1899

The Hawaiian pantheon

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THE HAWAIIAN PANTHEON.

By

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The Hawaiians are part of the Polynesian family, hence to understand their religion, one must necessarily trace and study their origin and affinities. On this point Judge Fornander, one of the ablest writers on this question says, "I trust that the sequel will show that my conclusions are not only plausible, but extremely probable, and that only by following the guide which the data now offered afford, can we account in a satisfactory manner for the ethnic, linguistic, and social phenomena connected with that family, for their appearance in the Pacific and their distribution within it, from New Zealand to Hawaii, from Easter Island to Rotuma. That the reader may know at a glance the result to which my investigations in the Polynesian folk-lore, as well as its comparison with other peoples have led me, it is proper here at the outset to say that I believe that I can show that the Polynesian family can be traced directly as having occupied the Asiatic Archipelago, from Sumatra to Timor, Gilolo and the Philippines, previous to the occupation of that archipel by the present Malay family; that traces, though faint and few, lead up through Deccan to the northwest part of India and the shores of the Persian Gulf;

that when other traces here fail, yet the language points farther north, to the Aryan stock in its earlier days, long before the Vedic eruption in India; and that for long ages the Polynesian family was the recipient of a Cushite civilization, and to such an extent as almost entirely to obscure its own consciousness of parentage and kindred to the Aryan stock." Such is the generally accepted opinion of writers on this subject; yet it will add to the certainty by adducing some of the evidence upon which such a conclusion is based. When all other evidence with reference to a people's existence and descent is lost, the names given to its places of abode will linger. This is illustrated in New England by such names as Shawmut, Neponset, Swampscott, Narraganset, Woonsocket, Walloostook, etc., etc., and in Pennsylvania by Wapwallopen, Shickshinny, Nescopeck, Sinnemahoning. Using the same means we can trace the early Polynesian word for Island--"Nusa" "Nusa-Jawa" for "Java"--"Nusa-Kautchana" for Borneo--"Nusa-Antaro" for Madura--while in the later Polynesian form it is seen in the names of such islands as,"Nuka-tea" of the Wallis group, "Nuka-tapu" a town in Tonga, "Nuka-Hiwa" one of the Marquesas, etc., etc.

Again the name of the chief island of the Hawaiian Group-Hawaii, is found in other parts of Polynesia, such as--Hawaii in the Society Group--Savaii in Samoa--Hawa-iki in New

Zealand--Awa-iki in Rarotonga--Habai in Tonga. Not only do we find these traces in the places of residence of the race; but we also find that they all speak dialects of the same language, have the same physical features, manners, and customs; the same system of tabus; similar traditions and largely the same religious rites. The centre of dispersion of the Polynesian race in the Pacific Ocean is now generally accepted as being Savaii of the Samoan group. Still there lingers in the song and legend of the race a fading memory of a far off blessed land toward the West--the Kahiki of their fathers. The Hawaiians looked upon Wakea, and Papa his wife, as the ancestors of their race, or at least as the first of their line of Alii or chiefs.

Turning now to their gods and Aumakuas (lesser gods) we find that they had four great gods who were worshipped not only in Hawaii but in other parts of Polynesia. The names of these gods were Kane, Kanaloa, Ku, and Lono. They were supposed to have existed since a period of chaos or as the Hawaiians say, "Mai Ka po mai." They thought that those great gods were very powerful, unseen beings who dwelt in the clouds or the sky although they were sometimes to be seen in human form.

Kana, the first in the list, is known in the Society Islands as Tane. He was considered to be the father of men

and creator of the world, and as such was known as "Kane-Makua". Some of the prayers addressed to him seem to have traces of a simpler, grander faith.

In some of the chants we find the different gods addressed in such a way as to indicate the Hawaiian conception of them, viz.

Kane.

The great ocean of Kane,
The rows of stars of Kane,
The stars in the firmament,
The stars that have been fastened up,
Fast, fast, on the surface of the heaven of Kane,
And the wandering stars,
The tabued stars of Kane,
The moving stars of Kane ж ж ж
The great moon of Kane,
The great sun of Kane,
Moving, floating,
Set moving about in the great space of Kane,
The great earth of Kane,
The earth that Kane set in motion ж ж ж
Kane, Lord of night, Lord the father,
Established in truth, O Kane, master-worker;
The Lord Creator of mankind.

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Kana-loa.

