

I

AMONG THE GODS

THE existence of the divine and eternal in contrast with the human and temporal is not a matter for argument. Conviction does not lie at the end of a course of investigation instigated by a desire to search out the causes of things. It comes by intuition. It arises spontaneously. It grips the emotions and sentiments of the race with unfailing power.

Research has discovered tribes without architecture or art, without coins or codes of law, without recognition of natural relations, without any of the institutions and inventions that mark social progress, but never a tribe without the idea of the divine, out of which somehow comes a demand for the worship and service of rational creatures. In Africa, it is said, there was found a group so low in the scale of intelligence as to acknowledge no god, but in the same breath they confessed that they prayed to the skies. Among all primitive peoples prayer is before investigation. Ethnology knows no race devoid of religious emotions and religious exercises.

This universal experience is an invincible proof

of godhood. With authority that cannot be ignored the instincts of the race assert the existence of the divine, and declare there is a god or gods. The sacred books of the nations never enter into any formal discussion on this point. They simply assume the divine existence, and proceed to state and enforce the duties which it implies.

The records of all primitive peoples, whether ancient or modern, indicate a belief in gods more than one. The first divine name mentioned in the Bible is plural. If literally rendered the opening sentence of the Old Testament would run: "In the beginning gods created the heavens and the earth." By the same rule: "Gods said, Let there be light, and there was light; gods saw the light that it was good, and gods separated the light from the darkness." Throughout the entire creation story gods are doing the work. In the end gods said: "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness," as if there were more than one engaged in the making. Some scholars call it the plural of majesty or fullness; others find in it the idea of the trinity, but in any case the word is plural, and this is the point under consideration.

The oneness of the true God was made known to man by revelation. Moses said: "Hear, O Israel, the Lord thy God is one Lord; and thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and all thy soul

and all thy might." It was a matter of divine disclosure rather than of human discovery. Amid scenes of deep solemnity God, who assumed the existence of other beings called by the divine name, forbade the recognition of any god other than himself. He gave further command that there should never be made any graven image or likeness of anything in heaven above or in earth beneath as an object of worship and service.

With such commandments clearly before them the chosen people found difficulty in visualizing God and holding communion with him. He seemed like an evanescent glory without form or local habitation. He was to them a vast shadowy something shrouded in clouds and darkness, uttering no voice and showing no outline of his person, and from such a presence timid souls shrank away abashed. They yearned for a god who approached their own sphere of existence and passed within the range of their comprehension, and the yearning became a temptation to disobey the law which they had received. Under stress of desire for an easy worship they said unto Aaron: "Up, make us gods to go before us."

Called of the Lord, they yet made a calf in those days, and danced with delight before the work of their own hands. Rebuke and entreaty, threatening and punishment were not sufficient to deter

them from their evil ways, and they forsook the Lord and served the gods of the heathen among whom they dwelt. They took up the tabernacle of Moloch, and the star of the god Remphan; they made groves in high places, and rendered their devotions to strange gods. More than a hundred times do the Scriptures record their iniquity in scorning the commandment and offering their devotions to other gods.

The New Testament declares that there is one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all; but it gives recognition to other beings called by the divine name. Paul the apostle says there are gods many, as there are also lords many; and he applies the term to Satan, as the god of this world.

Summing up the Scripture teaching on the subject early Christian students, the eminent Augustine among them, held that heathen divinities were real, but were evil in nature. As late as the seventeenth century there were devout and scholarly men who contended that the sacred books of the heathen were corrupted forms of divine revelation, the Bible only being the true word of God.

To this day there are some who regard all the great religions of the race as having a divine origin and divine elements, Christianity surpassing them only in the degree of its excellence. To

this day also men of backward races hold to the doctrine of many gods. In a public address in Asheville, North Carolina, in 1916, the Rev. S. G. Pinnock, a missionary to Africa, said he found difficulty in impressing the natives with the idea that there is but one true God; they said one might be enough for white folks, but negroes had to have more.

