

NOTES AND DISCUSSION

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THE PRESENT STATE OF STUDIES ON GERMANIC RELIGION

When a new method of scientific study comes to the fore in any field, its *raison d'être* can be explained only in relation to previous research. We shall try, then, to assess the value of nineteenth-century contributions to the knowledge of pagan religion among the Germanic peoples. At a first glance their value seems hardly to justify the tireless efforts of the illustrious scholars who devoted themselves to the task. The failure of so much scientific endeavor is no longer surprising, however, when we recall the character of that era. Opposing the bold and often fanciful syntheses of Romanticism, the nineteenth century advocated a rigorous analysis of the mythological tradition; it wanted first of all to discover what was authentic material in a confused mass of texts emanating from a period that was at once backward and colored by a long Christian tradition. A close examination, largely philological in nature, seemed to reveal that most of the myths and legends conserved in the rich literature of the Eddas consisted of mere fables or simple popular tales embellished with names of gods by adapting hands little concerned with the old pagan traditions.

The apparent abundance of Scandinavian literature was thus reduced to a very slim store of sure and authentic data. And, surprising as it may seem,

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the "loss" caused no discomfort, but, rather, general rejoicing that a large body of worthless and apocryphal legend had been eliminated.

Two new sciences, expanding prodigiously in the nineteenth century, exercised a decisive influence on studies of mythology: folklore and ethnology. Their importance is obvious. Popular traditions had aroused the interest of romantic scholars. Jakob Grimm, creator of the science of folklore, had clearly felt the value of these traditions for medieval literature as well as for Germanic mythology. Boldly advancing into what was still an uncleared wilderness, he proclaimed the importance of popular tales (*Märchen*) as secular heirs of the pagan myths. In *Deutsche Mythologie* (Gütersloh, 1835), his most important work, he raised the ancient Germanic religion into a magnificent system, drawing equally upon Eddic traditions, popular tales, and old beliefs and superstitions. It was in fact a premature work, though astonishingly rich in both documentation and erudition. Succeeding generations have gradually crumbled Grimm's imposing structure, arriving at a critical attitude which destroyed the whole pagan tradition except for a few scattered debris. Popular tales were not ancient myths at all but belonged to an autonomous tradition; if there were points of resemblance between myths and tales, their relationship was the other way round: the tales were believed to have provided the themes for a quasi-mythological literature. The German scholar Eugen Mogk, fervent adept of folklore studies, sincerely believed that he had uncovered (in a study published in 1924!) adaptations of popular tales in the most venerated of age-old myths.

Now, in devaluating the pagan traditions of Germanic mythology, one runs the risk of depriving the gods of all their many and varied activities, reducing them to the status of proper names totally lacking in substance. Such a result squared marvelously well with the results reached in the field of another recently founded science, ethnology. I shall limit myself to a résumé of some themes in vogue during the second half of the nineteenth century. The study of so-called primitive peoples had revealed religious forms of striking simplicity. Instead of personal gods had been found a swarm of demons, specters, and souls or even mere magical forces like the *mana* of the Polynesians. The concepts of *totem* and *tabu* had become the property of intellectual circles. Vestiges of them were soon found among Indo-European peoples; even today there are illustrious scholars who attempt to show in Greek and Roman religions the vestiges of these religious phenomena of a prehistoric period. It was agreed that the existence of individual gods should be denied to the Indo-European peoples;

for gods were substituted demons of the vaguest sort, or else impersonal forces resembling the primitive “*mana*” concept (for example, the *numen* of the Romans or the *megin* of the Scandinavian tradition).

From that point on it seemed justifiable to eliminate the traditional gods, with their richly developed mythology, from the tableau of Germanic religion in the prehistoric period. This whole pantheon, which had appeared to be so solidly constructed with the help of an often very bold etymology, was destined to crumble; there remained only the figure of the supreme god: in Sanskrit, *Dyaus pitâ*, in Greek, *Zeus pater*, in Latin, *Jupiter*, in Germanic, *Tiwaz*. He at least resisted even the irreverent blows of a stern criticism which sometimes tended to be hypercritical. All the rest were judged the chimerical result of a faulty method.

