of Islam. And, of course, the languages in which most of these scriptures were originally written belong to the same group—indeed Hebrew and Arabic are so closely related that some words sound almost alike in both languages and the Greek in which the New Testament was written was of a kind once spoken by Jews in the Mediterranean world and therefore made use of Hebrew words, phrases and sentence-construction.

But perhaps the most striking resemblance to be found in these three religions is in their beliefs about the God whom they call men to worship. For them, God is a God greater than man but like man in that He is personal. Man is made, they declare, 'in the image of God' and so worship is by a person of a personal Creator and Saviour. They certainly insist, as we shall see, that God is so much greater and holier than man that men have to recognize their creatureliness before God, yet at the same time they assume that by understanding himself man can always learn something of God.

Does this really mean, some people have questioned, that these religions have, after all, merely encouraged man to 'make God in his own image'—to invent a God who is only a super-human product of man's own imagination? Something like this was certainly the belief of the great psychologist Sigmund Freud, who came to the conclusion that for many religious people belief in God was an adult form of their dependence upon their human father.

This is, of course, only one way—and a rather pessimistic way—of looking at things. A more cheerful and equally logical conclusion to come to is that since the life of a person is the highest form of life which man knows it is reasonable for men who believe in God to believe also that God can then be thought of in terms of the highest qualities of all—as a personal Being.

In many books about the world's great religions,

Christianity is considered at the very end, because the author is often writing mainly for Christian readers and, for them, their own religion seems final and complete. The whole question of the relationship of Christianity to the other living religions is a large and complex one which cannot be discussed in this book, the aim of which has been simply to describe how people worship in different parts of the world. So it has seemed preferable to consider these last three religions in the order in which they first appeared. Judaism, the oldest, really began with Moses, probably in the thirteenth century B.C. Then came Christianity, in the first century A.D. and finally, Islam, the youngest of the three, in the seventh century after Christ.

I 4

J E W S

AT THE PRESENT time there are between 11 and 12 million Jews, about half of whom live in the United States of America, $3\frac{1}{2}$ million in Europe, and the remainder in Israel and other parts of the Middle East. Hitler's threats and attacks against the Jews in Germany caused many to leave the country. Most of them settled in the United States or in Britain, as did those from other European countries during the upheavals which followed the Second World War.

These migrations were no new phenomena in Jewish history, for the whole story of the Jews is, in fact, one of constant upheavals of a similar kind. In Old Testament times many of them had to leave Palestine and settle in surrounding countries—especially Babylonia and Egypt. Jerusalem suffered attacks by the Greek and Roman rulers who in turn dominated Palestine, and from the second century A.D. until the present century, all but tiny handfuls

of Jews lived in exile. But after the end of the First World War in 1918, Palestine came under British rule and there began a slow trickle of returning immigrants to settle once more in the land which, they believed, God had given them through his promise to Abraham. In 1947 the United Nations Assembly established a Jewish state in Palestine by dividing the country up between Jews and Arabs. The Jews proclaimed the existence of the State of Israel in May 1948 and, resisting the attacks of the Arab countries, allowed exiles from Europe to settle there. Now some Jews live in Palestine, but the majority are 'dispersed' in other countries.

The interesting and quite remarkable thing about this long and troubled story of Jewish history is that through it all has been kept alive the essential aspects of the Jewish religion. This is because to the Jew, religion is life and life is religion. Orthodox Jews in Britain or New York still read the Torah, worship in the synagogue, keep the sabbath, the Passover and the other fasts and festivals, almost exactly as their distant forbears used to do in the time of Christ in Nazareth or Jerusalem. There is, however, one important difference—there has been no Temple and so no sacrifices (because only in the Temple could sacrifice be offered) since the Roman general Titus destroyed the Temple in A.D. 70.

Modern Judaism has no priests, but only rabbis and scribes. There are still those who claim descent from the ancient priestly families—originally of the

tribe of Levi—but they have no priestly functions to perform. In the synagogue the rabbi, whose task it is to study and teach the Law, is the minister who conducts worship. Scribes still copy the roll of the Law as they did in the time of Christ because it is a sacred custom among the Jews that the Law must be handwritten according to precise rules, on parchment. A worn Torah is either repaired or laid aside—never destroyed—because anything on which the name of God has been written cannot be destroyed.

The synagogue nowadays is in many respects not unlike a Christian church—at any rate in its architectural form. Some of the older synagogues to be found in European countries are octagonal in shape but many are rectangular, while recently built synagogues, especially in the United States, are outwardly as modern in their external appearance as are some contemporary church buildings.

Inside the synagogue there are pews, or chairs, for the worshippers, as in a church, but in all except those belonging to 'reform' movements, the women sit in a gallery apart, because traditionally the worship is primarily the function of the men. The main feature of the synagogue is the 'ark'—a recess built into the wall that faces in the direction of Jerusalem—which houses the rolls of the sacred Torah. Above it are usually inscribed the Ten Commandments and it is generally enclosed with doors and covered with richly embroidered curtains.

A pulpit—or more correctly, a platform for the

reader, the 'cantor' who leads the chanting, and for the preacher—is placed on the floor of the central aisle some way back from the sanctuary in which the ark stands. The scroll from which the readings for a particular day or special occasion are taken, is solemnly carried by one of the elders to the rostrum and the reading, in Hebrew, is by the rabbi or by one of the elders, with appropriate chanted introduction and conclusion.

It follows that every devout Jewish boy must learn Hebrew so that he can in due course play his part in the public reading of the Torah in the synagogue services. In many synagogues the first public reading by a boy who has been learning to equip himself to perform this task, is observed as an important occasion. Jews have always attached great importance to family life, believing that children are 'a gift from God', and in Old Testament days the Jewish father believed that his 'name' lived on in his sons. Here lies the origin of the special place which Jewish men, and especially the eldest son, occupy in family life and in the worship of the synagogue.

The reading of the Law is apportioned out according to certain rules, in such a manner that the daily readings cover the whole of the Pentateuch ('the five books of Moses') in the course of a year. The services generally follow the order prescribed in the Jewish Service Book, and take place three times daily—in the evening (since the Jewish day begins at sunset), in the morning and in the afternoon. The

sabbath services and those held on particular occasions, are therefore in the nature of special services set within a larger framework of daily prayers.

