

Christian and pagan lands. When it shall possess not only the Black Sea, but the Bosphorus, the Dardanelles, and by consequence the Mediterranean, who shall then limit its power? Is this advent consistent with the interests of the civilized world?

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## ARTICLE IX.

### DR. P. ASMUS ON INDO-GERMANIC NATURAL RELIGION.<sup>1</sup>

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WHO will not hail with joy a promise of light and order amid the chaos of special investigations on the field of Indo-Germanic religions? Order; for it is evident, from the very title, that the author means to consider the whole subject from one point of view. He uses the singular — "The Indo-Germanic Religion," not "Religions." Light; for the additional title, "A Contribution to the Philosophy of Religion," shows that the author has a philosophical intention in this treatment of a part of the history of religion. How far this is an advantage would appear from a consideration of the principles involved in the philosophical parts of the book, especially of the Introduction. This latter is in two parts — one discussing the Theory of Apprehension, and one the Philosophy of Religion. But a consideration of this kind we must postpone till the second and final part of the work appears; for the author cannot give his decision on the questions on the philosophy of religion until he reaches that part of the work. For it is promised that the second part shall treat of the Absolute Deity, investigating the mode in which he appears as such in the different religions. Further, it will treat of the spiritualization of the Indo-Germanic natural religion; and finally, of the relation of this religion to Christianity.

Of the Introduction we will say here only that the author seeks a basis for investigations in the philosophy of religion by a refutation of the philosophy and theology which assert that God cannot be known. He holds firmly, with Hegel, that thought can penetrate the Absolute — that the Absolute is comprehensible by us. Reviewer thinks there should be in the Introduction a discussion and definition of the conception "religion," and also that there should be established some standard by which the

<sup>1</sup> P. Asmus, Dr., Privatdocent der Philosophie a. d. Universität zu Halle. 1 Band: Indogermanische Naturreligion. Halle: Verlag von Pfeffer. gr. 8. S. 237. 1875.

development of the Indo-Germanic religion is to be estimated. In the course of the book the author seems to regard the Christian religion as the absolute standard of comparison; and yet he postpones to the second volume a discussion of the relation of the Indo-Germanic religion to Christianity. The work when complete is meant to exhibit the Indo-Germanic religion as seen in its most important representatives. The author expects to point out in these a progress from natural religion to a spiritual religion. The volume before us treats of the first stage — the natural religion of the Indo-Germanic peoples. It contains four sections, in which the most important features of the Natural Religion are discussed as they appear among the chief of these peoples — the peoples of India, the Persians, the Greeks, and the Germanic peoples. The first section seeks to show that the religion of the Indo-Germans was never polytheistic, but henotheistic. The author places fetichism as the lowest religious stage. It makes a god of some single one of the many things about the soul which are known through the senses. (According to the most recent discussions of fetichism, especially that of Waitz and Gerland, "Anthropology of Uncivilized Peoples," and that of Tylor, "The Beginnings of Civilization," we ought to give up regarding fetichism as a separate religion. It is evidently only a secondary phenomenon in connection with a religion.) When the mind can make abstractions from the separate impressions on the senses, but does not yet rise to a unity of all things, regarding certain classes of things as absolutely separate from one another, and fixedly so, then the advance has been made from fetichism to polytheism. In the region of natural religion, henotheism is the next higher stage of development; but in the region of spiritual religion a polytheistic moral dualism stands higher than the henotheism of natural religion. (The author presupposes an absolute standard in this estimation of higher and lower stages of development which he makes. But he has not clearly defined any such standard).

Again, in the henotheism of natural religion the author makes three divisions of development — a fetish henotheism, a polytheistic, and a pure henotheism. Henotheism does not require that *one* Deity only, as opposed to many, be consciously placed at the head of all things; for we would call that monotheism. But it requires that, although there be an acknowledged plurality of divine forms, yet the divine unity lies in the background of the religious consciousness. This unity, then, reveals itself in a plurality of persons. (Henotheism, which had been thought of by Schelling, and for which, with its correlate kathenotheism, a name was coined by Max Müller, has with our author the significance of a principle affecting the whole system.) The form of henotheism is the only one under which natural religion can be properly classed. For natural religion knows no qualitative distinction between the divine and the earthly. Therefore polytheism is incongruous with it. Polytheism claims that