And so a new generation of scholars found itself faced with the task of explaining how all these gods, so varied and complex, so fully accepted by previous tradition, had developed out of an empty sky where the single “father Zeus” had dwelt in majestic solitude. But the idea of development was dear to the scholars of the nineteenth century, a period which rightly boasted of a conscious and fundamental historicism. The gods, supreme manifestations of an absolute Being, were subjected to the laws of Becoming. Scholars furiously set about the task of shedding light on their “origin,” the point of departure of their “extension” in space and time, their modes of adaptation to new milieus. At the same time they began to realize the role of the Near East in prehistoric times, notably for Indo-European peoples who came in contact with civilizations which had existed for thousands of years. What more natural than to suppose that newly developed agriculture should have brought with it a whole body of beliefs and concomitant rites? This current of cultural influences had not been interrupted in the following centuries, even well into the historical period. The striking cult and myth of the Scandinavian god Balder bore a puzzling resemblance to those of Attis, Adonis, and Osiris; remarkable reflections were found even for the traditions of Christ’s passion. Here then was an immense field for research carried on in a strictly “historicist” spirit, a field which was considerably enlarged as the ancient Orient disclosed more and more of its secrets.

The Germanic peoples, last to enter upon the stage of history, were an easy prey for research of this order: one by one their gods were robbed of their originality, treated as intruders come from all directions—Occident as well as Orient. The well-ordered pantheon of Scandinavian gods in historical times was considered as having been gradually formed from a series

of borrowings and adaptations. This should not surprise us, as the syncretism of the Hellenistic world offered a clear example of such a religious amalgam. The comparison is, however, pointless. That syncretism had been the result of a cultural movement in a world where religious faith was shaken and where sects agitated by fervent proselytism attracted a dislocated people avid for redemption. The Germanic peoples were still far removed from such a dissolution of morals and traditions. Even at the time of the conversion to Christianity, their pagan religion was in general solidly established in individual consciences; before the arrival of Christian missionaries, the propagandists of a new faith had failed utterly. How is it then possible to imagine methods of dissemination by which gods and cults were brought from all points of the compass to the Scandinavian people?

At the end of the nineteenth century it was felt that the time had come to draw up the balance sheet of mythological research; the manuals of Golther, E. H. Meyer, and E. Mogk were the curious result. They show an abundance of folklore data, a swarm of giants and gnomes, spirits and demons, fairies, wood nymphs and water nymphs. On the other hand, the picture of the pagan religion is deplorably sketchy; by ignoring foreign newcomers, and reducing myths transmitted into the region to a series of secondary versions of fairy tales, the authors had come up with a minimum of more or less solidly established divinities, which were considered almost exclusively from the point of view of naturalist method.

Such a conception of pagan religion was subject to caution; it was contradicted by the Scandinavian tradition itself. How could this religion, which had shown remarkable tenacity and resistance in the face of Christianity's superior forces, have been formed by a series of borrowings and resulted from a late and incoherent development? It was however a true religion, including a solid faith and a ritual as rich as it was subtly varied, and in no sense a mere mass of curious myths, more or less authentic. Unfortunately, the entire domain of the pagan rite was poorly documented in our literary sources; hardly any but mythological traditions were at our disposal.

The twentieth century, which saw the mind of Western man shaken to its depths by gigantic crises, forced science to consider the problems of cultures and religion from an entirely different point of view. Materialism, hand in hand with irreligion and the "desacralization" of life as a whole, was unable to arrive at an adequate evaluation of archaic beliefs. What was especially lacking was the respect due even the most primitive religious manifestation. Ethnology, which has led astray studies of re-

Notes and Discussion

ligion and mythology, also found the way to a more generous appreciation of religious facts. A more exact and sympathetic study of primitive data revealed more shaded and complex articulation than could be included in the simple concepts of *mana* or *tabu*. Finally, the role of myth itself was understood; instead of a fantasy recounting the acts and gestures of the gods, it must disclose a religious phenomenon intimately related to the cult. Thus the myth, however bizarre and ridiculous it may appear to our eyes, is marked by an indisputable sacredness and possesses a dynamic force manifest in the course of the accompanying ritual. Such a discovery necessarily had repercussions in the study of archaic religions; it was again necessary to take into account the character of mythological traditions.

The first sign of an about-face in current opinions came from an unexpected quarter. Since 1909 the Danish scholar V. Grønbech had been publishing a series of volumes on Scandinavian religious ideas modestly called *Vor Folkeæt* ("Our Race"). He was better prepared for this task than the philologists who had monopolized the domain, because as a theologian he was able to apply a method better adapted to this sort of research. Rather than occupy himself with the mythologies which had already been the subject of so many arid studies, he concentrated especially on the Icelandic saga, a rather faithful image of the pagan mentality. With penetrating lucidity he disclosed the religious bases of this whole violent and passionate life, dominated by hate and vengeance, by the desire for power and riches. The defense of peace within the family or the clan, the defense of one's honor and even of material prosperity, showed the religious structure of the pagan communities in all its uncompromising rigidity.