The basic Jewish beliefs about God, the Covenant which He made with Israel through Moses, and the Law (Torah) which God required Israel to observe, are familiar to Christians as well as Jews. It is necessary therefore, only to point out that throughout the Old Testament there is a strong emphasis upon the fact that for Israel God is One and is Almighty. At first, of course, Israel believed that other peoples had their own gods, but certainly by the middle of the sixth century B.C. her greatest prophets were insisting that Jehovah was the one and only God; there were no others. In time this became the belief of all Jews.

So today, the worshipper in the synagogue acknowledges the existence of the One, Almighty God, who redeemed his people from slavery in Egypt, led them into the Promised Land, watched over them in all the trials and tribulations through which they passed, and whose words of promise and hope speak to him still, as they did to his ancestors, through the Torah.

Readers who know the New Testament will remember that there are references in the Gospels to the fact that even in the time of Christ, the Jewish scribes revered, not only the Torah, but also 'the traditions of the elders'. The 'traditions' were, in fact, interpretations of the Law made over the centuries by the learned students of the Law. They

gradually became important as sets of rules by which a Jew should apply the Law to the circumstances of his daily life.

During the second century A.D. the celebrated Rabbi Judah sorted and collected the most important of the traditions to form what came to be known as the 'Mishnah' (Repetition), and this quickly became a standard authority for the detailed interpretation and application of the Law to the daily life of the Jew. It covered every part of Jewish life, from important matters like the care of the poor, down to such details as how a Jew could pray while working on the top of a wall or riding on horseback, or what objects could be worn on the sabbath.

But the process of interpretation still continued as rabbis added comments on the Mishnah as well. In the sixth century these comments were sifted and brought together in a collection called the Gemara, and combined with the Mishnah into one large commentary called the Talmud.

In the centuries which followed, and as one persecution after another fell upon the Jewish communities in the Near East and in Europe, so the Talmud became more and more precious to the devout Jew. Whatever physical deprivations he suffered, however much he might be prevented from holding services in the synagogue, or outwardly observing the great fasts and festivals of his religion, he could always escape through the Talmud and as he read it, re-create in his mind the world of the Temple, the

Law, and the Covenant as if he were living again in the Holy Land itself.

For the modern orthodox Jew the Talmud remains, after the Torah, the most important source of his faith. The rituals, the order of his worship and his marriage laws are all derived from it, and from it, too, he derives many of the detailed religious and ethical principles which form the basis of his beliefs and practices.

This is probably the best point at which to say a word about some of the reform movements which have given rise to what is called Liberal Judaism. The Liberal Jew does not believe that it is enough to cling too rigidly to the rules and customs of the past but insists that tradition must be interpreted in the light of contemporary thought and circumstances. The Reform movement began in the eighteenth century among some of the Jews of France and Germany who felt the need to adapt their way of life to meet the social, intellectual and political changes of that time. In Germany, for example, they began to conduct some of the services in German, instead of Hebrew or Yiddish (the Jewish language of modern times), and to use an organ to accompany parts of the singing, instead of using only the traditional unaccompanied chant. At the same time, some of the old traditional beliefs—like that about the coming of a promised Messiah, or the resurrection of the body—were called in question.

Today, Liberal Judaism finds a number of sup-

porters among members of Jewish communities in Great Britain and the United States. But there is a strong desire among them to emphasize the things which all Jews have in common, rather than their differences. One Liberal Jew has written recently:

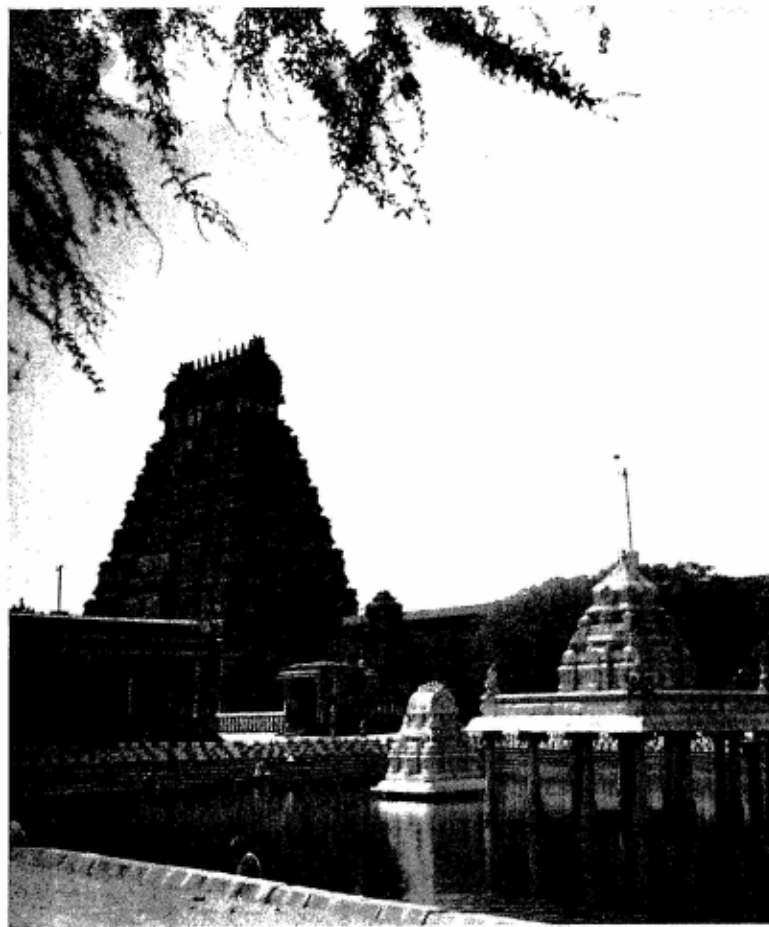
If . . . Liberal Judaism is a religion for thinking people, and indeed it is, it has to be remembered that the best type of Jew was, and remains, humble, reverent and essentially simple in his faith and outlook. Learned he need certainly not be, but ignorant he must never be. Here again Orthodox and Liberal Judaism are at one.¹

Prayers may be said in the synagogue only when at least ten males of over thirteen years of age are present. Otherwise they may be said in private—except that then certain sacred formulae may not be used. Before praying a pious Jew binds to his left arm, and to his forehead the small leather ‘phylacteries’ (tephillim) containing, among others, the most sacred scriptural text, the ‘Shema’, the commandment to love God, with all his heart, soul and might. (These texts, called there the ‘mezuzah’, are also fixed to the door-post of his house and he touches the mezuzah reverently as he goes in and out.) Then he puts on the tasselled praying-shawl, called ‘tallith’, draped over the head and shoulders, since by long custom the Jews must cover the head when he approaches God in prayer. The Jewish boy is permitted to wear ‘tephillim’ and ‘tallith’ after the age of

¹ *The Path of Life* by V. G. Simmonds, p. 33. London. 1961.