there are absolute distinctions in things, in spite of the actual absence of distinctions in its theory of the universe. The idea of God in the Indo-Germanic religion is a childlike, unreflecting henotheism, because of two characteristics which it bears. First, the gods shade into one another, without any fixed lines of separation, and they can exchange places. Secondly, the divine and earthly are regarded as the same in essence. Our author proves the presence of these two marks in the Indo-Germanic religion by pointing out the parent-myths of India, of the Persians, the Greeks, and the Germanic peoples. He finds them to be *divine deeds*, and that the idea of acting persons, deities, grows out of these. The Indian parent-myth, which we must recognize to be the mythical basis among all Indo-Germanic peoples, starts from the idea of a thunder-storm as a battle for the rain which is held captive in the clouds. The chief god of the heavens — the storm-god — conquers the dark cloud-demon, and by this victory gains water and fire — rain and lightning, or, it may be, the sun, which had hitherto been hidden behind the clouds. Our author distinguishes this parent-myth, as the sexless myth of the skies, from the sexual, in which the rain — the precious moisture — taken captive by the cloud-demon, is personified as a female deity. The act in the myth is then not the mere release, but conjugal embrace, from which rain and lightning come as fruit. The third form is the myth of the earth, in which the god of the skies approaches the earth for conjugal embrace. He sends the rain as fructifying seed into the receptive bosom of the earth. The original Indo-Germanic myth is the sexless myth of the skies. In India and among the Persians are found only the beginnings of the other two forms of the myth. Among the Greeks the original form is modified almost entirely into the sexual sky-myth, and this is then changed into the myth of the earth. Among the Germanic peoples all forms are represented, but oftenest a combination of the sky-myth and the earth-myth. Since the individual divine personages have to be developed out of these elementary acts, we can see how easily the gods could shade into one another; and, on the other hand, we can see that the essence of the divine coincided exactly with the essence of the earthly. Thus the parent religious myths show the henotheistic character of the Indo-Germanic religion.

In conformity with this character, each deity is absolute deity, because it has a part in the one divine element. The fact that each is defined and separate does not take from them the character of absolute deity. Our author's second section seeks to show how the individual divine forms came into existence, although this absoluteness existed. The essential quality of each deity consists in the function with which he comes into appearance in the myth. Accordingly, the individual deities are really later things than the myth; since in their individuality they do not originally exist, but they come into existence by a separation from the

myth as a whole. For example, the entire individuality of Indra has its ground ultimately in the one predicate of the Rain-getter, the killer of Vritra. The several divine personages which are developed in the Indo-Germanic religion do not belong to the highest stage of henotheism, but to polytheistic henotheism. This is a different stage from the fetish henotheism, of which we have also a few traces. It does not, like the latter, identify a single sensuous object with the absolute deity, and yet it shuts God up into a sphere distinct from other spheres of actual existence, without reflecting that, by virtue of his being absolute, he really extends beyond that limited sphere.

If the absolute nature of God could become visible as an absolute appearance, then we would have the highest stage of natural henotheism; but we would then be out of the sphere of religious things, although still within the sphere of nature. For a man cannot have religious feeling towards a pure generality. That feeling demands a definite, concrete God. The plain contradiction here — viz. between absoluteness and single personality — cannot be reconciled while we remain in the domain of natural religion. It is not even touched, much less solved, by advance of conception of the divine form of existence from that of one beneath the human to the human, which advance appears in polytheistic henotheism. No matter how exalted be the mode of appearance of any god in the natural religions, yet the god always sinks back again to the condition of some elementary function. And here we have proof that in this stage of religion a mere element is the contents of a deity. This way of viewing nature makes the single divine persons differ merely quantitatively in their relation to the genus, god. Personality as such, with its real value, is not recognized. It remains a mere fluid thing. The gods are unable to raise themselves really above the condition of merely representing elementary principles. While this faulty relation exists between the single divine persons and the absoluteness which these persons are supposed to represent, we can understand how some way will be sought to elevate the divine person to the level of absoluteness belonging to the divine class as a whole.

