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THE INFLUENCE OF GEOGRAPHY UPON PRIMITIVE RELIGIONS

by

Annie Bell Kirch

A Thesis Submitted for the

degree of

Master of Arts

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## CHAPTER I - INTRODUCTION

It is quite generally agreed that Nature—the sky, the sun, the earth, the storms—is at the base of all primitive religions. Keary says: "To me individually, after a study of certain among the Indo-European systems, the presence of this nature worship at the root of them seems incontrovertible. But what is of infinitely more importance, I find that the specialists in every field--Vedic, Persian, Greek, Roman, Teutonic, Celtic--have believed themselves to discover this nature worship at the back of the historic creeds they knew so well; and I cannot persuade myself that all their judgments are mistaken, or that there should be such a coincidence of error coming from so many different sides.

"For, whether we ask Vedic scholars, as Benfey, Max Müller, Kuhn, Roth, Breal, Grassmann, Gubernatis, Bergaique; students of Greek mythology, as Welcher, Preller, Maury; of German, as Grimm, Simrock; we find that those who are first in each of the several branches of research, or those who have studied them all, are alike agreed upon this particular question."<sup>1</sup>

The geographic influences will be found in the peculiarities of myths and concepts due to a particular environment, economic condition, or climate. "For the character of mythological speech must necessarily be modified, and its very

<sup>1</sup> Keary, C. F., *Outlines of Primitive Belief*, pp. xi-xii.

phrases suggested by the outward features and phenomena of the country."<sup>1</sup> "people may live near the water,---; or they may live inland in close-shut valleys,---; or they may live in the perpetual shade of woods, or on broad arid plains,---; or in the dark frosty lands where the sun dies during one part of his yearly round ---. It is impossible that the gods of nature can remain the same with peoples exposed to such varying influences."<sup>2</sup>

I shall try to point out differences arising in this way in the Aryan religions of eastern Asia, in Norse mythology, in Greek mythology, in the religion of Egypt, and in Mohammedanism. Although I have used the sacred books of the different religious systems to some extent, most of my information has been gathered from discussions of mythology and religion.

1 Cox, G. W., The Mythology of the Aryan Nations, p. 60.  
2 Keary, C. F., Outlines of Primitive Belief, p. 104.

## CHAPTER II - ARYAN RELIGIONS OF EASTERN ASIA.

I shall discuss only Vedism and Zoroasterism. Brahmanism and Buddhism are really merely different forms of the Vedism which developed in the Punjab of Western India. Zoroasterism is a distinct religion and originated in a different region. It is the original religion of Persia or of the Iran.

### Vedism

Almost the sole source of wealth of the Vedic people was their herds and to a lesser extent their agricultural products. So their gods could show themselves most gracious by protecting their cattle and their crops. All through the sacred books of Vedism, Brahmanism and Buddhism, especially in the Rig Veda, the gods appear as the special benefactors of herds and fields. This can be seen in the following quotations:

Hymns to Indra from the Rig Veda.

"Thou art the giver of horses, Indra, thou art the giver of cows, the giver of corn, the strong lord of wealth, --  
-----.

"-----.

"On these days thou art gracious, and on these nights, keeping off the enemy from our cows and from our steed -----.

"Let us rejoice, Indra, in treasure and food, in wealth of manifold delight and splendor. Let us rejoice in the blessing of the gods, which gives us the strength of offspring, gives

us cows first and horses."<sup>1</sup>

Hymns to Ushas (Dawn) from the Rig Veda.

"Thou art a blessing where thou art near, drive far away the unfriendly, make the pasture wide, give us safety!-----.

"Shine for us with thy best rays, thou bright Dawn, thou who lengthenest our life, thou the love of all, who givest us food, who givest us wealth in cows, horses, and chariots."<sup>2</sup>

There are also special laws given governing the use and care of land and cattle.

Sacred Laws of the Aryas.

"If a person who has taken a lease of land (for cultivation) does not exert himself, and hence (the land) bears no crop, he shall, if he is rich, be made to pay (to the owner of the land) the value of the crop that ought to have grown.

"A servant in tillage who abandons his work shall be flogged.

"The same (punishment shall be awarded) to a herdsman (who leaves his work).

"And the flock (entrusted) to him shall be taken away (and be given to some other herdsman).

"If cattle, leaving their stable, eat (the crops of other persons, then the owners of the crops, or the king's servants) may make them lean (by impounding them); (but) he shall not exceed (in such punishment).

1 Müller, Max, Chips from a German Worksnop, Vol. I., pp. 30-31.

2 Ibid, p. 36.

"If (a herdsman) who has taken cattle under his care, allows them to perish, or loses (them by theft, through his negligence), he shall replace them (or pay their value) to the owners."<sup>1</sup>

Cows, too, are especially sacred. Clarke says: "Next to Brahmans, cows were the objects of reverence, probably because in the earliest times, the Aryan race, as nomads, depended on this animal for food."<sup>2</sup> In one of the sacred books of Brahmanism cows are spoken of as follows:

"Cows are auspicious purifiers, upon cows depend the worlds.

"Cows alone make sacrificial oblations possible (by producing sacrificial butter), cows take away every sin."<sup>3</sup>

Of the six things<sup>4</sup> that it is good for the Brahmans to meditate upon, three are related to the industrial conditions of the people. These are rain, seasons and animals; animals because of the predominance of pastoral pursuits, rain and seasons because they were a people who gained their livelihood almost exclusively by herding and agriculture, both of which are largely dependent upon climate.

An influence is exercised not only by the economic status of the people, but also by the external physical phenomena. Keary says: "It has been established that the primitive Aryan creed rested upon a worship of external phenomena such as

1 Muller, Max, Sacred Books of the East, Vol. II, pp. 166-167.

2 Clarke, J. F., Ten Great Religions, p. iii.

3 Muller, Max, Sacred Books of the East, Vol. VII, p. 105.

4 Ibid, Vol. I, pp. 23-25.

the sky, the earth, the sea, the storm, the wind, the sun--that is to say, of phenomena which were appreciable by the senses,-----<sup>1</sup> They worshipped gods and goddesses who were personifications of these various elements.