7. Rabbi carrying a scroll of the sacred Torah during a service in a Cardiff synagogue.



8. Varadaraja temple and tank at the holy city of Kanchipuram, near Madras.

thirteen and following the necessary instruction and preparation. The formal service of 'confirmation' is marked by the boy being called to read the Torah in public in the synagogue.

The important place which home life occupies in Judaism is reflected in the fact that, in addition to daily prayers, certain other religious ceremonies are observed there. The beginning of the sabbath, on Friday evening, is marked by certain sabbath ceremonies. The wife lights the sabbath candles and as she does so pronounces a blessing over them. Before the meal is eaten, the whole family stands and all the males present who are over thirteen years of age hold in their right hands a goblet of wine, while the father pronounces the Kiddush, the prayer of sanctification.

Blessed art thou, O Lord, King of the Universe, who createst the fruit of the vine.

Orthodox Jews are most careful to avoid throughout the sabbath any activity which is connected with work—even listening to the radio, using the telephone or writing letters. The sabbath ends at sundown on Saturday and its close is marked by another ceremony called 'Havdalah' (separating) when candles are again lighted and the family partakes of wine and spices.

Other ceremonies which are strictly observed in the homes of orthodox Jews include the Jewish New Year (in September or October); Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement (nine days later); Passover (in

March or April); Shabuoth (the early harvest, held in April or May); Sukkoth (an autumn fruit harvest, when homes are decorated with flowers, fruit and branches); Purim (February or March), commemorating Esther's saving of the Jews); and Hannukkah, the Feast of Lights (held in November or December to commemorate the re-dedication of the Temple after Judas Maccabeus had recaptured Jerusalem from the Greeks in 168 B.C.).

One of the gayest as well as most solemn ceremonies held in a Jewish home is the wedding service. The ceremony itself is performed under a canopy decorated with flowers, which is intended to symbolize the voluntary coming together of bride and bridegroom in a new home. First comes the betrothal, when the vows are recited over a cup of wine which has been blessed by the rabbi. Then the bridegroom places the ring upon the forefinger of the bride's right hand, with the words:

Behold, thou art sanctified unto me by this ring according to the Law of Moses and Israel.

Further benedictions are recited and prayers said for the happiness of the couple and finally the bridegroom breaks a wine-glass as a reminder to him and to his bride of the destruction of Jerusalem and to signify that even in the happy moments of life, the sorrow of the Jewish people over the destruction of their holy city must never be forgotten. The ideal of marriage is a high one. Chastity and fidelity are im-

portant, as also is the maintenance of loving unity between husband and wife. Divorce is permitted, but only when it can be shown beyond all doubt that the maintenance of harmony between the partners is quite impossible.

The fact that so much that is central to the religious life of Judaism takes place in the home is, of course, a continual reminder to the Jew that the home and the family are the most important parts of the life that God has provided for man. Even the synagogue is secondary to the home. Family life is therefore a primary concern to a Jewish father, and one of his most important duties is the proper care and training of his family. This fact has accounted in no small measure for the cohesion and solidarity of the Jewish people throughout the long period of their history.

Other virtues are also important in Jewish teaching. The 'fear of the Lord' is a 'fear' which also expresses itself in a loving devotion to the God who is not only Creator, Law-Giver and King, but also the Redeemer and Shepherd of his people. And this concern of God for His creatures must find an echo in their concern for one another. So the Jew tries to love the Lord his God with all his heart and his neighbour as himself. The Talmud is explicit in insisting that the Jew's love of his fellows must extend to all men, of whatever race or creed.

Perhaps even this very brief and incomplete summary of some of the most important beliefs and prac-

tices of Judaism will have managed to convey something of the nobility of this great religion. It is impossible to go into a Jewish synagogue and to talk with sincere Jews without being aware both of the simplicity and at the same time the splendour of the faith which this long-suffering people has preserved through the centuries. For all its care for tradition, it nourishes today many men and women who, though their spiritual roots are sunk deep in the past history of their religion, are yet alive to the challenges and demands of life in the second half of the twentieth century. Because of this they, as many of their forebears have done before them, are making an immensely valuable contribution to the life of the communities to which they belong. This is because they believe that if they are people 'chosen' by God, they are 'chosen' not to privilege but for service to humanity as a whole.

15

CHRISTIANS

SOMETHING like a third of the world's population claim to be members of one or other of the Christian Churches. This puts the total number of Christians at about 1,000,000,000, but this figure must be regarded as a general estimate, because exact numbers are impossible to obtain for the Middle and Far East and Africa.

The term 'Christian Churches' covers such a wide variety of sects and denominations that the task of describing all the shades of beliefs and kinds of worship becomes quite impossible—certainly in a book of this size. All that can be done is to compare the outlook and practices of the biggest Churches. The reader must bear in mind that besides them are many smaller and less well-known denominations. (In the United States alone there are over 250 distinct Christian denominations or sub-denominations.)

We noticed earlier that Buddhism seems more like a whole family of religions than just one religion and

no doubt the Buddhist, the Hindu or the Muslim thinks of Christianity in much the same sort of way. To the non-Christian, the simplicity of the worship which takes place in a Meeting House of the Society of Friends and the solemnity of a High Mass in a Roman Catholic church must seem in such complete contrast as to suggest that they have very little in common.

Yet there are links—very strong links too—which bind all the Christian denominations together and which make it possible to speak of them as ‘Christian Churches’. The first is the fact that they acknowledge Jesus Christ as the one through whom God has been fully revealed to the world. The second is their reverence for the Bible—Old and New Testaments together—as the main source of man’s knowledge of God and God’s message to mankind.

THE FAITH OF THE EARLY CHURCH

Christianity did not appear to the first Christians as an entirely new religion but as a new kind of Judaism. For Jesus was a Jewish rabbi who was born in northern Palestine between 7 and 5 B.C. (Our year A.D. 1 was not calculated until the sixth century A.D. and we think now that the monk who worked it out, put the year of Christ’s birth from five to seven years too late.) Jesus preached in Palestine to His own people, speaking in Aramaic, the colloquial Hebrew of His day, and His first followers were nearly all Jews. At

first the Roman authorities made no attempt to interfere with the 'sect of the Nazarenes', or the followers of 'Chrestus', because they thought it was a Jewish sect and they allowed the Jews a good deal of freedom to practise their own religion.