The third section of our book shows that the attribute of immortality is the means used to this end in the Indo-Germanic religions. The nature-god was the expression of an element in nature. If, then, a god was to be regarded as a person, this personal individual could not be regarded as a mere copy or specimen, or a mere modification of the general type. Agni is "fire" in general. Considered as a person, he cannot represent merely *one* fire; but he must, as a single person, embody a representation of the whole class, fire. Here, therefore, it was necessary to have in the system a mode of representation which would relieve the difficulty. In order to take up its position on the high level of representation of the element contained in a whole class, the divine person

was obliged to drink some magic draught. In accordance with the whole mode of viewing things in natural religion, the solvent of the difficulty must be an external participation in something by means of which the divine individual would obtain immortality, unchangeableness, and intensified power of life. We find that such a means was used in all the Indo-Germanic mythologies, and generally it took the form of drinking some draught. In India the draught was of soma and amrita; in Persia, of yellow and white haoma; in Greece, of ambrosia and nectar. The Greeks used, also, for this representation, the apple of the Hesperides and Dionysos, who was a personification of the drink of immortality, as is the Indian Soma. Finally, the Germanic peoples had the odhrörir and the apple of Idun. This drink was always regarded as intimately connected with the divine person, and without it the gods could not fully occupy their respective spheres. Natural religion flourished so long as this childlike connection of ideas lasted. But with the dissolution of this union, and the comprehension which had to follow that these divine persons, as such, were finite, begins decay.

The fourth and last section of the book describes this decay of natural religion, and exhibits the various stages thereof in their correspondence with modern phenomena in theology and philosophy.

The Indo-Germanic gods were indeed absolute; and yet this absoluteness showed itself in the individuals in their shading into one another, and thus making it evident that the fundamental, essential principle in them all was one and the same. Each individual deity possessed both the moments which the religious relation requires—absoluteness and definiteness; and each should have exhibited the unity of these, but, in reality, did not do so. For the relation of these two moments to one another could be viewed only quantitatively in natural religion, where the spiritual idea of personality had not yet become known. Therefore the unity of finiteness and absoluteness could no more be grasped under that system than could the unity of the whole and the part. The decay of natural religion begins at the point where that contradiction which the natural gods actually carry about in themselves becomes practically evident. It appears most plainly in the relation of that drink of the gods to the gods themselves. For this drink of the gods, which represents the element belonging to the whole class of gods, was regarded as belonging to the very self of the divine person when the system was at the height of its flourishing. Herein lay the childlike identification of class and person. But gradually this drink came to be regarded as something separable from the divine person. In consequence of this, the unity of the divine person and the absolute class-element (water, fire), which had been brought about by the draught, became dissolved. With this dissolution, as it became manifest in practical results, began the decay of natural religion. In the consideration of this separation of the divine drink from the divine person,

an important question is, whether the drink was originally regarded as a provision for life which the gods had with themselves, or whether it had to be given them by men in their offerings. The latter is chiefly the case among the Indians and Persians, whilst among the Greeks and the Germanic peoples it is not supplied by human hands. The consequence of this difference is, that among the Indians and Persians the discovery of the finiteness of divine persons was connected with the soma-offering; for it was observed that the gods were dependent on the will of the sacrificer. Among the Greeks and the Germanic peoples other influences brought to light the finiteness of the gods, and thus brought about the decay of natural religion.

Having thus shown, in general outlines, what is the course of the book, let us make a very few closing remarks.

The treatment of the religious mythology of the Indo-Germans indicates a thorough acquaintance with the literature on that subject, and contains a rich store of combinations, which will be specially welcome to the mythologist. But a discussion of religious mythology has been given, instead of the promised history of religion. This complaint can hardly be removed by pointing to the reference to the soma-offering, which is merely incidental. The system of religious representations which a people have is not identical with their religion. Our author has not given clearly his definition of religion; and whatever that definition be, it evidently does not give due regard to religious observances, worship, etc., nor to the religious influence on the domain of the will. For the author has found no occasion for reference to religious observances in his discussions. We cannot say whether this fault is a consequence of the author's fundamental views of the philosophy of religion, until his second volume appears. Still, a thoughtful discussion of the religious mythology of the Indo-Germans is, of course, a valuable contribution; and this treatment of it which lies before us does excite a strong desire to see the second volume, and justifies us in commending the book to wide perusal.