Sacrifice in Ancient Religion and in Christian Sacrament.

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I.

In Ancient Religion.

Whether one ought to speak of the 'Sacrifice of the Lord's Supper,' and if so, in what sense, is a question continually discussed and on which men seem to get no nearer to agreement as time goes on. May not this futility of discussion be due to a false method of controversy? When the question is asked whether the Lord's Supper is a Sacrifice, the way in which an answer is sought is invariably by discussing the nature of the Sacrament, it being assumed that if only one could define that accurately its identity with, or distinctness from, Sacrifice would be at once apparent. But this is assuming too much; for unless Sacrifice be an equally definite conception the uncertainty still remains whether the two can be identified or no. And 'sacrifice' is a term which has borne many meanings in the past, and presents a very complex and vague idea to most persons at the present time. What seems to be chiefly wanted, in fact, if controversy is not to be altogether futile, is to give distinctness to this idea. The object of the following is accordingly to approach the controversy from the opposite side. Leaving aside, to begin with, all questions as to the nature of the Christian Sacrament, may we not discover what was meant by Sacrifice anciently, and so define the sense in which the term ought to be used if employed at all? Then perhaps it may be possible to say whether the Lord's Supper affords an instance of Sacrifice or not.

How ancient an institution Sacrifice may be, no one can say: certainly it is older than the dawn of history. The Semitic estimate of its antiquity may be gathered from the fact that in the Hebrew story of the world's creation the sons of the first man are represented as offering sacrifice, without any hint being given that this called for explanation, or any account added of its original appointment. Elsewhere legendary beliefs are met with which carry back this institution to an even remoter antiquity. The Brahman accounts, *e.g.*, describe the gods as practising sacrifice before the worlds were made. They even go so far as to affirm that the gods were themselves called into being in the dawn of all things by means of sacrifice. And the strongest confirmation of this estimate of its extreme antiquity is found in the fact that in one form or another sacrifice is met with all the world over amongst the most widely separated races of mankind. This not only points to its use at a very remote date, but proves that its real origin must be found in no particular appointment, but in the needs and instincts of human nature itself. 'When the Master of the universe,' said Emerson, 'has points to carry in His government, He impresses His will in the structure of minds.' Nowhere is that pregnant remark truer than in the present connexion. The religious craving, which is inwoven in the very texture of human nature, has everywhere prompted sacrifice. And if the central aim of this primitive institution is to be apprehended, it must not be forgotten that it originated in a stage of life and thought earlier by a vast interval than the late instances of its use which are most familiar. Too often we approach the study of early religion by way of classical literature and the law of the post-exilic temple in Jerusalem. But if we mean to grasp its cardinal idea, it is useless to search for a clue among the late developments of peoples who had already forgotten the earlier stages of their growth. To rummage among the débris of faiths already failing, can contribute little to the understanding of the impelling forces from which they sprang. It is in those ruder regions of human life where the mind of mankind can be watched working with the unreflecting spontaneity of childhood, and reaching often the crude half-conclusions which belong to that stage of thought, that the real purpose of sacrifice must be learnt.

No doubt this is a difficult study. A grown man finds it very hard to adopt the point of view of a little child. To divest oneself of all accumulated experience, to lay aside the bent of mental habit, to let go that complex web of associations

(most of which are not half conscious) wherewith mature ideas are always enveloped, and to return to the crude though often acute impressions of a child, is not to be done without a considerable effort. 'How can a man be born when he is old?' Moreover, the difficulty is increased and not diminished when the attempt is made to adopt the point of view of the infancy of the human race. For we can all of us recall some memories of our own childhood which give the starting-point for sympathy with a child's ideas, and children are under immediate observation on all sides. But the memories of very ancient human life linger on in but few regions; and often in fragmentary forms alone are primitive usages and institutions now to be found. Nevertheless the attempt must be made if the meaning and object of sacrifice is to be understood, for the origin of this oldest of religious ordinances lies in a stage of mind long since outgrown by every civilised race of man. Sacrifice goes back to a time when abstract ideas were impossible. In the most literal sense the blood was held to be the life. The individual was not clearly distinguished from the whole kin to which he was bound by ties of blood, *i.e.* of life shared in common. So little distinction was drawn between the nature of gods and men that it seemed quite natural that the sons of the gods should take them wives of the daughters of men, and heroes should be born from whom royal families claimed direct descent. No less natural did it appear, on the other hand, that certain tribes should be related to particular kinds of animals, towards whom the mutual duties of kinship were consequently recognized. In some cases beasts were even held to be actually akin to the gods. Such a mental standpoint as is implied in these and the like widespread beliefs of antiquity, it is hard for us to conceive. But that it was the natural standpoint of the human mind at one stage is certain; and is proved by such well-nigh universal practices as Totemism, the worship of sacred animals, and by many of the accessories of sacrifice which embody the same circle of ideas.