In his natural and unaided weakness man has never been able to reach the conception of a god large enough to establish his throne in the heavens and thence to rule over the entire realm of created things. The ancient Phenicians were unable to rise to such an idea. The wisdom of Babylonia and Egypt fell short of it. The fervid faiths of Athens and Rome, taught by priests and augurs of high degree, knew nothing of such a being. The noblest efforts of unaided devotion rose only to a great Zeus or a mighty Pan, who held the supreme place and ruled in the highest, but had various minor divinities beneath him and under his control to aid in governing the universe and working out the administrations of time.

By such a scheme Pluvius was set over the clouds, Neptune over the seas, Ceres over the grain fields, Pluto over the lower regions, and so on to every realm of divine providence and human interest. There were also gods to regulate the vari-

ant appetites and passions of men. It was a convenient division of labour and responsibility. It afforded opportunity to distribute divine honours and at the same time to lighten divine burdens. It was not an exclusive arrangement, however. In any great enterprise the gods were at liberty to work together, and this they sometimes did.

The scheme necessarily provided a god of war. The history of mankind is a story of strife, man against man, family against family, nation against nation, race against race. In the matter of organized effort nothing has ever made so great demands upon the resources of the race as has the practice of war. Naturally the god who reigns over a realm so vast and important is a being of great power and influence. His reality is attested by every consideration that demonstrates the existence of the Creator himself. He is known by his works done in all ages and nations, and by his sway over the lives of men in every land.

Like the God of Peace, the god of war has different names according to the advancement of his devotees or the languages which they speak. Some writers state that before the time of the Trojan war Belus had conquered the island of Cyprus and other adjacent territory; and they identified the conquering Belus with the Phenician Baal, whose

power had overthrown the Hittite kingdom at an earlier date.

Egyptian legends tell of the exploits of Sesostris, who led armies of archers and charioteers; and the first of her written laws recognize the war god, and make provision for his service in the support of warriors and in the honour accorded them. Professor Morris Jastrow, of Pennsylvania University, says ancient Egypt recognized some thirty gods of war, or in the stress of conflict called upon all the gods of the pantheon for assistance. The chief of her war gods, however, was Sutek, surnamed the Golden, and counted on to give victory over all enemies. Relying on Sutek's power, Pharaoh issued the haughty challenge: "Who is Yahweh (translated Jehovah), that I should obey his voice to let Israel go? I know not Yahweh, neither will I let Israel go."

Before the days of Moses Hammurabi gave distinct recognition to Marduk or Merodach, the war god of Babylonia, whom he proudly called his father. He made the name of the great god the centre of his legislation, and trusted him for power to overcome his enemies. In a famous inscription discovered in modern times he says: "I am Hammurabi, the mighty king, king of Ka-dingirra (Babylon), the king whom the regions obey, the winner of victory for his lord Merodach. . . ."

Thenceforward I am Hammurabi, the mighty king, favoured of the great gods. With the might accorded me by Merodach I built a tower with great entrances, whose summits are high."

In the native mythology, Marduk or Merodach was represented as originally a sun god, who ruled over the forces of nature, breaking the rigours of winter and bringing in the beauties of spring, as in the beginning he had broken the powers of darkness and had brought order out of chaos. As Babylon became ambitious of power and began to extend her dominions into a vast empire, the god who had given prosperity in times of peace was invoked for the exigencies of war, and his guidance was sought in the direction of armies and the slaughter of foes.

With the acquisition of riches and power through conquest the desire for more burned in the hearts of the people, and the god who granted the fulfillment of the desire rose to a higher place in popular esteem. In the end other qualities fell into abeyance, and Marduk was honoured as the great god who had given them dominion over the nations round about. He had also Bel as an able and honoured ally in his bloody work.

After Babylon became subject to Assyria Marduk retained some measure of his former glory. For a long time Assyrian rulers were inducted into

office with a ceremony called Taking the Hand of Marduk. An ancient inscription, quoted by Prof. L. von Ranke, recording the overthrow of Babylon's king and the conquest of the land, states that after the victory Cyrus did reverence to Bel-Merodach. It was an effort to appease the anger of the war gods of the conquered realm. Jeremiah the prophet, who honoured only one God, mentioned the overthrow of Belshazzar and his godless associates in these words: "Babylon is taken, Bel is confounded, Merodach is crushed."