The new orientation of the study of Germanic mythology is really not clear, however, until about 1930. I limit myself to the mention of two works which appeared almost simultaneously during the thirties. The first, *Kultische Geheimbünde der Germanen*, was published in 1934 by Otto Höfler. Based on previous researches of Lily Weiser-Aall and Richard Wolfram, it constructs an imposing record of popular traditions connected with New Year's customs. In Austria and Bavaria, in the Low Countries, and in Scandinavia, young men on that day form processions of masked demons, circulate through the fields, and visit the farms. They spread terror far and wide with the frightful din of horns, whips, bells, and rattles. Others do not dare show their faces in the street; this would be particularly dangerous for young girls, for, if the procession of demons finds them in its path, they are chased through the village, seized and carried off, taken

a considerable distance away, or even tossed into manure heaps. Traversing the fields, the young men dance and jump; it is believed that the wheat will grow as high as their leaps. When they enter a farmhouse, the inhabitants feel greatly honored, entertain them royally, and grant anything they may request.

These young men, wearing demonic masks, represent demons, particularly spirits of the dead who, according to a very widespread belief, visit the world of the living at the time of the winter solstice. In Norway this procession has names related to that of the Scandinavian god Odin; this leads us to suppose that the custom which has almost everywhere degenerated to the rank of rural amusement was formerly a serious and important rite. In fact, Mr. Höfler has gathered an impressive number of ancient texts by which we are able to reconstruct, with the aid of modern traditions, a pagan ritual of considerable interest. There is reason to link this with the institution of associations of warriors, described with sympathy and even admiration by Tacitus under the name of *comitatus*. The central god of these institutions was Odin; the *Einherjar* gathered in his celestial dwelling, Valhalla, correspond to this type of warrior community. The time propitious for these ceremonies is precisely that of the *Jul*, when the spirits of the dead are believed to be present among the living and when Odin himself, at the head of the "savage hunt," shows himself in the storms of the solstice. In a later book, *Germanisches Sakralkönigtum*, published in 1952, Mr. Höfler added a good number of new facts, leaving no doubt as to the existence of these organizations with their ritual ceremonies.

The importance of these studies can scarcely be exaggerated. Popular traditions are treated in such a way as to cast no suspicion on the authenticity of the literary sources; on the contrary, pagan rites and modern customs are mutually complementary; they are but the elements of an uninterrupted tradition dating from the prehistoric past, doubtless already Indo-European. One is led to the conclusion that ritual acts belonging to Germanic paganism kept their form and their value even after the disappearance of pagan culture and that they have persisted, in slightly altered form, in a profoundly Christian atmosphere. Gods may pass, but rites cannot be uprooted as easily from the collective consciousness.

The new orientation of mythological studies appears also in the manual *Altgermanische Religionsgeschichte* which I first published in 1935-37, as Volume XII of the *Grundriss der germanischen Philologie* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2d rev. ed., 1956-57). This work was a new edition of the book

written by the scholar E. Mogk for the *Grundriss der germanischen Philologie*. I have already mentioned that Mogk belonged to the folklorist school and that he underestimated the importance of the pagan myths. I wished to give the work an entirely new orientation and to try especially to sketch the Germanic peoples' religion itself. First it was necessary to restore to the literary traditions their full value in the study of ancient religions. In accepting the idea that there were most assuredly secondary and therefore apocryphal elaborations, one's proper attitude toward these texts should be that of taking the myths literally and discovering their religious meaning. Too often one is tempted to reject a myth, calling it a simple popular tale, because one has failed to grasp its real meaning; such an easy solution should always be distrusted. It goes without saying that the main proof of a myth's originality is found in a concomitant rite; for this reason as complete a dossier as possible must be assembled for pagan ritual.