But it was not long before Paul and the other Christian preachers made it clear that the 'gospel' was for Gentiles as well. And when the orthodox Jews began to attack the Christians, then it became more and more apparent to Roman officials that what had at first seemed merely a Jewish sect, was in fact a new religion. As the New Testament so picturesquely puts it—the 'new wine' had burst the 'old wineskin'.

All that was involved in the Christian religion did not become clear to the first few generations of Christians. It took two or three hundred years for all the implications of the new faith to be appreciated. But even in the early years certain facts stood out plainly enough.

The Jews looked for a Messiah. The early Christians said that the Messiah had come—in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, a man whose life and teaching showed that he was the Messiah sent by God. What was more, they declared that the Jewish leaders had put Him to death, but God had raised Him from the dead. And now God had given new life and power to all those who had accepted Jesus as Messiah and who had been baptized into membership of the new 'Church'—the new 'congregation' of believers in

Christ which was taking the place of the old 'congregation' of the Jews. Any man, of any race whatever, could become a member of this new Christian 'congregation' if he believed 'on the name of Jesus Christ' and was willing to be baptized 'into the name of Jesus'.

To begin with, the Christians continued to keep the Jewish 'hours of prayer', and to read the Jewish scriptures. Baptism, too, was practised by the Jews, and Christian baptism was distinctive only because it was done in the name of Jesus Christ.

But one feature of their religious life did distinguish the Christians from the very beginning. They observed the first day of the week as their specially holy day, to commemorate the day of Christ's resurrection. And on this day, 'The Lord's Day', they gathered for 'the breaking of bread'—the commemoration of the Last Supper which Jesus shared with His disciples in the upper room on the eve of the Passover just before he was arrested and put to death.

For them this was not just a weekly celebration of what had been part of the annual Passover celebrations. It was a memorial of Christ's death and at the same time of His resurrection, because the bread and wine of which they partook became a symbol of the new life and strength which came to them through their faith in Him. And since it was a 'meal' which they all shared together, it also symbolized their 'family' unity.

Gradually their numbers increased; communities

of Christians were formed in many of the cities of the Roman Empire. This meant that they had to organize themselves—appoint leaders and plan their worship and preaching so as to ensure that the new faith was properly understood and practised.

The New Testament is not always clear about the kind of organization which the early Christians adopted, though certain facts are plain enough. Baptism by or in water, followed by the 'laying on of hands' was the ritual used to mark the formal admission of new members into the Church. The 'Lord's Supper', sometimes also called 'the Eucharist' (Thanksgiving) or 'The Breaking of Bread', continued to be the chief act of worship. The Jewish scriptures were read and psalms sung at gatherings for prayer.

The Apostles, who were the chief leaders of the Church, appointed 'elders' to superintend the life and worship of the various Christian communities. To help them with some of the many routine tasks, junior ministers, called 'deacons' (one who serves) were appointed. We also find mention of 'overseers' or 'bishops' (*episcopoi*) in some of the Churches, though whether this was another name for 'elders', or whether it denoted from the beginning a separate class of senior ministers, is by no means certain. What is certain is that gradually three classes of ministers developed with these three titles. The 'episcopoi' became the 'bishops', the 'elders' became the 'priests' who led the worship and guided the life

of the local congregations of Christians; and the 'deacons' became their assistants, helping to visit the sick and care for the poor, and instructing those who wanted to join the Christian congregations.

Meantime other developments were taking place in connection with the Church's worship and belief. The letters which St. Paul and other apostles had written had become widely read and highly treasured. So, too, had the 'Gospels' about Christ's birth, life, teaching, death, resurrection and ascension, and the story of Paul's work. So often did the Christian congregations want to hear parts of these writings read during worship that these writings gradually became as highly prized by the Christians as the Old Testament. Soon the new writings became spoken of as the 'New' Testament (or Covenant) which completed or fulfilled the Old. And so that there would be no danger of this 'New Testament' being changed by false teaching, the Church decided which books were to be regarded as parts of it and which were not. The formal decisions about this were taken at a great gathering of Christian leaders in A.D. 397, but they merely confirmed officially what had been the common view of the Churches for the previous two hundred years.

By thus fixing the form of the scriptures, the early Church was able to protect its faith against men who misunderstood it, and others who tried to get it changed for other reasons. A second safeguard was found in the Creeds—formal statements of what the

CHRISTIANS

Churches believed. Creeds first came into use as summaries of Christian belief learned and publicly declared by 'catechumens', candidates for baptism. Between the second and third centuries the Church used these Creeds as the bases of her formal declarations of what all Christians believed. It was thus that the two Creeds known respectively as the 'Apostles' and the 'Nicene' Creed came to be the official Creeds of the whole Christian Church.

In these Creeds the developed beliefs of the Church are expressed more precisely than the first Christians would have been able to do, but in a way which, the Church has always maintained, is in harmony with the beliefs of the early Christians as they are reflected in the New Testament.

Perhaps the most perplexing part of the Creeds is that which speaks of God as 'Three Persons'—Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Probably few Christian theologians nowadays would claim that this is an easy belief to explain—certainly not in simple language. Yet the early Christians obviously found that it was the best way in which to express the kind of experience of God which the Church had always had.

Christians, like Jews, had always believed in Almighty God, the Creator of heaven and earth, and Christ had taught His followers to pray to God as 'Father'. St. Paul and St. John had expressed not only their own experience but that of many other early Christians as well, when they had declared that Jesus was indeed a man but also the agent of God's

redemption of mankind, and they, like other Christians, worshipped Christ as they worshipped God the Father.

Thirdly, they and the other early Christians were deeply aware that God, through Christ, was at work in and among them after Christ's death, resurrection and ascension, in a deeper and more vivid sense than had been the case before. To express this conviction, they resorted to Jewish terms and spoke of God's 'Holy Spirit' at work in the Church and in the heart and mind of individual believers. Thus, when later generations of Christians tried to describe God in the full sense in which they now believed in Him, they used the formula 'Three Persons and One God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit'.

