

met with; among the most remarkable, that of Eleanor Cobham, duchess of Gloucester, and Stacey, servant to George Duke of Clarence<sup>1</sup>."

But it seems to include also the practising against the life of an enemy by means of a waxen or other figure, in which pins were stuck, or against which a sharp bolt was shot. It is against this crime that the law of Henry the First enacts<sup>2</sup>: "Si quis veneno, vel sortilegio, vel invultuacione, seu maleficio aliquo, faciat homicidium, sive illi paratum sit sive alii, nihil refert, quin factum mortiferum, et nullo modo redimendum sit:" and this is perhaps also intended by the word *liblác* used by Ælfric<sup>3</sup>. It is also probable that this was the crime for which in the tenth century a widow was put to death by drowning at London Bridge, and her property forfeited to the crown<sup>4</sup>. Anglosaxon homilies however also mention philtres of various kinds, which the people are warned against as dangerous and damnable heathendom.

Start Here --> Such are the fragments of a system which at one time fed the religious yearnings and propped the moral faith of our forefathers,—faint notes from a chorus of triumphant jubilation which once rose to heaven from every corner of the island.

How shall we characterize it? As a dull and debasing *Fetish-worship*, worthy of African savages? or as a vague and colourless *Pantheism*, in which religion vanishes away, and philosophy gropes for a basis which it cannot find? I think not.

<sup>1</sup> Anc. Laws and Inst. vol. ii. Gloss.

<sup>2</sup> Leg. Hen. lxxi. § 1.

<sup>3</sup> Ælfric. i. § 6.

<sup>4</sup> Cod. Dipl. No. 591.

Contemplate the child who bounds through the wood, or pauses in delight upon the meadow, where he wantons in the very joy of life itself: to him this great creation is full of playmates, beings animate or inanimate, with whom he shares his little pleasures, to whom he can confide his little sorrows. He understands their language, and in turn he has a language for them, which he thinks they understand: he knows more of their peculiarities than the halting step of scientific observation is always able to overtake; for he knows what science haughtily refuses to contemplate or, it may be, is unable to appreciate. The birds speak to him, the forests whisper to him, the shadows and the low tones of the hill and valley lull him to repose, the winds wanton with his curled locks and blow them over his shoulders, the streams and brooks have spray to play with and sprinkle in his laughing eyes. He stands before the great spirit of nature, face to face, and knows him as he reveals himself in every one of his divine forms; for the child sees and knows the secrets of God, which the man, alas! is condemned to forget. Such as the child is, has the child-like nation been, before the busy hum of commerce, the crashing strokes of the piston, the heavy murmur of innumerable spinning-jennies necessarily banished more natural music from our ears. An age that thinks about itself and its own capacity, that reflects upon its own processes of thought, and makes great combinations of powers, and anatomizes nature till it becomes familiar with

every secret of creation, may be an earnest puritanical age, a stern protestant age, one that will not be fed with imaginative religions; but it cannot be one of implicit, trusting, fearing, rejoicing, trembling belief: the age of faith ceased where the age of knowledge began. Man knows too much, perhaps believes too little: he will not, and he must not, yield his privilege of calm, determined, obstinate enquiry: he will, and should, judge for himself, weigh evidence, compare and reason, and decide for himself how much or how little he will receive as true. How can he wonder at the stars, their rising, their setting or their eclipse? He calculates where new planets may be found: he weighs them in his balances when found, and tells not only their circumference or their density, but how long the straggling ray of light that started from them was on its journey, before it reached the eye of the gazer. What can these wavering fragments of time and space be to him who calculates duration by the nutation of suns, or the scarcely appreciable difference of millennial changes? Let us remember what our fathers were, and consider what we are. For them there was indeed a time, a period to tell of,

“when the Sun

Knew not her dwelling, nor the Moon his power,  
And the Stars knew not where their place should be!”