No less important, it seems to me, was a criticism of evolutionist theories, which had cast too much doubt on the originality of the Nordic pantheon. I was convinced that the gods handed down in the Nordic texts were extremely ancient; the introduction of a new divinity could only be a most exceptional case (e.g., a god with neither cult nor mythology, like *Forseti*). Nor did I wish to neglect the possibility of a close relationship between the Germanic gods and those of other Indo-European peoples; therefore, the thesis of a common heritage from an immemorial past had to be considered. I started down the path where romantic scholars had too often got lost, hoping that a saner method might lead to more solid conclusions. The stumbling block had been the war between the Ases and the Vanes: regarding this as the representation of a real war between two peoples of opposite faiths had robbed it of all religious meaning. Such an interpretation was satisfactory to the historicism prevailing in the last century; it was obvious, however, that a myth of such importance could not have risen from such a conflict, and I hoped to arrive at a more satisfactory conclusion by reintegrating it into the mythological system.

As a matter of fact, the negative criticism was relatively easy; evolutionist theories provided almost too many occasions for demonstrating the fragile basis of their deductions. But to prove positively that Germanic mythology derived from a wider Indo-European tradition was more difficult. Etymology was discredited by the abuses of the A. Kuhn–Max Müller school. Here and there a few myth motifs could be found. But did one have the right to make these so important as to deduce from them an Indo-European origin? What was the true character of these gods whose personality was so delicately shaded, even, at times, contradictory? The

naturalist theory which had reduced these divinities to natural phenomena such as sun, lightning, and storm had lost its appeal, but what was to replace it? With Wotan defined variously as the god of death, of magic, of war, of poetry, of ecstatic fury, it was difficult to see how these divergent qualities could be united in a single central function. Donar was doubtless a warrior god whose weapon was lightning, but he was also the god of fertility and the protector of the clan and other human groups.

Besides all this, historicism had broken up the pantheon into an incoherent mass of divinities, differing widely in both age and source. Now, a polytheism is not and cannot be an arbitrary collection of independent and autonomous gods; it is a system in which each god fulfils his own function and which embodies all aspects of both cosmic and human life. Where could be found the formula by which the elements of this complex divine world could be united in an organic system?

By the time my book appeared, Georges Dumézil had already published studies ("Le Festin d'immortalité" and the "Problème des centaures," 1924 and 1929, respectively) in which he successfully defended the Indo-European origin of several Greek and Hindu myths. Thus science retraced its steps by rallying to the cause of the romantic theses which had been so often derided. But this time a vast amount of carefully verified materials, resulting from a half-century of positivist studies, made possible an exacting criticism. So M. Dumézil succeeded in showing the likelihood of an original, Indo-European unity for several important myths. A bold etymological approach, utilizing the subtleties of an almost algebraic linguistics, was not the point of departure of the investigation but provided the keystone which finished off this study of comparative mythology.

I am sorry not to have been able to utilize M. Dumézil's studies to the extent they deserved. The apparatus of scientific research was not sufficiently developed; new publications were slow in crossing linguistic and national boundaries. Despite diligent efforts to overcome it, this regrettable hindrance to world co-operation has not been entirely suppressed even today. M. Dumézil's books are hardly known outside France; repercussions in the Germanic world have been rare and accidental. However, M. Dumézil has continued to make new contributions in his *Ouranos-Varuna* and *Flamen-Brahman*; in considering several aspects of the ritual, the latter is extremely important. When, two years after the publication of my own book, he answered it, so to speak, in his *Mythes et dieux des Germains*, his handling of the comparative method could be seen, as sure as it was flexible.

It was only with the publication of *Mitra-Varuna* and the trilogy *Jupiter-*

Notes and Discussion

Mars-Quirinus that the main lines of his theory were fully revealed. He had successfully systematized the Indo-European pantheon, with three main functions homologous to those of human society. Royal authority, the warrior class, and the mass of peasants and tillers of the soil constituted the Indo-European society, although the same structure existed elsewhere. But unique among the Indo-Europeans was the polarity of the first function, shown in a pair of complementary divinities like Mitra-Varuna in the Rg-Veda religion, and Tīwaz-Wotan in that of the Germanic peoples. On the one hand, a beneficent god, guaranteeing the stability of the social order; on the other hand, a violent, tumultuous, dangerous, and even chaotic god. An entire philosophy of royalty can be discerned in this polarity; as a guarantor of laws and conventions it ran the risk of being fixed in rigid and immovable forms; thus from time to time the petrified system had to be broken by an eruption of creative forces allowing a regeneration of social life. This duality of the royal authority is also found in the Germanic world; no better definition exists for the characters of Tīwaz and Wotan, who formed a couple truly antithetical and complementary.