"Dyaus (god of the bright sky) was evidently one among the greatest, probably he was once the greatest god of the Indians in the pre-Vedic age."<sup>2</sup> "We may suppose that in those climates where the Indian sung his song of praise--unlike ours--the heavens were most often seen in their garment of unblemished blue. Nothing is certainly more divine and impressive than such a sight--at first. But there is withal something monotonous about it. This god has not his changing fits, his passion and his kindness. He is too serene to be very ardently loved or feared, for that external calm can have small sympathy with the short and troubled life of man. With Indra it is different. He is the god of storms; he is the sky, but the sky of clouds and rain and lightening. -----.

"I think that the evidences of a transfer of worship from the older sky god to Indra are very clear in the Vedic poems."<sup>3</sup>

This displacement of Dyaus by Indra was, no doubt, due partly to the fact that a stormy sky is more spectacular than a clear sky and so makes a deeper impression upon people. But, more important, was the geographic fact of a change to a

1 Keary, C. F., Outlines of Primitive Belief, p. x-xi.

2 Ibid, p. 117.

3 Ibid, pp. 121-122.

monsoon climate. Such a climate produces the kind of skies which, according to Keary's description, Indra represented. The Aryans had left the high and arid plateau where clear, blue skies prevail; and had come into the Punjab of India where, during half of the year, there are the cloudy skies and heavy rains of a monsoon climate. Hopkins says on this point, "climatic environment, too, conditioned theological evolution, if not spiritual advance. The cult of the mid-sphere god, Indra, was partly the result of the changing atmospheric surroundings of the Hindus as they advanced into India. The storms and the sun were not those of old. The tempests were more terrific, the display of divine power more concentrated in the rage of the elements; while appreciation of the goodness of the sun became tinged with apprehension of evil, and he became a deadly power as well as one beneficent. Then the relief after drought gave to Indra the character of a benign god as well as a fearful one. Nor were lacking in the social conditions certain alterations which worked together with climatic changes."<sup>1</sup> The sun "became a deadly power as well as a beneficent" one because the climate, in the Punjab, was warm enough to dry up the vegetation, at times, as well as to aid it in its growth.

The change in social conditions was from herding to a more settled life, with grain culture as an occupation of increasing importance. They would become more interested in

1 Hopkins, E. W., *Handbooks on the History of Religion*, p. 39.

watching for the clouds which were to bring rain to their crops than in contemplating the clear, blue sky. This idea of Indra being the chief god, because of his aid to the people in their agriculture, is brought out by Murray. "In a land with the climatic conditions of India, and among an agricultural people, it is but natural that the god whose fertilizing showers brought the corn and wine to maturity should be regarded as the greatest of all."<sup>1</sup>

Agni is next in importance to Indra. He is the god of fire, but also of lightning, for this reason closely associated with Indra in bringing rain, and so worshipped for much the same reason. "Next to Indra stood Agni. To say that among the most genuine and ancient hymns of the Rig Veda about two hundred and sixty-five are addressed to Indra, two hundred and thirty-three to Agni, while no other god can lay claim to more than a quarter of this last number, is enough to show in what direction, toward what part of nature, the religious thoughts of these Aryas turned."<sup>2</sup>

#### Summary on Vedism.

The industries of the people exercised a marked influence upon their religious ideas. The gods are supposed to be special givers and protectors of their cattle and horses and to a less extent of their grain. Cows are considered sacred and as purifiers of sin. Rain, seasons, and animals

1 Murray, A. S., *Manuel of Mythology*, pp. 371-372.

2 Keary, C. F., *Outlines of Primitive Belief*, p. 126.

are among the six things that it is good to meditate upon. In their sacred books rules are given governing the conduct of pastoral and agricultural servants and governing the use of land and the care of cattle. External nature influenced the Vedic religion by creating gods and goddesses of the various elements and, combined with the economic life, gave the god of storms and the god of fire precedence over all the others. The different climate encountered by the migrating Aryans in the Punjab and their development into a more settled, agricultural people, led to a change in the chief god from the god of the clear sky to the storm god.

#### Zoroasterism

This religion clearly shows the influence of the economic life of the people. By the time of the development of Zoroasterism, the people had become essentially agricultural. So, in contrast to Vedism, the chief emphasis is on the tillage of the land. This transition from herding to crop raising is brought out in the Zend-Avesta in "The Wail of the Kine." The explanation given by Mills, the translator, is somewhat easier to understand than the words of the Zend-Avesta.

"This chapter ----, the Soul of the Kine, as representing the herds of the holy Iranian people, their only means of honorable livelihood, raises its voice, and expressing the profoundest needs of an afflicted people, addresses Ahura and His Divine Order, Asha, in bitterness.

"1. Recalling another and a later 'groan of creation,' she demands wherefore and for whom she was made, since afflictions encompass her; and as her comfort, if not her existence, was threatened as much by the unsettled habits induced by constant alarm as by the actual incursions of her predatory neighbors, she beseeches the Bountiful Immortals to instruct her as to the benefits of civilized agriculture, and conform her protectors in its practice, as her only remedy against the evil of which she complains.

"2. Ahura answers by a question to Asha, the personified Righteous Order, as to what guardian he had appointed in order to smite back the fury which assails her, intimating that some chief ought to have been set over her originally who would have averted her miseries, training her people in steady tillage and bucolic skill, and repelling the destructive raids.

"3. Asha answers that her sufferings were inevitable, that no chief could be appointed who could prevent them. ----"1

Finally Ahura appoints Zoroaster as "the diligent tiller of the ground."<sup>2</sup>

Of the five places where the earth feels most joy,<sup>3</sup> two are connected with herding and one with agriculture; and of the five who rejoice the earth most<sup>4</sup> two are connected with agriculture. There is no reference to herding. Taken as a whole this places slightly greater emphasis on agriculture.