The two oldest divisions within the Church are those of the Roman Catholic and the Eastern Orthodox Churches—a separation which dates officially from the year 1054, but which had its roots in a rivalry between the Popes in Rome and the Patriarchs of Constantinople that had developed during the preceding four centuries. This rivalry was as much political as theological. The bishop of the Church of Rome had very early on been looked up to as the chief leader among the bishops because Rome was the great imperial city of the Empire. On the other hand, Constantinople had been the chief city of the eastern part of the Empire ever since the Empire was divided in the fourth century A.D. It was

almost inevitable that the Patriarchs of Constantinople would resist, sooner or later, any claims made by the Pope to be the head of the Eastern as well as of the Western Church.

The separation of the Roman from the Orthodox Churches continues to the present time, though the fact that within recent years relations between them seem to be growing closer, is itself a reminder that there are no great differences in their beliefs and practices.

In the Roman Church the chief act of worship is the Mass—the Roman Catholic name for the Eucharist or Holy Communion service. In the Orthodox Church, too, this service—there called the Liturgy—is the principal act of worship. Both churches have encouraged the offering of prayers to the saints and the Virgin Mary. Both Churches share a concern for the use of splendid and carefully ordered ceremonial—processions, the use of incense, holy water, candles and elaborate robes for bishops, priests and other ministers—in connection with their worship.

There are, however, one or two differences in the conduct of worship which are worth mentioning. The Roman Catholic Church has been scrupulous in retaining the Latin words of the Mass—the language which the ancient Churches of the West had used ever since they formed part of the Roman Empire. Perhaps no subject was so earnestly debated in the second session of the Vatican Council held in Rome

in 1963 as the proposal that the use of local languages should be substituted in part for Latin. On the other hand, though the Greek of the ancient Eastern Liturgy has continued to be used in Orthodox Churches, there is no hard and fast rule about this and the use of local languages has been common practice.

Again, Orthodox churches, unlike the Roman, have not until very recently contained seats for the worshippers, since the congregation stands to worship. In the Roman Church relics of saints are still valued and most churches contain images of the Virgin Mary and of saints. In Orthodox churches however, icons take the place of images. The icon is a picture of Christ, or the Virgin, or a saint framed in such a manner as to leave only the face and hands of the figure visible. Icons are found in homes and even shops, as well as in churches, and are also carried by travellers. They are greatly revered, it being believed that through them the faithful can receive much-desired blessings. The Orthodox Church is still strong in eastern Europe—in Russia, Greece, Yugoslavia, Bulgaria and Rumania—and in countries of the Middle East; it also has well over 1,000,000 members in the United States.

THE PROTESTANT CHURCHES

A whole series of further divisions within the Church was set in motion by the Reformation, which led to the breaking away from the Western Church of

groups of Christians in Europe. The first to break away were the followers of Martin Luther, who supported their leader in 'Protesting' (hence they were called 'Protestants') against what they regarded as wrong practices tolerated by the Church of Rome. In Germany a number of Protestant churches had been established by the middle of the sixteenth century. They kept many of the old ways of worship at first, but introduced a great deal of hymn-singing and made the sermon a very important part of the service. At this period also similar Reformed Churches sprang up in other parts of Europe—in Denmark and Sweden, in Switzerland (where John Calvin lived and taught), in Italy, France, the Netherlands and Spain. Ireland, too, came under the influence of the Protestant movement.

The story of the separation of the Church of England from the jurisdiction of the Church of Rome, of the changes that were made in her forms of worship, is long and involved and cannot be adequately summarized in a few paragraphs. The outcome, however, is well known. Under Queen Elizabeth a settlement was reached which was intended to put an end to the warring of the Roman Catholic and Protestant parties within the Church. The Sovereign became the Supreme Head of the Church and the Church became the Church of England, established as the State Church. Her bishops were appointed by the Sovereign, to whom they took an oath of allegiance. To this day the position remains the same,

though the Prime Minister makes recommendations of suitable persons to the Sovereign. The throne remains officially responsible for the final government of the Church and for her forms of worship.

In Scotland the movement towards reform found a champion in John Knox. Knox was a follower of John Calvin and lived for a time on the Continent. His efforts to establish a reformed Church in Scotland helped to bring about the measure passed by the Scottish Parliament in 1560 which officially sanctioned a Protestant Confession of Faith for the Realm of Scotland. Shortly afterwards parliament repudiated the authority of the Bishop of Rome and forbade the use of the Mass. A system of Church government was worked out in which congregations elected and called their own ministers, and, with the minister, ruled the Church through a body of 'elders'. This system of Church government became known as the Presbyterian, because the elders or presbyters were the real authority in the Church. The Presbyterian Church is the national Church of Scotland and other Churches, including the 'episcopal' Church (the Scottish equivalent of the Church of England) occupy a position there comparable with that which the Free Churches have in England.

Worship in churches of the Reformation has changed a good deal over the centuries and varies from country to country and from church to church. The Holy Communion generally remains the most solemn act of worship, but the doctrine of the 'sacri-

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fice of the Mass' was repudiated by the Reformers together with the belief that the bread and wine changed, at their consecration by the priest, into the body and blood of Christ. In some of the Churches of Europe the Holy Communion is now celebrated only three or four times a year, whereas in Anglican churches it takes place weekly or even daily.

But the emphasis in the worship of the Reformed Churches was put upon the 'ministry of the Word'—the reading of the Bible and preaching. Thus the pulpit had an important place in the services. An altar, or a 'holy table', usually occupies a prominent place in the church, but it has been as preacher as much as priest that the ministers of the Reformed Churches have fulfilled their main task.

Music, too, has had to adapt itself to the demands made by the Reformed type of worship. In the Church of England much of the older music used in the Liturgy has continued to be sung. But hymns and anthems were composed and sung with great enthusiasm in all the new churches. It is to this tradition of church music that we owe much of the choral music of Bach and Handel, and a great deal of splendid organ music also was composed to beautify the services of the Reformed Churches.

THE FREE CHURCHES

The seventeenth and eighteenth centuries saw the separation from the Church of England of groups of

Christians who wanted freedom to elect their own ministers, and to worship as they thought right, without interference from the State or a central Church authority. Many of them also objected to the formal ceremonial connected with Church worship and to the use of certain furnishings in the churches and to the wearing of vestments by the clergy.

These were the 'Puritans', some of whom emigrated to America when they saw that if they stayed they might be forced to give up their beliefs. The others who remained felt obliged to leave the Church and become Dissenters, later to become Congregationalists, Baptists, Quakers, Presbyterians and Unitarians.