By those who have undertaken with most success research in this field of ancient thought and feeling,[1] it has been clearly enough shown that sacrifice was originally intended as a living bond by means of joint participation in one life. Men felt themselves and those who were most closely bound to them, to be sharers in a life larger than their own, which was found in all the members of one clan or kindred alike. If it were desired to draw these natural ties of life closer, or to strengthen their binding force, what steps could be taken? The answer was sometimes given, by sharing the same food. For food as the means of life, and the life itself of which it is the means, were not clearly distinguished; and it was readily supposed that those who had eaten together of the same food and been strengthened thereby, had received into themselves the same life, and so were bound to one another by the act. Hence arose the sacred obligations of hospitality. The man who has been fed by your food, whereof you have yourself been nourished, is thought to be in some sort bone of your bone and flesh of your flesh, and that although all sense of hospitable feeling, as we should understand it, be wanting. The same idea underlies the ties of fosterage. Those who have been nourished on the same mother's milk were thought to have imbibed the same life at her breast, and deemed themselves commonly in later years to be in some sort kinsmen. Sometimes, however, the endeavour was to share in the same life directly, and not by partaking of the same means of life; and inasmuch as the life was identified with the blood, this led to an interchange of blood in what is called the blood-bond. When, *e.g.*, a man sought to join himself to some other clan or kindred than that into which he had been born, he either drank of, or was smeared with, blood drawn from the veins of a tribesman, and was supposed thereby to have absorbed into himself the life of the race he was joining. Or else, two men who wished to be united by the bond of a common blood, might become so by alike receiving the blood drawn from some living creature, whose life was conceived as being thus transferred to them.

If now the desire were to bind oneself more closely or more securely to some god whose help or fellow-feeling was sought, the most natural way of doing so seemed to be by the like means. For it must be remembered that no clear distinction was drawn between the nature of gods and men, although the former were conceived as greater, and of less gross being than the latter. And the result of the craving to bind oneself to God in a

[1] *E.g.* W. Robertson Smith, *Semites*; J. G. Frazer, *Golden Bough*.

living relation in this way was sacrifice. Sometimes sacrifices consisted in offerings of food to be consumed by God and men alike. The offerers in that case either ate a part of what was being presented, or else the offering was itself considered as a part of the stock of food on which they were living, set aside as the share of God. This might be simply exposed in the sanctuary, and left to be consumed by the priests as the representatives of God, or perhaps by wild creatures. Sometimes it was burnt, and so converted into a 'sweet savour,' being thought in this subtler form to be better suited to the uses of the unseen God. But whatever the exact form of the sacrifice its essence consisted in the one food being shared by God and men, whose life was thereby received in common. Of these often bloodless sacrifices the essential fact lay in the fellowship in food of God and man. But at other times the sacrifice took the form of a blood-bond. A victim was slain in order that its life might be imparted to God and men together, who would thus become sharers in one life common to both. In this case also the details might vary, but the aim was the same in all. Commonly the blood (as the life) and the intestines of the victim (as the seat of its life) were reserved to God, while the other less sacred parts of the victim formed man's share. The blood was therefore often smeared or sprinkled on the altar, or on the image of the god, or sometimes left to sink into the earth, and to touch it was to encroach on God's rights. The intestines were often burnt upon the altar, and so transmuted into supersensible food for Him. Part of the blood, on the other hand, was very frequently put upon those offering the sacrifice. Or else the rest of the flesh was eaten by them at a meal which formed a part of the sacrifice, no less than did the presentation of the blood. But whether it were by sprinkling the altar and the worshipper with the blood, or whether by burning some parts of the victim and consuming the remainder at a sacrificial feast, the purpose was in either case to unite God and man in the common possession of the victim's life which became the medium of their union. The victim was moreover chosen carefully, and often set apart for the purpose some time in advance. Wild animals were rarely employed, except of special kinds which were deemed sacred. Generally speaking, the victim was such as might be supposed to be closely related to those who made the sacrifice. Either it was a totem, and so considered a kinsman; or it might in human sacrifices be an actual member of the kindred; or at all events it was taken from the flocks and herds which form at once the wealth and the companions in travel of the tribe, and which were bound to it by ties of quasi-fosterage since their milk constituted an important part of the tribal food. In certain instances, however, the victim was chosen on the grounds of its relation to the god rather than to those offering the sacrifice.