M. Dumézil has in recent years published a series of new contributions to this work of synthesis. He has refined his method and the somewhat rigid and oversimplified mechanism of his earlier system. Several gods, acting with special functions at a lower level than the great protagonists, have successively found their place in the tripartite system of Indo-European gods. We are beginning to discern, to our continuing amazement, the complexity of this system, which is at the same time very well balanced. There is nothing "primitive" about it in the ordinary sense of the word, but recent ethnological research has shown that the word "primitive" does not at all mean simple or undeveloped; on the contrary, it often connotes a bizarre complexity which can be reduced to a coherent view of man's vital problems.

A new theory is now demonstrating its accuracy, or at least its heuristic value, by its applicability to religious facts which had previously resisted the efforts of scholars. The war of the Ases and the Vanes, of which I have already spoken, fits marvelously well into the tripartite system; Indo-European analogies (among the Hindus and the Romans) show its original meaning. The equilibrium of human society, composed of three classes each having its own interests, is menaced by dangerous tensions. The myth gives us the symbol of this rivalry in the war *in illo tempore* between the ruling classes and the *tiers état*. The peace which ended it guaranteed

established order for all time to come, a guaranty made irrevocable through the exchange of hostages. This long-debated problem finds a plausible solution in M. Dumézil's thesis.

When the character and function of important gods like Tîwaz, Wodan, Donar, Njord, and Freyr have been clearly defined, the Germanic pantheon presents us with a large number of minor, complementary divinities. How can they be assured their proper place in the system? Sometimes one has the impression of parallel deities, as in the case of the Scandinavian god Ullr, whose function is homologous to that of Tîwaz; he opposes Odin in several Scandinavian myths transmitted in the prolific work of the Danish writer Saxo Grammaticus. Sometimes a god seems to fulfil a need to limit more precisely the too-wide functions of one of the major gods. I have tried to define in this way the character of Heimdallr, whose tradition is at one and the same time very restrained and very disconnected; following the studies of Messrs. Ohlmarks (Lund: Heimdalls Horn & Odins Auge, 1937) and Pering (Lund: Heimdall, 1941), I wrote an article on him in *Études germaniques* in 1956. This divinity, linked in curious fashion to the tree of the world, has been compared by M. Dumézil to the Roman god Janus and the Hindu god Vâyu; it is true that he is the model of a god of commencement and a remarkable example of a god of sovereignty.

The gods Balder and Loki, ever since the earliest mythological studies, have attracted special interest from scholars through the myths that are attached to their names. Balder, faced with imminent danger, was made invulnerable by an oath offered by all of nature save for one inoffensive plant, the mistletoe, which became the cause of the death of the god: a blind god, his hand guided by Loki, threw the plant at Balder, who fell dead, to the great consternation of the other gods. There are here remarkable analogies with the plots involving agricultural divinities, especially the myths of Attis and of Adonis; this is why Gustav Neckel conceived of an adaptation from the religions of Asia Minor through the Thracians (*Die Überlieferungen vom Gotte Balder* [Dortmund, 1920]). The Finnish scholar Kaarle Krohn brought up several very late traditions regarding the passion of Jesus Christ and sees in them a proof favoring an adaptation of Christian traditions (*Skandinavisk Mytology* [Helsinki, 1922]); this point of view can be understood only in terms of the rise of evolutionist theories and especially of nineteenth-century rationalism. None of this agrees with the undeniable fact that Balder does not at all belong to the Vanes because he is closely associated with Odin; we must not minimize the completely unequivocal data of the Scandinavian tradition in this regard. Whereas

agricultural divinities experience death in order to be revived in a new fullness of life, Balder dies definitively, and the attempt to deliver him from the realm of the dead fails lamentably. This is why I have sought the solution of this mythological enigma in another direction (see my article in *Arkiv för Nordisk Filologi*, 1956), associating it with a universally widespread tradition: the one showing how man, destined to happy and eternal life, has been subjected to the fate of death.

His adversary Loki is no less difficult to describe. M. Dumézil and I have attempted to resolve this problem. In a book on Loki, published in 1933 in the series "Folklore Fellows Communications," I followed the lead of the great Danish scholar Axel Olrik, attributing to Loki the role of an impostor god, a crafty and astute trickster, a figure who often doubles as a civilizing hero. In this case his activity as an enemy of the gods, even as a true Satan, would have been a later development. M. Dumézil, on the other hand, in his book on Loki published in 1945, sees this activity as an original trait; by an ingenious comparison with a satanic being named Syrdon, in the Ossete tradition (also an Indo-European people), he reaches a tempting conclusion. It would be premature to say, however, that the case of the god Loki is definitely closed. The Swedish scholar Folke Ström has recently made a further attempt to discover Loki's secret (*Loki* [Göteborg, 1956]).