We know their places, and their dwellings, and their power. They are subordinated to a hypothesis of gravitation. For us there is no wavering bridge of the Gods, no *Bifröst* or *Asbrú*; our rain-

bow is a shadowy thing, a belt of deceptive colours, the reflection of a sunbeam in the multitudinous prisms of a shower-cloud. We have no *Hammer*, wielded by the Thunder-god, and dreaded by the giants; our *Miölner* has vanished into the indifference of opposing electricities. Apothecaries' Hall prepares its simples without the aid of charms, or invocation of divinities; and though we stand as yet but on the threshold of science, we have closed for ever behind us the portals of mystery and belief. For we are raised upon the shoulders of the times gone by, and cast a calm and easy view over the country which our forefathers wandered through in fear and trembling. We fear not what they feared; we cling not to what they clung to, for relief and comfort; we have set up our own idol, the *Understanding*, fortified by laborious experience, taught by repeated struggles and victories, firmly based on conquered, catalogued and inventoried nature, on facts, the stern children of a passionless reality. I know not whether we have gained or lost in this inevitable career of humanity; I have faith only that He who rules the purpose of the ages, has thus cast our lot in the infinite love and wisdom of his own thought. But not to us, or in our finite forms of thought, can the world be as once it was, and the “dull catalogue of common things” admits no admixture of a fancied divinity; nay, so far are we from seeking to instil spirit into matter, that the informing soul itself ceases to be the object of our contemplation, while we are busied with the nerves and tendons,

or charmed with the wonderful combination of details that form the perfect whole. We stand supreme among the subjects of our knowledge; and the marvels of science itself will now not form the stock in trade of a second-class conjuror. Observe the man who threads his way with imperturbable security and speed through the thoroughfares of a densely-peopled metropolis: the crowd throng about him, yet he yields here, he advances there, till at length, almost unconsciously, he has attained the goal of his desire. He is familiar with the straight lines and angles that surround him, he measures his position and stands upright, mistaking, if indeed he think at all, the inconceivably rapid calculations of the understanding for acts of his own spontaneous volition. The unaccustomed eye of the child cannot do this; and he wavers in his steps and stumbles from point to point, helpless, but charming in his helplessness, till practice brings him power, and he too walks and stands upright among men. So is it with the minds of men in early and uninstructed periods, stumbling from belief to belief, resting for support upon every circumstance of surrounding life, and unfurnished with the elements of scientific reasoning, which, by assuring certainty, destroy the vague, indefinite basis of faith, or bring within a narrow and constantly decreasing circle, its vague and indefinite object. We believe the results of Geometry, the theorems of analytic mathematics, because we cannot help ourselves, cannot escape from the inevita-

ble conclusion involved in the premises; but we cannot call this acquiescence faith, or establish upon it a moral claim before our own conscience and our God. And as there can be no reason save in the unintelligible, no faith save in the impossible, all that is brought within the realm of the intellect, or the sphere of the possible, is just so much withdrawn from the circle of religion.

The basis of the religious state in man is the sensation of weakness,—whether that weakness be or be not distinctly traced in the consciousness to the ignorance which is its cause, or to the ultimate, more abstract and more philosophical conviction of sinfulness, in the conscience. Man cannot rest for his anxious desire to know the why and how of every phænomenon he observes: this restlessness is the law of his intellect, that is, the condition of his humanity: he interrogates the phænomena themselves, but if they will give no answer to his question, he will seek it without them. In himself he will seek it in vain. At no time, at no stage of his development can he understand the relation of the subject and the object, or comprehend the copula that unites them. The philosopher the most deeply trained in watching abstract forms of thought, acknowledges with a sigh that even the intuitions of the reason halt in the fetters of the understanding, and that to give objective reality to what can be known only in the forms and through the powers of the subjective, is at best to be guilty of a noble treason to the laws of pure reasoning. And what

shall he do, who is not trained in watching abstract forms of thought? Is he more likely to find the answer in himself? Alas, no! he feels only too surely that his nature can give no satisfying response; that his confined and bounded being is itself full of problems which remain unsolved.

And now let this state be considered with reference to the early inhabitant of a world, whose secrets are yet undiscovered, and on whom no light of heavenly radiance has fallen. For him, as for us, there is no answer either in the phænomenon or in the observer: but he has no reason to reject the supposition of a supernatural influence: everything that surrounds him is filled with evidence of supernatural power. He lives in nearer communion than we do with the world about him: his frame, not yet clogged and vitiated by the habits of an advanced cultivation, is more alive than ours to the external effects of natural causes: the world itself, existing under different conditions of climate, different electrical combinations, not yet subdued by the plough, or the axe of the forester, not yet bridled and trained by the canal, the manufactory or the railroad, has effluences which act upon the nerves and fluids of the man, and which seem to him divine emanations, revelations of the divinity within the lake, the mountain and the tree: the lake, the mountain and the tree he peoples then with gods,—with Nymphs and Nereids, with Oreads and Hamadryads—to whose inward and spiritual action the outward owes its power and its form.