The chief war god in Assyria was called Asshur, the name signifying strength and leadership. In the earlier records he was simply the patron divinity of the capital city, which bore his name. In the beginning of his career he disclosed no vicious and bloody traits; but as the people grew in wealth and influence they also grew in their greed and arrogance, and were filled with desire to possess the things of others. They wished a place in the sun, and they turned to the chief god of the realm for aid in their unholy schemes.

They set Asshur over the national armies; and as victory followed their efforts, they gave him the supreme place in the pantheon. Lesser divinities gradually dropped into obscurity, or else they were endued in fancy with warlike qualities, and made mere satellites of the great war god. It was

Asshur that "thrust the king of Babylon into a consuming fire and ended his days." All victories were ascribed to his will. He was represented by the figure of a strong man armed and bearing a winged disk, the disk suggesting the glint of sunlight on burnished armour and the wings indicating rapidity of movement.

Hosea the prophet recognized his existence, but scorned his power. Noting the ills that afflicted Israel and foreseeing greater ills to come he warned the people against trusting the native god of war: "Asshur shall not save us, neither shall we ride (to victory) on horses."

Among the gods of India Seeb or Siva, the god of destruction, red with the blood of unnumbered dead, held a high place. At different times he took different forms, but his favourite guise was that of the demon Bhairava, whose ornaments were garlands of serpents and a necklace of skulls. He had power to loose the forces of desolation and to breathe pestilence into the air. He was grim of visage and frightful of form, and he moved among the children of men, causing them to blanch with apprehension and tremble with fear.

The old Norse mythology named the war god Odin or Woden, and assigned him the fourth day of the week. In the opening of his career he was merely a man of immense strength, a sort of

brute man, mighty in body, dauntless in spirit, terrible in battle, a genuine hero of the primal sort. About him the admiration of the old Norse heart gathered, rising higher and higher until it broke forth in adoration and made him divine.

Under the sway of Odin Teutonic peoples began to count brute force and physical courage the supreme virtues. Through the centuries they cherished that base conception, and gloried in the gory deeds of Attila and Charles Martel and Charlemagne and Peter the Hermit and their successors in brutality down to the present time. They esteemed the service of the barbaric war god the noblest form of human activity, and felt that they had been robbed of their heritage if they were not allowed to die in battle.

Sometimes, as the natural signs of decay appeared, they inflicted wounds upon their own bodies with the idea of disclosing the warrior spirit and winning a more abundant entrance into the presence of Odin, who made it a virtue to subdue all forms of fear and march forward without a tremor into the jaws of violent death. In the great Valhalla, which lay just beyond the field of blood, the war god awaited his faithful servants, and welcomed them to the victory feast according to the heroism of their deeds, while those who died

a natural death were debarred from the joys of the festal board.

The dead heroes were feasted on the flesh of the wild boar in the presence of Odin; the supply was inexhaustible, for the boar which was cooked every morning was made whole every night. The drink for the banquet of the mighty was mead made from the milk of the sacred goat, and they drank it from the skulls of their slaughtered foes. The banquet of the hog and strong drink was entirely suited to the appetites of the red-blooded men who gathered there.

When not feasting the gallant warriors were graciously allowed to continue their favourite earthly pursuit, being better fitted for that than for anything else. Every day they rode forth in glittering array to butcher one another; but at meal-time they were duly healed of their wounds, and were called back to their favourite feast. It was a brutal conception, but it had the virtue of consistency at least. Certainly it did not present the absurdity which some preachers have lately proclaimed, that men who hate and kill one another in battle are welcomed to the Better Land, where they forget the animosities which they have cherished and the wounds and deaths which they have inflicted, and together praising the Prince of Peace

“Bring forth the royal diadem,
And crown him Lord of all.”