Congregationalists and Presbyterians believed that the government of local churches ought to rest mainly with the laity and not in the hands of a priest or bishop. The Baptists shared this conviction, but also maintained that baptism should be administered to adults and condemned the practice in the Church of England of baptizing infants. The Quakers abandoned the use of all ritual and adornment of any sort in connection with worship and stressed the work of the Holy Spirit in the day-to-day life of believers, while Unitarians believed that they had the New Testament on their side when they taught the unity of God and abandoned the doctrine of God as a 'Trinity'. The Baptists and the Unitarians also had their counterparts in some of the other countries of Europe.

Another group, who became known as the 'Methodists' (because they believed in 'methodical' study and prayer) broke away from the Church because they felt that they were not free to preach, pray and worship as fervently as their leaders—John and Charles Wesley, and George Whitfield—had urged them to do.

If there is one thing which is common to these different denominations, it is their devotion to the study of the Bible and to prayer. Generally speaking this has been accompanied by a tendency to neglect the older, set forms of worship and the Creeds, and to make greater use of spontaneous prayers and hymn-singing. The Methodist Church, however, has been an exception in this respect and has tended to cling more closely to the older forms of worship. This is because Methodism was not a reform movement but an attempt to revive the spiritual life of the Church at a time when it seemed lifeless and dead.

Probably the Society of Friends is the best example of extreme reaction against the formal worship of the Church of England. Its members assemble not in churches, but in meeting-houses decorated only by a text on the wall and flowers on a table. Silent meditation is their main form of worship, the silence being broken only when the Spirit moves some friend to speak about spiritual things.

Today there also exist other less well-known Protestant groups, holding a variety of beliefs and practising forms of worship which are in some cases more

or less similar to the main types of Free Church teaching, but in others, noticeably different. Seventh Day Adventists, Jehovah's Witnesses and Christian Scientists, are examples of groups whose beliefs are not easily reconciled with those of the main denominations.

This brief summary of the principal Christian denominations and their worship began with the reminder that all Christians share a common devotion to Christ and a reverence for the Bible. We have also seen how, though they worship in a variety of ways, they are at one in worshipping the one God who has revealed Himself fully through Jesus Christ. Christians are becoming more conscious of this underlying unity at the present time; nowadays the causes of so many divisions within the Christian Church are beginning to seem less important than they were to the Christians of earlier days. Perhaps the twentieth century will go down in history as the century when the Christian Church began, after a thousand years of disagreement and dissent, to find a new and more splendid unity than it had ever known.

16

MUSLIMS

THE YOUNGEST of the world's great religions is today also one of the largest. There are about 300,000,000 Muslims—approximately one-ninth of the total population of the world. The majority of them live in the Middle East, Africa and Pakistan, and in other areas of the Far East.

People still sometimes refer to this great religion as Mohammedanism and to its adherents as Mohammedans. But it is more usual nowadays to use the names which Muslims themselves use. They call their faith 'Islam', an Arabic word which means 'obedience' and a Muslim is 'one who obeys'.

This emphasis on obedience provides the clue to the essence of this religion. God (Allah) is, rather like God in the Old Testament, the Almighty Creator and Ruler of the universe. Islam especially emphasizes the sovereign power of Allah over men's lives and destinies. He is One whom men must obey. He has revealed to man His will in the messages given through the greatest of all His prophets—Muham-

mad—and if men accept the message, and believe, they will be rewarded after death in paradise, but if they do not heed the message and rebel against Allah and the prophet, they will be punished in hell.

This 'gospel' of Islam, is nothing if not simple and direct. This partly accounts for the success which it has had in making converts: it has spoken of God and His will for man in terms which the simplest person can grasp. Not that all Muslims have been simple people. On the contrary, as the centuries have passed, Islam has also attracted and produced scientists, philosophers and poets. On a modern star-chart can be found Arabic names of well-known stars, side by side with Greek names—Aldebaran, Betelgeuse and Mizar, along with Castor, Pollux and the Gemini. This is a reminder of the time when men who professed the faith of Islam kept alive the study of astronomy to which the Greeks before them had devoted their time and energies. Muslim poetry equals in its imaginative power and beauty of expression the best that other civilizations have produced. While in Spain, which from the eighth to the eleventh century was dominated by Islam, the impressive architectural beauty of the mosques of this earlier period can still be seen, even though the mosques have now been transformed into Christian churches.

Let us look more closely at the mosque which, with its tall, slender towers or minarets, dominates the buildings in a Muslim city. The most impressive of them are to be found in places like Turkey, Egypt

and Pakistan, and though the external architecture of the mosques will differ from place to place, reflecting something of the history of the country itself, in all essentials the mosques conform to a certain basic pattern.

The centre of the mosque is the rectangular hall where the congregational services are held; on to this may be built a number of smaller rooms for the use of the Imam or prayer-leader, students, and ordinary worshippers. The minaret points upwards towards heaven and has a gallery running round it about two-thirds of the way up, where the 'muezzin' stands to call the faithful to prayer at the prescribed hours each day. A courtyard surrounds the richer mosques, attractively laid out with fountains. Water is provided in some of the chambers adjoining the main hall, so that the worshippers can engage in the ritual ablutions before entering the mosque proper.

The main prayer-hall is in the form of an open rectangle, divided only by the pillars supporting the roof. There are no pews or seats, because the worshippers squat, stand or prostrate themselves on mats placed on the floor. The ritual requires that the worshipper adopts a sequence of movements, standing, bowing, kneeling and finally prostrating himself with his forehead touching the ground—a climax which well expresses the 'obedience' which is the essence of Muslim faith and devotion.

All the worshippers are men, because, as in the Jewish synagogue, the women sit apart, in a screened

section of the hall. They face towards a niche built into the wall in the direction of Mecca. There is a platform sometimes raised like a pulpit, from which the Imam leads the prayers and delivers an exhortation or sermon.

The only decorations allowed in a mosque are geometrical patterns in glass in the windows, or in mosaics, and verses from the Qur'an inscribed on the walls.

The prophet forbade the use of any images of any living creatures whatever, lest there might appear to be any hint of a denial of the worship of the One God only.

The daily prayers may be said in the mosque, but for the majority who work this is obviously impossible. On Fridays, however, all the devout Muslims attend the mosque for the midday Friday Prayer. The ritual of the worship follows the same pattern as for the daily prayers said elsewhere. Before entering the worshipper will have first washed, in this order, face, hands, forearms up to the elbow, head and feet. He stands barefoot and repeats the call to prayer which the 'muezzin' proclaims from the minaret:

'Allah is great (said four times);

I bear witness that there is no other God but Allah
(said twice);

I bear witness that Muhammad is the messenger of
Allah (said twice);

Come to the prayers (said twice);

There is no other God but Allah.'