But the outward and visible is not a sign only, of the inward and spiritual; it is a symbol, a part of that which it denotes; it is at once the sower and the seed.

In no age can man be without the great ideas of God, of right, of power, of love, of wisdom; but an age that has not learnt to feed upon abstractions, must find the realization of those ideas in the outward world, and in a few familiar facts of human nature. It strives to give itself an account of itself, and the result of its efforts is a paganism, always earnest and imaginative, often cruel and capricious, as often gentle, affectionate and trusting—for even in spite of cruelty and caprice, the affections will have their way, and trust will find a home. Its inconsistency is the offspring not of guilt, but of imperfect knowledge: it seeks the great solution of all religious problems, a mediator between God and man: it is its error, but not necessarily its crime, that it finds that mediator in the complex of the world itself: no other has been revealed to it; and the reveries of philosophy that haunt the sounding Portico or the flowery swathes of Hymettus, cannot tell of the “Unknown God” to the agriculturist, the huntsman or the pirate.

I believe in two religions for my forefathers: one that deals with the domestic life, and normal state of peace; that sanctifies the family duties, prescribes the relations of father, wife and child, divides the land, and presides over its boundaries; that tells of gods, the givers of fertility and increase, the protectors of the husbandman and the herds-

man; that guards the ritual and preserves the liturgy; that pervades the social state and gives permanence to the natural, original political institutions. I call this the sacerdotal faith, and I will admit that to its teachers and professors we may owe the frequent attempt of later periods to give an abstract, philosophic meaning to myths and tradition, and to make dawning science halt after religion.

The second creed I will call the heroic; in this I recognize the same gods, transformed into powers of war and victory, crowners of the brave in fight, coercers of the wild might of nature, conquerors of the giants, the fiends and dragons; founders of royal families, around whom cluster warlike comrades, exulting in the thought that their deities stand in immediate genealogical relation to themselves, and share in the pursuits and occupations which furnish themselves with wealth and dignity and power. Let it be admitted that a complete separation never takes place between these different forms of religion; that a wavering is perceptible from one to the other; that the warrior believes his warrior god will bless the produce of his pastures; that the cultivator rejoices in the heroic legend of Wóden and of Baldr, because the cultivator is himself a warrior when the occasion demands his services: still, in the ultimate development and result of the systems, the original distinction may be traced, and to it some of the conclusions we observe must necessarily be referred: it is thus that spells of healing and fruitfulness survive when the great gods have vanished, and that

the earth, the hills, the trees and waters retain a portion of dimmed and bated divinity long after the godlike has sunk into the heroic legend, or been lost for ever.

I can readily believe that the warrior and the noble were less deeply impressed with the religious idea than the simple cultivator. In the first place, the disturbed life and active habits of military adventurers are not favourable to the growth of religious convictions: again, there is no tie more potent than that which links sacred associations to particular localities, and acts, unconsciously perhaps but pervasively, upon all the dwellers near the holy spots: the tribe may wander with all its wealth of thought and feeling; even its gods may accompany it to a new settlement; but the *religio loci*, the indefinable influence of the local association, cannot be transported. Habits of self-reliance, of a proud and scornful independence, are not consistent with the conviction of weakness, which is necessary to our full admission of the divine pre-eminence; and the self-confident soldier often felt that he could cope with gods such as his had been described to be. In the Greek heroic lay Tydides could attack, defeat, and even wound Ares: I do not know that the Teutonic mythology ever went so far as this; but we have abundant record of a contemptuous disregard with which particular heroes of tradition treated the popular religion. Some selected indeed one god in whom they placed especial trust, and whom they worshipped (as far as they worshipped at all) to the exclusion of the

rest; but more must have participated in that feeling which is expressed in a Danish song,

“ I trust my sword, I trust my steed,  
But most I trust myself at need <sup>1</sup> !”