In the studies listed here as examples it has been constantly clear that the solution to a religious problem is found only through its integration into the mythological system common to all Indo-European peoples. It goes without saying that there has been no lack of support for evolutionary theories as well. But the solutions proposed by these scholars are hardly convincing; when the Norwegian folklore specialist Nils Lid considers the god Ullr as a woolly doll, and the Swedish scholar M. Eldquist interprets the same god as a divinity of bubbling springs, we see how arbitrary such interpretations really are. In singular fashion they limit narrowly the basis of the mythological notion, and we are not convinced that a god like Ullr could have developed from such humble origins. For Ullr was certainly the figure of an important cult: his name appears in a large number of Scandinavian place names. It is safe to predict that mythological research will be increasingly oriented toward the method so brilliantly begun by M. Dumézil. However, along other lines, the Würzburg scholar F. R. Schröder has made valuable contributions, especially to the conceptions and myths of fertility divinities.

The study of archaic religions of the polytheistic type can easily be lim-

ited to defining the personalities of the gods and, which is worse, to sterile efforts toward demonstrating their origin and modes of development or extension in time and space. This is due to the state of our documentation, which is limited to myths told about the gods. One too often gains the impression that these gods figure in rites strictly regulated by the changing seasons of the year; the whole apparatus of the cult seems to tend toward satisfying community needs. Now, we ask first of all: What is the relationship between man and the supernatural beings he adores? Sacrifice is an act of faith, and we wonder what was the religious attitude of men as they participated in ceremonies taking place during the great seasonal festivals. Of this we know next to nothing; the Germanic tradition as transmitted by Christian writers is singularly silent on this point. Was the sacrificial meal really nothing but a feast whose participants were regaled with horsemeat soup and ale? After all, the priest officiated and the gods on their pedestals were present. This leads to a crucial question: Where was the center of the pagan faith? What was the source of the lively emotion which took hold of the soul in communion with the gods? A religion which is but a series of sacrificial acts ordered by custom inherited from ancestors is, after all, an empty shell. Indirectly, we see that Germanic religion was by no means a matter of pure and simple tradition; its bitter resistance against the assaults of the Christian mission shows us that the pagans knew they must defend something very important, something indispensable.

The religious vocabulary of the pagans calls for examination. One's first reaction is disappointment; at the time of conversion, they were defending their religion not in the modern sense of the word but in that which Scandinavian texts call the *sidhr*; this is precisely the word for "custom, usage." Likewise the Christian religion was called the new *sidhr*, as if the essential part were the Mass, the ringing of bells, the glow of candles, chanting, and liturgy. Did the preaching of Christian doctrine have less importance than the exterior trappings of the cult? We are inclined to believe so, considering that paganism itself knew no dogmas which clearly defined the fundamental traits of its beliefs. Another word seems to lead us to the same conclusion: the verb *trua*, whose meaning, "to believe," was acquired only after the conversion. In pagan times the word was the equivalent of "to trust, to have full confidence." But let us remember that the god Thor is called *fulltrui*, "the one who is trusted completely," and then we seem to glimpse an element of intimacy between god and man, not limited to moments of ceremony but extending throughout the life of the believer. When one embarks upon a dangerous enterprise, one feels

that the god is quite near, that he will be of help in case of danger. It would be easy to show that there are in relations with Odin, too, elements of devotion and of a confidence essentially personal. Although it is difficult to discover just what went on within the pagan heart at the moment of communion with the gods, we may suspect that it included strong and sincere feelings.