1 Müller, Max, Sacred Books of the East, Vol. XXXI, pp. 5-6.

2 Ibid, p. 9.

3 Ibid, Vol. IV, pp. 23-26.

4 Ibid, p. 28.

Ahura Mazda—the beneficial god—says in one place, "Unhappy is the land that has long lain unsown with the seed of the sower and wants a good husbandman;"<sup>1</sup> and in another, "He who sows corn, sows holiness."<sup>2</sup>

The effect of the aridity of the climate upon the religion is brought out by the following extracts from the Zend-Avesta.

If a person sins his dwelling place "shall be the place on this earth wherein is least water and fewest plants, whereof the ground is cleanest and driest and the least passed through by flocks and herds. -----"3

In a prayer to Ormuzd, they say, "I invoke the source of waters. -----"4

And again, "Here we praise --- the abode of the water --- the mountains which make the waters flow. -----"5

This quotation from Clarke also shows the importance of water to the Iranians. "Khordad was chief of the seasons, years, months, and days, and also protector of the water which flowed from the fountain Anduisur, from Elburz (probably the Elberg). The planet Tistrya was commissioned to raise the water in vapor, collect it in clouds, and let it fall in rain, with the aid of the planet Sitavisa. These cloud-compellers were highly revered."<sup>6</sup>

1 Ibid, p. 29.

2 Ibid, p. 26.

3 Ibid, p. 26.

4 Stebbins, H. B., Chapters from the Bible of the Ages, p. 67.

5 Clarke, J. F., Ten Great Religions, p. 189.

6 Ibid, p. 197.

The mountains also exerted an influence. The people were impressed by their grandeur and sublimity and so made them the home of their gods, as did the Greeks. "On the earth he (Ormuzd) created the high mountains Albordj (probably the Elburz) which soared upward through all the spheres of heaven till it reached the primal light, and Ormuzd made this summit his abode."<sup>1</sup>

And again: "Invoke the mountains abode of happiness, given by Ormuzd. -----"<sup>2</sup>

But the difficulties to agriculture which the mountains presented also impressed the people. The evil god was finally to be overcome by the good and then "the earth, being made plain and level, there will be one life and one society of mankind, made all happy. -----"<sup>3</sup>

#### Summary

By the time the religion of Zoroasterism was being developed, agriculture was becoming the chief occupation. Grazing, however, was still important. This transition so impressed the people that, in their Zend-Avesta, is to be found a beautiful poem called "The Wail of the Kine." In it, the cattle expressed their desire to be taught the advantages of settled agriculture so that they might continue to prosper. Both occupations were still important and so both were

1 Ibid, p. 195.

2 Stebbins, G. B., Chapters from the Bible of the Ages, p. 67.

3 Clarke, J. F., Ten Great Religions, p. 177.

considered pleasing to their divinity. The blessings to come from tilling the soil received slightly the greater emphasis. The Iranians suffered from the aridity of their climate, so places of punishment were to be without water or plant growth. Their god (Ormuzd) was especially loved because he was supposed to be the source of water. The mountains, too, were praised, because water flowed from them. The mountains affected their religion in two other ways. The Iranians felt the beauty and grandeur of their mountains, and so imagined them the abode of their gods. But they also realized their hindrance to agriculture, and so the new world, made after the evil god was overcome, was to be level.

### CHAPTER III - NORSE MYTHOLOGY

This mythology "expresses the conception which a powerful and imaginative, though uncultivated people formed of divinity through its diversified activity in nature, ----"1 "It would speak not so much of the daily death of the sun (for the recurrence of day and night in other lands would bring no darkness to these), but of the deadly sleep of the earth, when the powers of frost and snow have vanquished the brilliant king."2

Climate, which in this region is so decidedly severe, is the most important geographic factor influencing the religion. Of the three great sacrifices, each one is held with special reference to some feature of the climate. The most important festival was held about the middle of October, "being still called Winter-night in Norway and reckoned the beginning of winter. This festival was called - - - Winter-night's Sacrifice, or, Sacrifice toward winter; and they were said to welcome winter - - -. They sacrificed at that time for a good year - - -, which in Norway meant in reality a good winter, that being then, as now, a matter of very great importance in that country."3 The second festival was January twelfth. This was the Yule sacrifice and was especially

1 Keyser, R., The Religion of the Northmen, p. 108.

2 Cox, G., The Mythology of the Aryan Nations, Vol. I, p. 52.

3 Keyser, R., The Religion of the Northmen, pp. 219-220.

dedicated to the god Frey for peace and a productive season. It was really to celebrate the coming of spring. Peace was probably wanted so that the work of agriculture might not be interfered with. The last of these festivals was held in April and was a sacrifice to summer. As summer, especially in a northern country, is the time for military operations, they also sacrificed for victory. As Odin is the war god, the festival was held in his honor.

"In the north the giant race was associated with the worst, the most inimical of the influences of Nature, with the frosts and snows which abounded in these countries."<sup>1</sup> They were supposed to dwell in the barren mountain slopes and other waste places. "They are very ancient, these giants, older than the gods, all human progress is a war upon them, for they are anterior to all human beginnings, and are for ever endeavoring to bring back the world to the state in which it was before change began."<sup>2</sup> So these giants were the northern devils<sup>3</sup> and also, because they represented the cold, being often called frost-giants, they were much dreaded by a northern people, who knew nothing of suffering from intense heat.

Njord, a sea deity, had as his wife, Skade, the daughter of a giant. Her natural home being on the stormy mountain sides, she did not like to live on the more peaceful seashore, which was her husband's home. And he did not like

1 Keary, C. F., Norway and the Norwegians, p. 95.

2 Ibid, p. 96.

3 Clarke, J. F., Ten Great Religions, p. 362.

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1 Keary, C. F., Norway and the Norwegians, p. 95.