He then declares silently his intention to offer sincere worship, saying:

'I perform at its proper time the prescribed Middyay worship to God.'

Next he raises his hands to his shoulder, saying the while:

'God is most great.'

With his left hand placed in his right, he then recites the first chapter (Sura) of the Qur'an, with the preface:

'In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful.'

This may be followed with as many other chapters of the Qur'an as desired. He then bows, with his hands on his knees, and says again:

'God is most great.'

Next he stands upright and then prostrates himself by kneeling, stretching out his hands and touching the ground between them with his forehead. He then sits up and prostrates himself again.

The whole sequence makes up one complete act of prayer, called a 'rak'a' and two, three or four 'rak'a' may go to make up the full form of prayer said at one of the daily hours of prayer. Each 'rak'a', and the full form of prayer, must end with a set formula. For the 'rak'a', the Confession of faith:

'I testify that there is no God but Allah.'

And at the end of the full prayer:

'O God, have mercy on Muhammad and on his descendants.'

followed by the salutation:

'The peace and mercy of God be upon you.'

The only differences between prayers said in private and in the mosque are that the latter are accompanied by an exhortation preached by the Imam and that the Friday prayer in particular, being congregational, emphasizes for each worshipper his membership in the community. The exhortation may be simply a recital of verses of the Qur'an, or a meditation based on a portion of it, rather as a sermon in a Christian church may be based upon verses from the Bible.

The important place which Muhammad holds in Islam is clear from the number of times that his name is uttered in worship. The Creed of Islam, as was shown above, introduces the name of the Prophet immediately after that of Allah. The Muslim does not officially pray to Muhammad. It is strictly enjoined that prayer must be addressed to God alone and Muhammad himself never allowed his followers to regard him as anything more than 'the seal' (that is the last and final) of the prophets. Nevertheless, Muslims do believe that the Prophet will intervene for them at the judgement. It is also the case that the faithful sometimes speak of the Prophet as

though he were above ordinary mortals—calling him Intercessor, Mediator, Holy One, Holy Spirit and Light of all Light.

Muhammad began his work as a prophet about the year A.D. 610, when he was about forty. Up to this time he had been engaged in managing the caravans belonging to his wife Khadija which, in company with others, used to ply to and fro along the routes which passed through Arabia. Mecca, where he lived, derived much of its wealth from supplying trade caravans to carry merchandise between the countries of the Near East.

The great change in Muhammad's life came when, out on the hills around Mecca, he became convinced that the angel Gabriel had summoned him to become the mouthpiece of God. From then on, he believed that God was revealing, piece by piece, the message that He wanted made known to men. He began preaching the message in Mecca, but at first won few converts and, by his condemnations of their idol-worship, succeeded only in arousing against himself the hostility of the Meccans.

So bitterly did the Meccans oppose him that in the year A.D. 622 the Prophet was forced to leave Mecca with a few companions. He went to Medina, an oasis city 200 miles north of Mecca, where he was welcomed by those of the inhabitants who had been converted by his preaching. This 'flight' (Hijrah) afterwards seemed so important a turning-point in the fortunes of Islam, that it was made the beginning

of the Muslim era, the Year 1. The Muslim Calendar is reckoned in terms of years after the Hijrah—A.H. (Anno Hijrah), instead of A.D. (Anno Domini, 'The Year of the Lord'), of Christendom. (But the Muslim Year is a Lunar Year and so shorter than the years reckoned according to the A.D. calculation. Thus 1965 is not 1343 A.H. but 1385.)

At Medina Muhammad gradually strengthened his following and organized the Muslims on a military as well as a religious basis. Soon they were strong enough to take Mecca and so establish their hold over all Arabia. In A.D. 632 the Prophet died but the Muslim armies went on to conquer Syria, Iraq, Persia, Egypt and North Africa, and so laid the foundations of a Muslim Empire which was to reach up to the very borders of France.

Military exploits did not deter Muhammad, however, from making proper provision for the religious life of his followers and before he died he had firmly established the beliefs and practices which, ever since, have been the strength of Islam.

Muhammad imposed upon his followers five sacred obligations:

Faith, Prayer, Giving of Alms, Fasting and Pilgrimage—and they remain the basis of the practice of Islam today.

The recital of set prayers daily has already been noticed in connection with the worship at the mosque and it is necessary only to add that a pious Muslim observes five periods of prayer a day—at daybreak,

midday, afternoon, evening and at night. He always faces Mecca to pray and it is a moving sight to pass a group of Muslim travellers on the roadside who have broken their journey and, with faces turned towards the holy city, are engaged in the ritual prayer.

The declaration of faith is, as we saw, also included in the prayers which a Muslim uses regularly:

‘I give witness that there is no God but Allah and that Muhammad is the messenger of Allah.’

To utter this sentence is to profess the faith of Islam; it is the sign that a man is indeed a Muslim. These are also the last words which the dying take upon their lips.

The giving of alms plays an important part in the life of the individual and of the community. Its institution dates from the time when the prophet had to collect revenues from his followers in order to equip an army and to plan the organization of the new community. Nowadays the contributions are used to provide for the upkeep of the mosques and for the support of the poor members of the community. Tax levied on each property owner is worked out as a proportion of his possessions. It often amounts to one-tenth of the total but assets may be less in certain circumstances; thus, merchandise will not be taxed if it has not remained in the hands of one owner for a whole year. The deeper motive underlying this regular and systematic almsgiving is important: it springs from the conviction

that all Muslims are brothers and that therefore the wealthier must make themselves responsible for supporting those who are in need. The same deep sense of brotherhood finds expression in the custom which allows any Muslim traveller to ask and receive from any other Muslim, food and lodging while passing through town or village.

Muhammad almost certainly took over the custom of fasting from the Jewish communities with whom he came into contact at Medina and elsewhere in Arabia. The observance of a holy day of the week, and the custom of facing the holy city to pray was probably learned from the Jews as well. The Qur'an shows in what great regard the Prophet held the Old Testament and the Jewish religion. He speaks of the prophets with respect and says he is their great successor. But while at Medina he quarrelled with the Jews, and then attacked them. From this time on, he enjoined his followers to keep Friday, and not Saturday as the holy day; to face Mecca and not Jerusalem when they prayed; and instituted a new month of fasting, distinct from the Jewish fast, which he called the month 'Ramadan'.