In Greek the supreme war god was called Ares. He was accounted the son of the great Zeus and the spiteful Hera, the two corresponding respectively to Jupiter and Juno of the Latin mythology. In the earlier times Ares was not esteemed the source of war, or the manager of camps and campaigns; rather he represented the wild rage and destructive violence displayed on the field of battle. Homer represented him as the model warrior of the heroic age, fully armed with gleaming helmet and bronzed cuirass, embossed shield and glittering spear, going forth with the familiar strut to be the scourge of mortal men. He inherited a vicious and turbulent spirit, and delighted in confused noise and garments rolled in blood. Unlike many who send others to battle, he did not spare himself.

According to the Greek myths he twice engaged in personal encounter with Hercules. In the first instance the combat was ended by a bolt of lightning from the great Zeus, but in the second he received an ugly wound, his opponent being aided by Athena, who bore him a ceaseless grudge. Later he sought to punish the goddess for her opposition, but the effort was not to his honour. Homer said of the incident: “Giving back somewhat she seized with strong hand a stone that lay upon the

plain, black, rugged, huge, which men of old had set to be a landmark; this she hurled, and struck the impetuous Ares on the neck, and unstrung his limbs. Seven rods he covered in his fall, and soiled his hair with dust, and made his armour ring."

It was evidently a surprise to his gay lordship. "Then did brazen Ares bellow loud as nine thousand warriors, or ten thousand, cry in battle, as they join in strife and fray." The bruised god took the case up to Olympus; but the supreme Zeus said: "Nay, thou renegade, sit not by me and whine. Most hateful art thou of all the gods that dwell on high Olympus. Thou ever lovest strife and war and battle. Truly in thee thy mother's spirit is intolerable." His mother also rebuked him as lacking in moderation and judgment, and he was dreaded even among the gods.

Once he fought with Halirrhotos, who had invaded his home and seized his daughter Alcippe. He vanquished the invader, and was tried and acquitted by a court of the gods sitting on the Areopagus. It was an early case of the application of the unwritten law, gods and men alike being accorded the right to defend their homes.

In the earlier representations Ares was burly and bearded, stern of feature and fully armed, ready at all times for grim and savage work. Later he was

set forth in more attractive form, having a smooth face and curly hair, a figure more pleasing to Aphrodite and others of the softer sex, whom he tempted from the paths of virtue.

Usually he travelled in a chariot made by his sons Panic and Fear, who also attended him as he rode forth to incite the passions of war and direct the movements of cruel men. His train was completed by the presence of Eris the goddess of strife, Enyo the goddess of fury, Keres the goddess of death, and a contingent of bloodthirsty demons prepared to roam over the battle-fields and bear the dead away. His symbols were a spear and a torch, suggesting the general character of his work. The creatures sacred to him were the vulture and the dog, that feed on filth. Especially at Thebes and also at Athens he with his paramour was worshipped in bloody and elaborate rites.

The Romans called him Mars. They accounted him the father of the warlike founder of their city, Rhea Silvia being his consort. They accorded him high honour, rendered him deep devotion and trusted him for ceaseless care. They conceived him to be stately in form, majestic in mien, stern in character, pitiless in spirit, but not essentially vindictive or needlessly cruel. His dress, adorned with belts and buckles, straps and tinsel, became the model for the soldier of all time. He rode in a

stately chariot drawn by Terror and Fear and driven by a distracted woman holding a torch in her hand. He bore a shield on his arm and a spear in his hand, and they were said to have fallen down from heaven.

In the Roman calendar Mars was honoured in the name of the first month of Spring. At that time his dancing priests marched through the city bearing the sacred shield and sounding the war trumpets which bade the armies abandon their winter quarters and take up their work of carnage and destruction. Under his grim guidance the conquering eagles were carried over all Gaul and across the seas to the Ultima Thule. In Roman thinking Mars ranked second only to the great Jupiter himself, and became the patron deity of the city and the empire. As Rome ruled the world the war god assumed the supreme place in the pantheon, and in some important respects he has kept it to this day.

Through centuries of carnage all the base passions of the human soul have risen up and raged in power, but they have not for an instant dimmed the glory of the war god. Men who have retired to their quiet laboratories away from the sickening scenes of war and have devised the deadly explosives and the fearful fixtures that grind together in one bleeding and repulsive mass the flesh of men

and mules call upon the god of war for aid in their wicked work. History records no case in which warring peoples have failed to call upon the god of battles for his blessing on their bloody deeds.