2 Ibid, p. 96.

3 Clarke, J. F., Ten Great Religions, p. 362.

to live on the stormy land. So they compromised and were to live nine nights, which probably signifies months, in Thrymheim—the giantess' home—and three nights in Noatun —the sea god's home. This "refers to the high northern latitudes where rough weather and wintry storms prevail during the greater part of the year."<sup>1</sup>

In such a climate, too, the idea of clothed gods and heroes and people would prevail. After the three gods, Odin, Hoener and Loder, had made the first man and woman out of two trees, that grew beside each other near the sea, "they gave them clothes and names: the man they called Ash and the woman Embla,"<sup>2</sup> because they were made from an ash and an elm tree. The gods each morning dress before they gather on the plains of Ida to hold council. In like manner, the einherjers or heroes, whom Odin and his Valkerjers have taken to Valnal when they were killed in battle, dress themselves before "they take their weapons and go out into the court and fight and slay each other."<sup>3</sup> Although slain they become whole again each night. Even the giants, the very embodiment of cold, were conceived of as being clothed. In the younger Edda, Thor's visit to the giant Hymer is described. "In the morning Hymer arose, dressed himself, and busked himself to row out upon the sea to fish."<sup>3</sup>

Ragnarok signified the destruction of the existing gods and earth and the creation of a new earth and a new system of gods. This dreaded time of destruction was to be heralded

1 Keyser, R., The Religion of the Northmen, p. 133.

2 Younger Edda, p. 64.

3 Ibid, p. 128.

4 Ibid, p. 128.

by a change in climate. There were to be three years of constant winter, followed by three years of constant warfare. And then Ragnarok followed by "the new earth, filled with abundant supplies, will spontaneously produce its fruits without labor or care."<sup>1</sup> To the northern people the raising of products meant a hard struggle with nature. So among the conditions which they would very ardently wish for would be an earth which would "spontaneously produce its fruits."

The differences between what the north and the south represented is very marked. The Norse heaven—Gimle, which is in Muspleheim—lay to the south, and the Norse hell, which is in Nifleheim, lay to the north. Muspleheim was thought of as a warm, bright region; Nifleheim as a cold, mist region. So the Norse hell is cold as opposed to the Christian and Mohammedan hell which is a region of flame and fire. This latter conception originated in a hot, southern climate. The wind was said to be caused by a giant who dwelt in the north. He was clad in eagle's plumage. Every time he spread his wings for flight, a wind arose. It was the biting cold winds from the north, rather than the milder winds from the other directions, which impressed the northern people. The home of the giants was to the north. But Idun, the goddess of rejuvenation, came from the south. Idun had the apples of which the gods ate in order to remain young.

<sup>1</sup> Bulfinch, T.,

The Age of Fable, p. 433.

Odin was the foremost god, but he was the god rather of the Vikings than of the people who stayed at home. Odin was the war god and so the Vikings would need especially to invoke him. Besides he was not so specialized but that they could take him to different parts of the country with them. He was also the god of the sky in general, but it was Thor who was storm god and god of thunder. So he had to be worshipped at home. A very much more important factor, however, in his being the special god of the Norse bond or yeoman-farmer, was that, by the use of his hammer--mjolner--he could slay the giants who constantly opposed the farmer. Thor "embodies the characteristics of the Norse people as they were--nay, as they are--to be studied in their native land. His adventures express the terror with which the Norsemen were inspired by the unknown forces of nature by which they were surrounded, by the cold and darkness, and by the great tracts of mountains and of heath, of barren, unexplored territory. And at the same time he expresses the courage and resolution with which all these forces were met and confronted. ----- Thor is a patron of agriculture as well as a constant fighter."<sup>1</sup>

"Frey is one of the most celebrated of the gods. He presides over rain and sunshine and all the fruits of the earth. His sister Freya is the most propitious of goddesses. She loves music, spring, and flowers ----."<sup>2</sup> It is Freya whom the giants are constantly trying to get from the gods. This is

1 Keary, C. F., Norway and the Norwegians, pp. 98-99.

2 Bulfinch, T., The Age of Fables, pp. 412-413.

probably because, in trying to make the earth productive, she opposes them.

Frey is the special god of the Swedes. The Swedes in their comparatively fertile, level country, had little need of a god like Thor to fight the giants who rule over barren, desolate stretches. They worshipped Frey because he promised them good harvests. He could bring them rain and sunshine, in which they were much more interested than in fighting ice and desolation.

The vans were not gods, but were deities of the sea who were constantly at variance with the gods. At last peace was established. The gods gave Hoener to the vans in exchange for Njord. Njord presided over that part of the sea close to the land, or where fishing could be carried on. Eger, the deity of the deep sea, never became a god.

Balder, the god of the summer sunlight, was the best loved god of the north. He was the son of Odin and Frigg, the goddess of the cultivated earth. Balder was killed by the blind god, Hoder, who represents the darkness of northern winters. Hoder was later killed by Vale, who represents the light of spring. Vale, when only one day old, killed the winter darkness, Hoder. Although the gods tried very hard to secure Balder's release from hell, they did not succeed. After Ragnarok, however, both Balder and Hoder were released from hell and dwelt among the gods. So there was still to be a winter and a summer. The Norse could conceive of no other

condition since they had always lived in a region of such marked winter and summer seasons.

The Volsung and Neiblungen myths are both explained by Cox in much the same manner. They have their beginning in the seasonal conditions of a northern climate.

In the poem Beowulf, the most striking feature "is the picture which it draws of the giant Grendel, the foe of Man, who lives away from human habitations, and makes war upon mankind. The conception of such a being as this, dwelling in the fen and fastness, a haunter of the night, fits in exactly with the experiences of a northern people, in a country scantily inhabited and not yet fully explored, in a climate in which, if there were long summer days, there were long winter nights, too, nights of darkness and bitter cold, seasons when all the ways were closed by snow and ice, or made dangerous by storms and floods. How naturally would such a northern people pent in, by groups, within the limits of their villages and homesteads, conceive the notion of a vast and terrible outside world peopled by monsters as the Grendel of Beowulf.

#### Summary

In Norway the cold, harsh climate is the chief geographic factor influencing the mythology. Practically the only instances where the occupations of the people enter are in placing Njord among the Asas and in having Frey the chief god of the Swedes and Thor the chief god of the Norse. Even in Thor as chief god of the Norse the influence of the bare

1 Keary, C. F., Norway and the Norwegians, pp. 94-95.

mountains and severe climate are shown rather than the stage of agriculture, which, however, was developed by the aid of Thor. There are many practices, religious concepts and myths arising because of the climate. The three great festivals, both in time and nature, reflect the influence of climate. The whole race of giants exist because of barrenness due to climate and mountains. The compromise between Njord and Skade is due to seasons. Climate is responsible for the idea of the condition directly preceding Ragnarok and the condition which is to follow. It gives rise to the idea of clothing the gods, the people, and even the giants. It causes the contrast between what the north and the south typify. The idea underlying the myths is the struggle between the winter and summer for supremacy.