while to many we may safely apply what is said of a Swedish prince, “han var mikit blandinn i trunni,” he was mightily confused in his belief. Still it is certain that a personal character was attributed to the gods, as well as an immediate intervention in the affairs of life. The actual presence of *Óþinn* from time to time on the battle-field, in the storm, in the domestic privacy of the household, was firmly believed, in Scandinavia; and it is reasonable to assume that *Wóden* would have been found as active among our German progenitors, had not the earlier introduction of Christianity into Teutonic Europe deprived us of the mythological records which the North supplies. *Beda* tells us that *Eádwini* of Northumberland sacrificed and offered thanks to his gods upon the birth of a daughter. *Rædwald* of Eastanglia, even after his nominal conversion, continued to pay his offerings to idols, and the people of *Essex*, when labouring under the ravages of a pestilence, abjured the faith of Christ and returned to the service of the ancient gods. But in the personality of God alone resides the possibility of realizing the religious idea.

<sup>1</sup> “Forst troer jeg mit gode sward,  
og saa min gode hest,  
dernast troer jeg mine dannesvenne,  
jeg troei mig self allerbedst.”

Many examples are given in *Grimm, Mythol.* p. 7.

We possess no means of showing how the religion of our own progenitors or their brethren of the continent, had been modified, purified, and adapted in the course of centuries to a more advanced state of civilization, or the altered demands of a higher moral nature; but, at the commencement of the sixth century we do find the pregnant fact, that Christianity met but little resistance among them, and enjoyed an easy triumph, or at the worst a careless acquiescence, even among those whose pagan sympathies could not be totally overcome. Two suppositions, indeed, can alone explain the facile apostasy to or from Christianity, which marked the career of the earliest converts. Either from a conviction of the inefficacy of heathendom had proceeded a general indifference to religious sanctions, which does not appear to answer other conditions of the problem, or the moral demands of the new faith did not seem to the Saxons more onerous than those to which they were accustomed; for it is the amount of self-sacrifice which a religion successfully imposes upon its votaries, which can alone form a measure of its influence. The fact that a god had perished, could sound strangely in the ears of no worshipper of *Baldr*; the great message of consolation,—that he had perished to save sinful, suffering man,—justified the ways of God, and added an awful meaning to the old mythus. An earnest, thinking pagan, would, I must believe, joyfully accept a version of his own creed, which offered so inestimable a boon, in addition to what he had heretofore possessed. The final destruction

of the earth by fire could present no difficulties to those who had heard of Surtr and the Twilight of the Gods, or of Allfather's glorious kingdom, raised on the ruin of the intermediate divinities. A state of happiness or punishment in a life to come was no novelty to him who had shuddered at the idea of Nástrond: Loki or Grendel had smoothed the way for Satan. Those who had believed in runes and incantations were satisfied with the efficacy of the mass; a crowd of saints might be invoked in place of a crowd of subordinate divinities; the holy places had lost none of their sanctity; the holy buildings had not been levelled with the ground, but dedicated in another name; the pagan sacrifices had not been totally abolished, but only converted into festal occasions, where the new Christians might eat and drink, and continue to praise God: Hréðe and Eóstre, Wóden, Tiw and Fricge, Ðunor and Sætere retained their places in the calendar of months and days: Erce was still invoked in spells, Wyrð still wove the web of destiny; and while Wóden retained his place at the head of the royal genealogies, the highest offices of the Christian church were offered to compensate the noble class for the loss of their old sacerdotal functions. How should Christianity fail to obtain access where Paganism stepped half way to meet it, and it could hold out so many outward points of union to paganism?

We dare not question the decrees of omnipotence, or enquire into the mysterious operations of omniscient God; it is not for us to measure his infinite

wisdom by the rules of our finite intelligence, or to assume that his goodness and mercy can be appreciated and comprehended by the dim, wavering light of our reason; but man feels that in every age man has had a common nature, a common hope and a common end of being; and we shall do no wrong either to philosophy or to religion, if we believe that even in the errors of paganism there lay the germs of truth; and that the light which lighteth every one that cometh into the world, was vouchsafed in such form and measure as best to subserve the all-wise, all-holy, and all-merciful objects of creation!