Recent German writers deeply stirred the wrath of their enemies by confident appeals to a god capable of approving such crimes as German soldiers committed. In German writing, however, all nouns begin with a capital letter, and it seems that those devout Germans did not make their supplications to the God of the whole earth, who loves all his children alike; rather they made their appeal to their "old Ally," the German god of war. In a published article Burris A. Jenkins, formerly president of Transylvania University, made reference to certain aspects of German teaching in these words: "The only god possible under it is the god of the Hun, the god of battles, the god of a Teuton, a tribal and heathen god, a sort of Woden or Thor." President Faunce also suggested that the god of militarism is necessarily provincial.

With such a god in mind Professor Kaeler represented the German armies as having four fronts, three toward the enemy and one toward heaven. Another German author spoke of a divine form standing before the German people, as Jesus stood before the grave of Lazarus, and calling them to renewed energy in fighting for the fatherland.

Throughout the empire loyal ministers of religion devoutly offered their daily prayers to the German Gott, almost frantically imploring his aid in their efforts to butcher the people of other lands.

Failing to note the difference between the German Gott and the God of the whole earth, destined shortly to bruise Satan under the feet of the saints, one of our own religious teachers said: "It shocks and disgusts all reverent souls to read the German Emperor's blatant claim to partnership with God, God being the junior member of the firm. It is blasphemous to think of the God of grace and mercy as being in sympathy with the mad lust of power and the murderous disregard of human life which has marked the German conduct of the war."

Strangely enough the same eminent teacher proceeded to urge that in the critical times in which he wrote "every house of worship ought to be open continually," and that "our good people ought to repair to the sanctuary to lift up their hearts and their voices in earnest and importunate prayer for the blessings of the Most High on our cause." Earnest and importunate prayer for a mightier might to smash the German might! It was our cause against the German cause, and our God against the German Gott.

In the same spirit a circular letter was sent out

from a group of persons calling themselves a committee on national preparedness appealing to ministers of religion throughout the country. It said in part: "This insolent god-claiming attitude of the German Emperor our people treat with silent contempt or utter indifference, but it is just here that a serious mistake is being made by us. We are permitting this blasphemous propaganda to fall upon the minds of our whole population without offering any active opposition to its acceptance." With a suggestion that scruples might arise "even among many religious men in the army," the authors of the circular proceeded to urge ministers "as an act of religious patriotism and justice" to use their pulpits "to counteract this evil" and "to destroy this sacrilegious propaganda."

In harmony with the request some ministers proceeded to preach and to pray in terms quite as provincial and profane as anything heard in England or Germany. Before a great assembly a preacher of prominence addressed a god whom he considered capable of sinking into hell entire nations, not even sparing godly women and innocent children. In his rage and vituperation he prayed: "O god, help the man on the ship, who aims the cannon, to send to hell a submarine every time one sticks its dirty stinking nose above the water. O god, damn Germany and Turkey and all the rest of

that gang of thugs and cutthroats. O lord, I don't want to bless them, and you can go ahead and damn them just as soon as you get ready, so far as I am concerned. But, god, don't wait too long. Hurry up, and help us."

Such a prayer was rightly addressed to a provincial god who had no interest in the people the preacher wanted to kill and send to hell. It was never a prayer we have known and loved.

Another offered the following bitter petition, which was widely circulated through the religious press: "God in heaven, forbid that any man or woman in this land should be so steeped in sin, so morally leprous with the taint of Germanism, so rotten-souled from vile contamination with these vile criminals as ever by a single thought to favour peace until down in the dust of unconditional surrender the forces of hell acknowledge the power of heaven, and until the criminal German leaders swing high from the gallows, which though doing their appointed work would still be contaminated by the dead bodies of those lying, looting, outraging beasts, whose crimes would sicken a tiger!"