#### CHAPTER IV- GREEK MYTHOLOGY.

Norse mythology is sombre and in its myths and folk lore tells of sleeping maidens, who represent the earth during its winter sleep, being awakened by the kiss of a hero, who represents the spring sun awakening frozen nature with his warm kisses. Greek mythology is graceful and its myths and folk lore tell rather of the daily death of the sun than of the winter sleep. It is thus that Cox explains the myth of Persens and Medusa, of the golden fleece, of the seige of Troy and of the wanderings of Odyssey. This difference is due to the harsher climate of the north.

Such contrasts in the fundamentals of the mythologies of Greece and Norway are clearly pointed out by Anderson and Bunsen. Anderson says: "As we would be lead to suppose, from a study of the physical and climatic peculiarities of Greece and Norseland, we find the Greek mythology forms en epic poem, and that of Norway is a tragedy. Not only the mythology, considered as a whole, but even the character of its speech, and of its very words and phrases, must necessarily be suggested and modified by the external features of the country. Thus in Greece, where the sun's rays never scorch, and where the northern winds never pierce, we naturally find in the speech of the people, brilliancy rather than gloom, life rather than decay, and constant renovation rather than prolonged lethargy. But in the frozen-bound regions of the North, where the long arms of the glaciers clutch the valleys in their cold embrace, and the

death-portending avalanches cut their way down the mountain sides, the tongue of the people would, with a peculiar intensity of feeling, dwell upon the tragedy of nature."<sup>1</sup>

"The old Teutonic mythology of Germany and Scandinavia does not possess the grace of the Hellenic fictions. The Muses and Graces have not smiled on her birth as on that of her Greek sister. Nor has she been reared under the sunny skies of Ionia, but amid constant strife and an austere climate and rugged nature. Consequently this mythology has not, like the former, received such an organic elaboration as to impart to it an undying influence upon the course of human history."<sup>2</sup>

Both authors ascribe the wide difference in the two mythologies to geographic differences, chiefly climate. X

Speaking of the death of the Norse gods which all expected at Ragnarok, Keary says: "So it is evident that the idea of the Olympians dying in a body, though it was not altogether extinguished, was pushed quite into the background. In the Norse creed this was not the case. The gloomy outer world of the Teuton was so large as contrasted with the narrow limits of his home and homestead that for him life itself seemed to be surrounded by a veil of darkness, and at the end of every avenue of hope there seemed to stand an immovable shadow."<sup>3</sup> This idea of the death and old age of the gods may also have been impressed upon the Norse mind by their winter climate. They were used to seeing the annual death of all external nature and forces.

1 Anderson, R. B., Norse Mythology, p. 59.

2 Bunsen, C. C. J., God in History, Vol. II, p. 405.

3 Keary, C. F., Outlines of Primitive Belief, p. 345.

Odin had three wives: Jord, the uninhabited earth, Frigg, the cultivated earth, and Rind, the unfruitful or winter earth. "Jord is the Greek Gaia, Frigg Demeter, but the fortunate Greeks had no goddess corresponding to Rind, they had not the severe Norse winter."<sup>1</sup> It was the cold of Norway, too, that gave rise to the idea of clothing of the gods, in contrast to the Greek nudity. The Greeks, too, had no frost giants, because they had no cold frozen mountain tops. With them the mountains, as with the Persians, were revered. Mount Olympus was the home of their gods. As they had no giants, they had no Thor. The Greeks had nymphs, muses and graces—all light, airy, pleasure loving creatures. Norse mythology produced no such beings. They were concerned with the sterner affairs of life. Anderson says: "The gods of Norseland are stern and awe inspiring; those of Greece are gentle and lovely. In the Norse mythology we find deep devotion but seldom tears. In the Greek there are violent emotions and the tears flow copiously. .... In Greece there is gracefulness, a perfect etiquette, and you dine on ambrosia and nectar; there Eros and Psyche, the graces and muses, hover about you like heavenly cherubs. Graces and Muses are wanting in Norseland. The Norse mythology is characterized throughout by a deep and genuine sincerity; the Greek, on the other hand, by a sublime gracefulness. ...."<sup>2</sup>

1 Anderson, R. B., Norse Mythology, p. 237.

2 Ibid, p. 237.

Although there is a general parallelism between Greek and Norse gods, still the gods are not alike. For instance, Odin and Zeus are in each case the supreme gods, still as Desent says: "The main differences between the adventures of Odin and Zeus are that, while those of the latter are chiefly erratic, the former involve the exhibition of gigantic physical strength,-a distinction at once accounted for by differences of soil and climate."<sup>1</sup>

In Norway Balder was killed and does not return to earth until after Ragnarok when there is an entirely new order. In Greece Persephone, the spring, daughter of the mother earth, Demeter, was carried away to Hades, but she is allowed to come back to spend the greater part of each year on earth with her mother, who then produced abundantly.

The contrast between the north and the south is not found in Greece. Neither is the Greek Hades like the Norse Nifleheim. Both are regions of the dead and places of punishment, but the utter cold and darkness of the Norse region is not found in the Greek Hades.

There are instances of climatic influences in the mythology of Greece that are due to local peculiarities. The Danaides, who lived in Argos, were punished for killing their husbands "by having continually to carry water, and pour it in the vain endeavor to fill a broken cistern . . . . it is suggestive of the dry, parched soil of Argos, the streams of

1 Cox, G. W., Mythology of the Aryan Nations, p. 237.

which were always dry in summer."<sup>1</sup>

There are usually only three Horae (Goddesses of the Seasons) mentioned. These are summer, spring and autumn. The Greek winter did not appeal forceably to them. It merely indicated a sleep of nature. Had there been a severe winter, it would probably have been represented by a hated goddess who was harmful to men. The spring goddess--Chloris--represented in mytnology as wooed by both Boreas, the north wind, and Zephyrus, the gentle, west wind, chooses the latter and becomes his constant wife. The north wind was harmful to the flowers, buds and other growing things which Chloris loved and helped to grow.