These two modes of binding closer the relation between God and man,—by sharing, on the one hand, in the same food, which might become a means of life common to both; and by receiving, on the other hand, the flesh and blood of some kindred victim in order that its offered life might pass into God and man alike and give them added community of life—were not sharply distinguished. In bloodless sacrifices there was of course no room for the latter idea, but in most bloody sacrifices perhaps the two conceptions coalesced. In all cases, however, the sacrifice was originally prompted by a craving to draw closer the living relation between God and man, and it was meant as an act of communion in the life of a victim chosen on the ground of its possessing some quality which associated or identified it with the tribe which dedicated it, and with the god to which it was dedicated.

Such was the original and central purpose of sacrifice; but presently it came to involve other ideas, which in particular places overshadowed or even superseded this primary intention. An institution of such antiquity, of so much importance, and of so universal acceptance, could not in fact fail to gather to itself a host of subordinate associations as time went on; and in different races where conditions varied, this or that special aspect would naturally receive greater prominence. The more important of these may be briefly noticed in order to be laid aside; for it is necessary to observe that they were none of them fundamental in the idea of sacrifice, and that their influence on its form and practice was not exercised in the direct line of development.

One of these accretions resulted from the commonly low conception of the Divine nature. Where men viewed their gods as jealous and capricious beings, whose power was to be feared,

their sacrifices were coloured by the belief. They then partook of the nature of propitiatory offerings. The envy of the god might be averted, and his anger appeased, by a gift which would please him; or his favour and help might be won by an oblation which would act as a bribe, such as may be presented to a great chief with whom it is important that one should stand well.

Where customary law accepted a fine in satisfaction of injuries done, or of life taken, it was natural enough to suppose that wrongs against God might be atoned for similarly by a suitable offering; and so sacrifices were often regarded as making satisfaction for sin, and means of winning forgiveness.

At other times the government of some conqueror moulded men's thoughts of power into forms adapted to personal rule; and then it was easy for people used to pay tribute and dues to the king, to suppose that the Divine King claimed similar tribute. In such cases sacrifices were often viewed as the dues of the divinity, and were not very sharply distinguished from tithes.

Elsewhere the practice of making votive offerings an occasion of personal escape from danger, whether incurred through war or travel or sickness, coloured the theory of sacrifice. For the vow to pay such offerings was often made in the moment of danger, or at the time when peril was apprehended, and was conditional on the man coming safely through the crisis. If the vow were to offer a sacrifice, the life of the victim was easily regarded as given in lieu of one's own, and so the idea of sacrificial substitution was engendered.

In some regions as the old tribal organisation of society which had been formerly connected with sacrifices broke up, giving way either to the hardening of caste, or to later forms of social development whereby the sense of kinship was superseded, the old rites survived while their reason was forgotten. Then sacrifices were regarded as ceremonies possessing intrinsically a magical or mystical virtue, and superstitious veneration was paid them for their own sake.

But none of these ideas lay at the root of sacrifice, they were all later accretions. True, it is easy enough to point to times and regions in which sacrifice has been practised as a means of propitiation, or of satisfaction for sin, as a religious tribute rendered, or as a substitution of the victim for the worshipper, or in which it has been used as a potent spell in itself of efficacy in any time of need; but though these ideas of sacrifice have been variously prevalent, and at times exclusively prominent, it is none the less true that none of them were original, and none of them constituted the central purpose of sacrifice. That was fundamentally distinct. Sacrifice was a bond of life between the members of one kindred on the one part and the god whom they worshipped on the other. It was, in all the more solemn instances where blood was shed, an act of communion in a sacred life which was shared in alike by god and man after being set free for this purpose through the slaying of the consecrated victim. And, however this central meaning may have been merged in or overlaid by accessory ideas, it remains the essential fact in sacrifice.

Requests and Replies.

Would you kindly advise me as to the best Hebrew lexicon and the best edition of the Hebrew Bible? The lexicon I have is Bagster's publication, and my Hebrew Bible is a small-typed one, obtained from the British and Foreign Bible Society. I desire a lexicon on the scholarship of which I can depend.—R. R. S.

PERHAPS the best Hebrew lexicon in English is still Bagster's edition of Gesenius by Tregelles. Of course the book is now rather behindhand in the matter of etymology and otherwise, but it is well arranged and very pleasant to use. In German the best is Buhl's Gesenius. The Oxford Hebrew Lexicon when finished will be the most complete lexicon existing, but several parts of it have still to be published. This lexicon endeavours to give not only the philology of the language, but also the criticism and even the theology. This fulness of material, however agreeable to those of full age, will be apt to derange the digestion of a learner or one who uses a dictionary for simple philological purposes. A very good German lexicon is that of Siegfried-Stade; it eschews