Ramadan has been observed faithfully by devout Muslims ever since. During the whole of the 28-30 days of this month the Muslim must abstain from all food and drink, for all the hours of daylight. When darkness falls he may break the fast but must resume it again at daybreak. In the cities the beginning and ending of the daily fast is usually marked by the

appearance of a green flag on the top of the minarets of the mosques and by the firing of a gun. The completion of the month of the fast is the occasion for great festivities—new clothes are worn, religious gatherings are held, colourful processions take place, and families and friends exchange visits.

Four days of Ramadan are especially sacred. It is believed that it was during this month that the Revelation was first communicated to the Prophet. This was 'the night of fate' (laylat-al-qadr). It is not fixed precisely so the days of odd date between Ramadan 21st-27th, and especially this last day, are honoured. People visit the mosques on these days to meditate and to hear parts of the Qur'an recited.

But undoubtedly it is the annual gatherings in Mecca for the Pilgrimage which, more than any other Muslim observance, keep alive the feeling of the unity and the strength of Islam. Every Muslim is under obligation to make the Pilgrimage (hajj) to Mecca at least once in his lifetime, though exemption is allowed to those who are too poor or ill to undertake the journey. All devout Muslim men therefore try to do so and some go more than once. When he returns, the pilgrim is dignified in his community with the title 'Hajji' and is thenceforth always addressed with this honourable prefix to his name.

Nowadays something like a million pilgrims from every part of the Muslim world converge upon Mecca during the weeks preceding the pilgrimage, which takes place during the ninth month of the

Muslim year. Some come by aeroplane, in special charter-flights, and others by ship and road and some travel part of the way on foot.

The focal-point of the pilgrimage is the sacred Ka'ba in Mecca itself but the whole of the city is regarded as sacred ground and the ceremonies connected with the pilgrimage take the pilgrims also to various holy sites outside Mecca. The Ka'ba has a strange history. It is a stone of cubical shape, about 12 yards long, 10 yards wide and 10 yards high. In its south-eastern corner is embedded a Black Stone, oval in shape and about 7 inches in diameter. It may have been a meteorite, but even before Muhammad's time it was regarded as sacred by Arabians who used to visit Mecca to see the Ka'ba and kiss the sacred Black Stone. The prophet incorporated this custom into Islamic religious practice. Nowadays the Ka'ba is always covered with a black cloth of cotton and silk, woven in Cairo and renewed every year. It can be seen only for a few days in each year. It forms part of the courts of the great mosque, the Masjid al-Haram, which the pilgrim visits at the beginning of the pilgrimage.

After kissing the Black Stone—if he can get near enough to do so—the pilgrim goes seven times around the Ka'ba in an anti-clockwise direction, trying to touch the Stone as he passes. Processions move out from Mecca to the hill called 'Arafat', where the pilgrims spend the night. The next evening they hasten to the sacred valley of Mina, near Mecca, to

cast stones upon a cairn and take part in the sacrifice of animals. After having his head shaved, the pilgrim then walks again around the Ka'ba to complete the actions which must be observed in order to make a true pilgrimage.

There are, needless to say, other pious acts of a voluntary kind in which most of the pilgrims wish to engage while they are in Arabia. They may pay homage at the Prophet's tomb in Medina and meditate and attend prayers in the Mosque of the Prophet which is built around the tomb.

The exact origin and the symbolic meaning of the rites which go to make up the pilgrimage no longer can be explained very clearly. The journey out to Mina and the prayers which are said there are believed to be in imitation of actions performed by Muhammad himself. The casting of the stones upon the cairn is said to commemorate the deliverance of Abraham (the ancestor of Muslims as much as of Jews), who cast stones at Satan to prevent him from pursuing him. The sacrifice of the animal is in the nature of an offering to Allah.

But whatever doubt may exist as to the meaning underlying certain parts of the ritual, of the significance to the pilgrim of the pilgrimage as a whole there is none. To have gathered in the most holy city of Islam with hundreds of thousands of his fellow-believers from many parts of the world and, with them, to have engaged in prayer, sacrifice and worship, is an experience which he will treasure all his

life. He has sensed the world-wide extent of his religion and has experienced the brotherhood of Islam in its widest and deepest aspects. Even if he may at the same time be exploited by the rogues who come to the holy city and take advantage of simple pilgrims, or find the commercial enterprises of Mecca at this season difficult to reconcile with the pious aims of the pilgrimage as he envisages them, the chances are that none of these things will obliterate the deep spiritual and emotional satisfaction which the pilgrimage will have given him.

Islam is, as we have seen, a religion of 'the book', the 'book' in this case being the holy Qur'an. The Prophet believed that the whole Qur'an existed eternally in heaven and that Allah had communicated it, bit by bit, to him. It was not revealed to men by the Prophet but through him, he being, as it were, the human instrument of God. 'Qur'an' means 'recitation'. Muhammad 'recited' the message which he had received from Allah.

The revelations which God made through the Prophet seem to have been written down on all sorts of materials, including scraps of leather and pots-herds. They were gradually collected together by Muhammad's followers but it was not until about twenty years after his death that a full authoritative collection was made.

The Qur'an contains in all 114 'Suras' or chapters and Arabic scholars have tried to divide these into

those which belonged to the earlier and the later periods of the Prophet's life. The earlier ones are generally short and direct: the later become longer and are in the nature of complicated directions about the life of the Muslim community. It is believed that the first revelation of all which Muhammad received is the one which is now Surah 96:

'Recite thou, in the name of thy Lord Who Created:
Created man from clots of blood:
Recite thou! For thy Lord is the most Beneficent.'

Besides the Qur'an, other sacred writings have come to have a special place in the affections of Muslims. Chief among them are the 'hadith' or Traditions, which claim to be testimonies of the companions and followers of the Prophet about other events in his life and of his sayings. When a young Muslim boy is being taught about his religion he learns not only to recite passages from the Qur'an in Arabic, but also some of the more important 'hadith'.

Over the centuries Islam has developed its sects, a great body of law to regulate the domestic and social life of the Muslim communities, its mystics and its reformers. Perhaps its most difficult task at the present time is that of adapting its traditional outlook and way of life to the demands that the conditions of the twentieth century make upon people in the Muslim communities. Of this we may be certain—that a religion which has been such a strong force in the

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lives of many different people for so long a time, will certainly succeed in meeting these new demands which are being made upon it.