Topography also influenced Greek mythology. The mountains, as has been said, were not barren and forbidding. They showed themselves in all their grandeur and beauty. Hence they inspired in the Greeks the feeling of reverence and became the home of the gods.

The ruggedness of Thessaly, with hugh blocks of rocks lying on the mountain sides, made it the imagined region of the conflict between the gods and the Titans. "In harmony with the wild, rocky features of the country, the early legends of Thessaly tell of furious wars, in which the combatants fought with trunks of trees or hurled rocks and even hills at each other."<sup>2</sup>

1 Murray, A. S., Manuel of Mythology, p. 259.

2 Ibid, p. 275.

The roughness of the country, which separated Greece into separate districts, gave rise to the idea that for each district, that was later found settled, there had been created a pair of human beings. And "as the natural features of these districts varied, so varied the opinions with regard to the exact substance from which these first beings had sprung. In the wooded and mountainous districts, for instance, they were held to have sprung from rocks and trees; in valleys, from the moist elements of nature."<sup>1</sup>

The influence which the maritime tendencies of the Greeks had on their mythology is shown through their sea god, Poseidon, who was supposed to have been one of the original three gods, Zeus and Hades being the other two. All through the Trojan war, their sea god aided the Greeks. On peninsulas, which would tend to develop first and farthest in commerce, Poseidon was the chief god, especially is this true of Corinth.

An interesting change in the religion is found accompanying a similar change in the life of the people as portrayed in the *Illiad* and *Odyssey*. "The *Odyssey* is generally admitted to be of a more recent date than the *Illiad*. . . . . The essential distinction between the two lies in the difference of the subjects of which they deal, the diversity of interests which they represent. The *Illiad* is a tale of land battle and the theatre of its action is limited to the known world of the Greek, the two shores of the Aegean,-the *Odyssey* is a song of praise

1 Murray, A. S., *Manuel of Mythology*, p. 249.

not of war but of sea faring adventure, and the hero is not a type of warrior, but of the navigator. . . . . Such men had different views of life and a different worship from those of the settled nobility of Greece, the Ionian princes, for instance, for whom the Illiad was composed; and this divergence in views of life and worship appears very strikingly on a comparison of the two great poems."<sup>1</sup>

The earth goddesses, as the people developed into a settled agricultural people, show a similar development. "The Earth, Gaia, becomes more and more important in the Hellenic mind. Passing through various stages of development, she becomes, successively, Gaia in the first generation, Rhea in the second, and Demeter, Mother Earth in the third."<sup>2</sup>

#### Summary

The comparison of Norse and Greek mythology shows strikingly the effects of climate on religious ideas. The Norse mythology is of an entirely different character. It is more sombre, more vital, more tragic. The Greek mythology is graceful and in its entirety makes a beautiful story. The particular climate of Greece, its topography, its industrial life and the changes in this life, all show effects in the Greek mythology. Greece might be taken as a type of country where geography affects the religion in a sort of negative

1 Keary, C. F., Outlines of Primitive Belief, pp. 296-297.

2 Clarke, J. F., Ten Great Religions, p. 276.

manner. In Norway the extremely unfavorable climate exerts positive control. In Greece the climate is so favorable that it did not impress itself upon their consciousness to the exclusion of almost everything else. ✓ They had time to think of the human element and exalt it. They could develop a very intricate religion. The climatic effect would be as Cox describes it. "The speech of the tropics, and still more of the happy zone which lies beyond its scorching heat, would tell rather of brilliance than of gloom, of life rather than of decay, of constant renovation rather than of prolonged lethargy<sup>1</sup>."

Greek geography produces definite effects also. The nature of the punishment of the Danaides suggests the dry climate of Argos. Climate also produces the absence of a goddess of winter, and it produces the marriage of the goddess of spring to the west wind instead of to the north wind. The grandeur of the Greek mountains made them the home of the gods. They were not dreaded as the barren, Norse mountains were. The ruggedness of Thessaly resulted in it being considered the battle ground of the Titan war. The roughness of the whole country had an interesting effect upon the people's ideas concerning the first human pairs. Each district had a first pair, made from material characteristic of the place. The influence of the sea faring life of the Greeks upon their religion is seen in the way their sea god aided them in the Trojan war; and also by the sea god being especially revered on peninsulas, places particularly important in commerce. The effect of the develop-

1 Cox, G. W., Mythology of the Aryan Nations, p. 60.

ment of the people, from a waring nation into a commercial nation, is seen in the difference in types of heroes in the Illiad and in the Odyssey. The three different types of the earth goddess also show the development of the Greeks; in this case, into an agricultural people.

## CHAPTER V - RELIGION OF EGYPT.

The fact that Egypt was an agricultural country stands out prominently in her religion. There were important festivals at seed-time and at harvest time. Sacrifices were always chiefly of fruits, flowers, vegetables or grains. This was evidently because the people were in the agricultural rather than in the pastoral stage, in which case the sacrifices would tend to have been animals.

Agriculture also clearly shows its influence through the many gods and goddesses in some way connected with it. Of the gods and goddesses of first rank, there are Khem, the god of reproduction and of gardens, Neith, the goddess of production in nature and Maut, who signifies mother nature or the productive principle. Osiris, the chief god of the Egyptians, when on earth taught the people agriculture. Of the gods and goddesses of lower rank, there are Ranno, the special god of the gardens, and Raunee, a goddess of gardens; Kham, the goddess representing Egypt, and the goddess of the West, both signifying cultivated land.