On the one hand, texts give the impression that men and gods met on an equal footing, but, on the other hand, the gods appear separated from men by a clearly marked sacredness. Just what is the sacral character of the gods? The Germanic languages have two words to express it; in the religious vocabulary of a people, two words for the same notion are certainly not identical in meaning. First there is the very widespread word: Gothic *hailags*; Old Scandinavian *heilagr*; German *heilig*; then the Gothic word *weihs*; Old Scandinavian *vé*, which disappeared after the conversion but which is found in the German verb *weihen*, "to consecrate." As is usual in these cases, etymology is of little help to us. The original meaning of *heilig* would be "total, intact, healthy"; there is no need to read into it the slightest religious element. The texts themselves must be examined. M. Baetke has done this in *Das Heilige im Germanischen* (Tübingen, 1942), where he compares the two words, concluding that the two notions may be seen as the positive and negative sides of sacrality. *Heilig* is an attribute exclusive to the gods; even when manifested in a human being or a thing, it remains an emanation from the divine world. Everything which belongs to the cult as a source of sacrality is called *heilig*. But the other word, while it is also applicable to the sacral qualities of the gods, indicates the total separation of the sacred and profane worlds; it expresses approximately the same nuances as the term "taboo" in ethnology: a person or a thing to which the word *weihs* applies is by that very fact inviolable and excluded from profane usage. Such a study, completing the earlier work of V. Grøn-bach, shows that a careful examination of texts can lead to clear and truly revealing definitions.

It is fortunately possible to cite several efforts toward determining the exact sense of religious ideas. Once again it was a French scholar who instituted such studies of the religious vocabulary: M. Cahen, whose thesis, *Le Mot Dieu en vieux scandinave*, published in 1921, was followed by "Études sur le vocabulaire religieux du vieux scandinave, La libation." Others might be mentioned. The importance of the idea of fate in the Germanic world is well known. Epic poetry shows us the hero in the grasp of a pitiless destiny; he stands against this fatal power with magnificent bravu-

ra, only to succumb at the end. This dominant feeling of man's dependence on his destiny created personal forms, such as the Norns, and especially Urdhr, goddess of destiny, superior even to the powers of the gods. Sometimes the god Odin seems to assume the role of an implacable destiny, especially when he assigns victory or defeat in combat. What was the role of fate in the real life of men? In recent years several scholars (Walther Gehl, Martin Ninck, Ladislaus Mittner, Eduard Neumann) have attempted to elucidate this complex and important idea; tragic events in Germany aroused interest in the idea of a fate menacing man throughout his earthly existence. Attacking the problem from several sides, these scholars have shed new light on it. They inevitably encounter the question of the relation between fate and the power of the gods and run the risk of posing a problem which by its very nature must remain insoluble. The Greek world at the time of Homer experienced the same aporia. It may perhaps depend quite simply on the attitude of man himself in regard to all that menaces his fragile existence; he may see in this the action of a god who leads him through life by obscure paths; he may also see the will of a powerful destiny inexorably pushing man toward his downfall. To make logical distinctions among these conceptions so intimately dependent upon psychological attitudes can be but a distortion of nature.

In view of the great difficulties arising from the vague and incomplete state of our sources, the study of pagan religion often assumes the character of a Tantalus' punishment. At the moment we think we are near a precise knowledge of a religious fact, it escapes our efforts; does this mean that it will always remain a nebulous specter which can never be grasped? We must, however, remember the character of polytheistic belief. A dogma tracing the form of its faith with a clear line is absolutely wrong; this divine world is revealed only through symbols, hidden in the ensemble of the myths. The gods act, behaving too often in a purely human way; it might be said that they are energies rather than modes of being or aspects of the cosmic world. When they *are* the latter, it is in an almost subconscious manner. We must try as it were to test the quality of their divine power; the required condition is a respectful attitude, ready to receive their revelation.

Now, it is respect for religious facts which was above all lacking to the generations of scholars of the second half of the nineteenth century. Comparing our research methods with theirs, we have a right to believe that today's attitude is better adapted to the subject matter. The method which consists of treating myths as traditions without any value, of questioning

Notes and Discussion

their truth, of breaking them up into folklore motifs, seems to us a curious aberration, a consequence of the sterile rationalism of that period. We want to believe in the myths even before we understand them; we see in them grandiose symbols in which the great problems of life and the face of the cosmic order are revealed. And here we are closer to the great scholars of the romantic period; although we reject in large measure the results of their too superficial comparisons and too fantasy-laden schemes, we are convinced of the sureness of their intuition, which saw in Germanic mythology the venerable legacy of an Indo-European past. To make that intuition more conscious, to arrive at an over-all view showing the articulations of a complex yet homogeneous organization in scattered elements, this is the task of our generation—a task which requires the collaboration of philologists, folklorists, ethnologists, and historians of religion. If religion is one of the grandest revelations of the human spirit, it is worth the effort needed to know it in all its fulness and in all its depth.