With more dignity and reverence another distinguished man addressed a god who was supposed to regard the interests of a particular nation, and he prayed in part in these words: "That thou wilt come to the men who are already on the front, to

General Pershing and the men who are under him, and to the men in training in France and on the high seas, our men in camps in training here and those subject to call, those on the way to camp and those who may be called for land service or sea service. God, grant them thine own strength and thine own direction.

“For the navy we pray that thou wilt give wisdom and guidance to Admiral Sims and to all those under him. God, grant unto our soldiers and our sailors the abiding conviction that they are fighting in the name of liberty, of righteousness, of brotherhood and of humanity. Give to them, we pray thee, that vision which shall sustain them throughout the long weary hours of fighting or waiting, of enduring or suffering. God, give to them the spirit that cannot be broken. God, give to them the perseverance and the resolution which never dreams of defeat and ever claims the victory in advance.”

In all these utterances whether of emperor or editor, evangelist or teacher, preacher or publicist, the same spirit is shown. Whether by instinct or purpose none of them mention the name of Jesus, who forbids violence and commands non-resistance and love. All alike appeal to a provincial god, who in each case is supposed to favour one class of his creatures in their fell desire to hurt and to kill

and to destroy others of the same blood and so to fill the world with additional bereavement and woe. Each assumes that such a god will side with him and against those whom he wishes to destroy, or even to send to hell. Nowhere is there any touch of the humility that admits the possibility of error in the petitions that are made. Nowhere a "nevertheless, not as I will." It is a distinct recognition of the god of war, and it may be traced through the ages from the myths of ancient Babylonia and Egypt to the theology of modern Europe and America.

Current thinking makes no mistake in the matter. The men who have reported from foreign battle-fields need no interpreter when they speak of trailing the war god. A popular poet touches a responsive chord in the following lines:

"The war god has gone through the wheatfields,
And eaten the children's bread;
He has gone through the beautiful orchards,
And all the trees are dead;
He has gone through the whole wide world,
Like a dragon that must be fed.

How shall we speak to the war god,
And what shall the message be?
For never a prayer we have known and loved
Will be heard by such as he.
For him there is no word of praise,
Nor any psalmody."

In glowing periods orators have declaimed on the passing of the war god. They have pointed to the advance of civilization, to the progress of learning, to the instincts of humanity, to the demands of economy, to the sentiments of brotherhood, to the dictates of reason, to the entire range of rational considerations, and they have demonstrated that all these forbid the foul art of war. Peace societies have been formed, well officered and highly financed. Peace agents have traversed land and sea, dispensing fine phrases and gathering millions of money. Poets have rhymed about the silencing of the war drum, the gathering of nations in 'fraternal parliament and all kindreds and tongues federated for the enforcement of perpetual peace. Prophets have foretold the time when the soldier and the husbandman shall come together, and shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning-hooks, nation no longer desiring to lift sword against nation, neither to learn war any more. Angels have stooped over simple shepherds pasturing their quiet flocks, and have filled the vibrant air with songs of peace on earth and good will to men.

These all have caught the popular ear and have moved the popular heart. But the god of war has looked on in derision, and his followers have heard with a scorn which they have felt no care to con-

ceal. They have seen the orators who grew rich by preaching peace suddenly adding to their wealth by preaching war. They have seen peace societies struck dumb in the presence of mobilizing armies. They have seen peace agents who quietly smoked in the shadows of the Hague blaze into fire at the call to war. They have heard peace poets adding a new fervour to their song as they told of the glories of war. They have seen the prophets of peace cower before the haughty stride of the defiant militarist and reserve their Christmas sermons till after the war. They have calmly allowed the orators to declaim, and the peace agents to smoke their pipes, and the poets to indulge their pleasing rhymes, and the prophets to tell of the dawning day, and the angels to sing their melodious songs. Confident in the war god's power they know full well that in due time the basilar passions of men will assert themselves, the voice of reason will be drowned, the holy sentiments of the human heart will be trodden under foot, the covenants of righteousness will become paper scraps, the gates of Janus will be thrown open, the dogs of war will be let loose and the minions of hell will go forth in renewed strength to work desolation and death among the children of men.