Another geographic factor, the Nile river, influenced the Egyptian mythology even more than her agriculture. Osiris, the chief god of Egypt, is closely connected with the Nile, and the myth about himself and his wife, Isis, comprises a large part of the Egyptian religion. "To sum up the details of this story -----, we may apply to each its distinct meaning, as follows: Osiris, the inundation of the Nile. Isis, the irrigated

portion of the land of Egypt. Horus, their offspring, the vaporous and exhalations producing rain. Buto, Latone, the marshy lands of Lower Egypt, where these vapours were nourished. Nephthys, the edge of the desert, occasionally overflowed during high inundations. Anubis, the son of Osiris and Nephthys, the production of that barren soil, in consequence of its being overflowed by the Nile. Typho, the sea, which swallowed up the Nile water. (Typho or Seb, though is usually, even by this author and by others, interpreted as the heat which dries up the flood waters of the Nile.) The conspirators, the drought overcoming the moisture, from which the increase of the Nile proceeds. The chest in which Osiris body was confined, the banks of the river, within which it retired after the inundation. The Tonáiteé mouth, the lake and barren lands about it, which were held in abhorrence from their being overflowed by the river without producing any benefit to the country. The twenty-eight years of his life, the twenty-eight cubits to which the Nile rises at Elephantine; its greatest height. .... The queen of Ethiopia, the southern winds preventing the clouds being carried southwards. The different members of Osiris' body, the main channels and canals by which the inundations passed into the interior of the country, where each was said to be afterwards buried. That one which could not be recovered was the generative power of the Nile, which still continued in the stream itself; or as Plutarch thinks, it was said to have been thrown into the river, because 'water or moisture was the first matter upon which the generative power of the deity

operated, and that principle by means of which all things capable of being were produced.' The victory of Horus, the power possessed by the clouds in causing the successive inundations of the Nile. Harpocrates, whom Isis brought forth after the winter solstice (after the death of Osiris) those weak shootings of corn produced after the inundation had subsided."<sup>1</sup>

The flooding of the Nile made Egypt such a fertile place, that life, of the good after death, was pictured as a repetition of the earthly life, "with all its occupations and enjoyments, but free from fear and decay."<sup>2</sup>

The Egyptians, too, imagined that "the world was subject to occasional deluges and conflagrations, as a punishment for the wickedness of mankind . . . . ."<sup>3</sup> The flooding of the Nile, to which the Egyptians were so accustomed, very probably suggested the idea of a deluge.

Even among the gods of the highest and oldest order, the Nile influence is seen. It was at the pleasure of Ammon-Ra that the Nile overflowed, and Kneph was called the lord of the inundation.

#### Summary

Egypt is preeminently an agricultural country. This condition is brought about by the flooding of the Nile, which makes an otherwise desert country very fertile. So, in the

- 1 Wilkinson, J. G., The Manners and Customs of Ancient Egypt,
- 2 Menzies, D.D., History of Religion, p.131 (Vol. III, pp.79-80.
- 3 Wilkinson, J. G., Manners & Customs of the Ancient Egyptians, (p. 507.

Egyptian religion, it is the Nile and the agriculture which exert most influence; the latter through the festivals, sacrifices and nature of the gods, the former through the Osiris myth, their idea of a future life, of deluges to destroy the earth, and through the nature of their highest and oldest gods.

One might expect Egypt and Greece to have very similar religions, because both countries were about equally advanced in civilization, and because both had climates, so far as temperature is concerned, much alike; and because there was constant intercourse between the two. But Egypt, being naturally a desert, the whole thought of the people was centered upon the overflow of the Nile, without which they could not have existed. Greece had no such disadvantage as an arid climate and also no overflowing Nile. So the very essence of the Egyptian religion was lacking in the Greek due to a vital geographic difference, the overflow of a river in a desert. Greece with practically the same kind of people and temperature, but with sufficient rainfall, developed a highly intricate religion. In contrast, the Egyptian religion had practically but one idea, the Osiris myth, which was a personification of the overflow of the Nile.

## CHAPTER VI - MOHAMMEDANISM

The Mohammedan religion, like the Norse, shows very marked effects of the climate under which it has been developed. The Arabians suffered from aridity as the Norse suffered from cold, and in both cases the effects are positive and definite.

The highest rewards which could come to a Mohammedan was to be placed in a shady garden through which rivers flow. "God promised unto the true believers, both men and women, gardens through which rivers flow wherein they shall remain for ever; and delicious dwellings in gardens of perpetual shade."<sup>1</sup> The only productive places in Arabia were oases, which are really gardens. As these fertile places were few, they were all the more precious and all Arabians desired to live in them. About the most common thing in the Koran is verses referring to pleasant gardens.

In their paradise there was to be plenty to drink. Their lack of water was such a vital thing that its abundance in heaven was mentioned as an especial blessing. They were also to have plenty of fruits, from the lack of which they suffered on earth. They were to wear green clothing, probably because green things in the desert signified life, food and water. The cloth was to be of silk and the ornaments were to be of precious stones and gold. They were to have beautiful carpets and cushions. These speak of their trade with the east, by which

<sup>1</sup> Koran, p. 107.

they became acquainted with these things and learned to value them. The following extract will illustrate these points. For the righteous "are prepared two gardens --- planted with shady trees ---. In each --- there shall be two fountains flowing --- fruit of two kinds ---. They shall repose on couches the linings whereof shall be of thick silk interwoven with gold; and the fruits of the two gardens shall be near at hand ---, and besides these two there shall be two other gardens --- of a dark green --- two fountains pouring forth plenty of water ---; there shall be fruits, and palm-trees, and pomegranates ---. Therein shall they delight themselves, lying on green cushions and beautiful carpets."<sup>1</sup>

And again "they shall be adorned therein with bracelets of gold, and shall be clothed in green garments of fine silk and brocades ---."<sup>2</sup>

Hell, in marked contrast to the Norse Niflheim, was to be a region of intense heat. Even the drinking water was to be boiling hot.

To them rain was of prime importance. God was especially praised as the sender of rain which aided their fruits and cattle; these being their chief means of support. The Koran says:

"It is he who sendeth down from heaven rain water, whereof ye have to drink, and from which plants, whereon ye feed your cattle, receive their nourishment. And by means thereof he causeth corn, and olives, and palm trees, and grapes,

1 Koran, pp. 410-411.

2 Ibid, p. 160.

and all kinds of fruit to spring forth for you."<sup>1</sup>

Their growing commerce also entered their religion. "Of his signs one is, that he sendeth the winds bearing welcome tidings of rain, that he may cause you to taste of his mercy; and that ships may sail at his command, that ye may seek to enrich yourselves of his abundance by commerce; and that ye may give thanks."<sup>2</sup>

A peculiar effect of the lack of water and abundance of sand is also found. There were strict rules regarding cleanliness. Still if water could not be found, a person could "take fine clean sand and rub your face and hands therewith."<sup>3</sup>

#### Summary

The heat and aridity of the climate exerted a great influence upon the Mohammedan religion. This is shown by paradise always being described as a shady garden through which rivers flow and where there is to be plenty of water to drink and fruits to eat. Hell, on the other hand, is described as a place of intense heat. Even the little water, which there was, was to be boiling hot. The Arabs suffered from heat, lack of water and consequent lack of food. They knew nothing of suffering from intense cold, as did the Norse or of having so much water that it became a commonplace. What they dreaded most was extreme heat and lack of water. So these conditions were to exist in hell. What they desired most was plenty of water and

1 Koran, p. 144.

2 Ibid, p. 321.

3 Ibid, p. 52.

gardens in which an abundance of fruit grew. These conditions, consequently, existed in heaven. Gardens and fruits were so highly prized because, to the Arabs, the oases, which resemble gardens, were the only places where food and water could be obtained; and the fruits, growing in these gardens, were practically the only food stuffs which they knew. Green was a favorite color because it signified growing things and consequently water. Sand was given as a substitute for water for cleaning purposes because of the lack of water and abundance of sand. The silk clothing and precious stones, to be worn in heaven, showed the influence of the Arabs' trade with the east. Their God showed His beneficence toward them by helping them with their fruits, their cattle and their commerce. Each of these indicates a source of wealth to the Arabs, so in each they would want God's help.

## CHAPTER VII - CONCLUSION

A primitive person's thoughts and ideas come from his experiences either with external nature or with mankind. The more undeveloped the people are, the more will material forces influence them, because their human relations, based upon love, sympathy and friendship, are comparatively few and simple. Natural phenomena will also make a deep impression upon such primitive people, because they lack a rational explanation of them. The nature of their thoughts, even on the highest and most profound subject, religion, will necessarily be conditioned by their geography; which includes not only climate, topography and occupations, but also those human relations resulting from their occupations. In the earliest stages of development, these are the only things which have forcefully impressed the people. In the case of the Greeks, however, nature has been so bountiful and gracious that it has not held the attention of the people. There the influence is rather negative than positive. The people were allowed to develop an elaborate and highly artistic system of divinities. There was an absence of any one striking feature, such as a disadvantageous climate or a particular way of earning a livelihood, upon which to center their thoughts. They could focus their attention and energy upon devising a beautiful, graceful and intricate religion. But people with a definitely unfavorable climate or with one special kind of occupation will devise a

religious system in which their gods will help them to overcome their drawbacks or will bless them in their work.

To a primitive people there are no natural laws and no one god ruling over all things. Each phenomena must be explained by a separate, personal god who presides over it and who controls its actions. When the ancient Hindoos migrated from the high, dry plateau to the region of the monsoons, they could not rationally explain the difference in climate. So they had to change the worship of their gods; taking Indra as their chief god, as cloudy skies were then more common and impressive than the clear skies. To the Norse their bare mountains were such because the giants dwelt in them. These giants were frost beings because, to the Norse, all evil and suffering were represented in terms of cold, the thing from which they suffered so much. The Egyptians allowed their explanation of the all important fact in their existence, the overflow of the Nile, to overshadow all the rest of their religion. Most of the various myths, so common in all mythology, are merely attempts of a primitive mind to explain the change from night to day or from winter to summer.

An undeveloped people could do almost nothing in earning their livelihood except as aided by nature. They knew little about how to prevent diseases of their cattle or how to overcome the aridity of their climate. Under such conditions, their gods would be conceived as especially blessing them in their occupations, as blessing them by sending rain or as helping them against the demon beings who kept their mountains bare.

As their occupation or the nature of their life changed so also would their religion change. The Iranians were becoming essentially agricultural, so in their religion agriculture was more praised than herding; even the cattle wished to be taught the value of settled agriculture. In Greece, as the people became more and more sea faring, their type of myth hero changed. He was no longer the warrior of the Illiad, but the "sea faring adventurer" of the Odyssey.

An interesting feature of a religion is the peoples' idea of hell. Hell, being a place of torment, would have to be characterized by the things from which the people suffered most. Climate, in its heat, aridity and cold, probably caused more suffering than any other thing. So, to the Norse, hell is a cold, damp, dark place. To the Mohammedan, it is hot, burning and devoid of water,--in each case the very things which made their climates unfavorable. The Greeks had a delightful climate. They suffered from nothing in particular. Consequently the sufferings, in their hell, were various and ingenious; such as rolling a hugh rock up a hill, only to have it roll back again or being surrounded by delicious fruits and water, neither of which one could reach.

The Persian, the Norse and the Egyptian religions show interesting geographic influences in their idea of a new world or after life. To the Persians, who found it difficult to raise grain in their mountainous country, the new world has to be level. To the Norse, the world after Ragnarok was to produce its fruits spontaneously. There was no longer to be a struggle

against a rough and cold land in making their crops grow. The Egyptians, with their fertile, level Nile valley supplied with regular moisture by the overflowing river, had little that oppressed them. So they pictured the occupations of the blessed people in after life as a repetition of their occupations here on earth.

In conclusion, geographic factors exert an influence according to the extent to which they dominate the situation. This is seen in the effects produced by the monsoons of India, the intense cold of Norway, the extreme aridity of Arabia; or by the predominance of the pastoral life in India and of agriculture in Egypt, and by the growing importance of agriculture in Persia and of commerce in Greece. Of all the geographic factors, climate seems to me to give rise to the most definite and easily discernable influences as can be especially seen in the religions of Norway and Arabia. I think there can be no doubt that in all the religions studied, geography definitely exerts an influence.

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