This Hawaiian god corresponds to the Tanaoa of the Marquesan group, and embodies the conception of evil; although among the Marquesans it is rather the abstract idea of darkness, chaos and confusion than a divinity. Among the Hawaiians Kane-loa is a personified spirit of evil who is the originator of death and the prince in "Po" the Hawaiian chaos or hell. He disobeyed and revolted from Kane but was conquered and punished and finally thrust down into "he Po-lua-ahi" (the pit of fire). It is probable that Kane-loa was not at first looked upon as on a par with Kane, Ku and Lono. His worship can only be traced back to the time when the second immigration took place from the southern islands to Hawaii. In the earliest Hawaiian chants he is never mentioned in connection with Kane, Ku and Lono. However, in nearly all the islands inhabited by the southern Kanakas or Polynesians, Kane-loa under the name of "Tanga-loa" or Taaroa is worshipped as the supreme deity and the father of the other gods and men.

"Ku."

The third in the list of great gods is described as "O Ku-Ka-Pao" the Ka-Pao" being an epithet which corresponds to the idea of picking, or digging down into and seems to have been applied to "Ku" as the one who picked out

the earth from the chaos surrounding it. He is spoken of as, "Ku-Ka-pao, the hot heavens". He is sometimes so closely associated with Kane as to be hardly distinguishable.

Lono.

The last of the list is hurler of the Hawaiian thunder-bolt. He is described as

"Lono, of the great night,
Great Lono dwelling on the water,
O Lono of the thunder,
O Lono of the heavy rain,
O Lono of the terrible, divine, face,
O Lono, O Lono with the restless eyes".

Space forbids anything but a glance at the subject and yet we find some striking similarities in the Kanaka ideas of the infancy of the race of men and some of the events recorded in the Bible, which must have been derived from their ancestors as they are found in their very old traditions, and meles.

Creation of Man.

The Polynesians say that "Kane" "Ku" and "Lono" made the earth and the stars and then man out of the "red earth" and breathed into his nose and man became alive. The Hebrew word "Adam" also means blood colored or red.

The order of creation in Hawaiian folk-lore is after the

separation of heaven and earth, (the heaven being pushed off from the earth by "Tane-mahuta" according to Maori legends) the ocean was stocked with its inhabitants, the stars were created, then the moon, then the sun. This agrees with the Marquesan ideas of creation; and in the creation of the moon before the sun, with the Babylonian.

Eden.

Hawaiian traditions grow eloquent over the beauty and excellence of the home of the first man and woman. It is called "Kalana i Hou-ola" or Kalana with the life-giving dew. They thought of the place situated in a large country "Kahi-Ki-Ku" and several other names. Among the names of this paradise are "Pali-uli", "the blue mountain" or "Aina i Ka Kaupo o Kane","the land in or of the heart of Kane". Sometimes as "Aina wai Akua a Kane" "the land of the divine water of Kane". It was a sacred land, a tabued land. A man must be pure, righteous, holy to attain to it, or as in an old chant it is said to be,

"O Pali-uli, hidden land of Kane,
Land in Kalana i Hau-ola,
In Kahi-Ki-Ku, in Kapa Kapa-ua a Kane,
Land with springs of water fat and moist,
Land greatly enjoyed by the god."

The Fall of Man.

The Hawaiians or Polynesians have no large reptiles in their present habitat yet they have a tradition that Kane created a "Moo" or "Moko" which is variously described as being a talking Moo--a creeping Moo--a watchful Moo--a prophesying Moo--a Moo with sharp teeth--a deadly Moo. This reptile is described as large and amphibious, living in caverns, and a terror to mankind. A Moo-pelo, an astute and lying reptile, called in ancient chants "Ilioha". This "Moo" was concerned in the downfall of man. First the man and woman are described as happy."

"Dwelling together are they two,
Dwelling in marriage (is she)
with her husband, the brother".

then

"The Ilioha, mischief-maker, stands on the land;
He has caught the chief Ku-Honua,
And Polo-Haina, the woman,
The tabu chiefs of Kane,"

Then there follows the thought of man as "fallen", as a "Tree-eater" as a "Mourner", etc., etc.

In the Marquesas they have also in one of their sacrificial hymns a reference to "the red apples eaten in Vavau". "The tabued apples of Atea". The Hawaiian tradition adds

that the first pair were driven out of their home in "Kalana i Hauola" by the large white bird of Kane."

Spirits.

The "Wela-ahi-lani" and "Kumu-honua" legends speak of the gods creating out of their spittle a host of "i Kini Akuas" or spirits; they were not like men, but were messengers. The chief of these spirits was "Kanaloa" or "Milu" who as mentioned before, disobeyed and rebelled and was cast out into "Po" the land of chaotic darkness and fire.

The Flood.

Among the Marquesans there exists a chant which varies very little indeed, in its description, from the essentials of the Biblical account. Four men, four women were saved--the animals taken into a house high above the waters--the coming of the storm--the floating of the house--subsidence of the water--house on the ground--bird of a dark color sent out--fails to land and comes back--sent out a second time and returns with young shoots, etc., etc.

The Hawaiians have a legend which says that in the time of "Nuu" or"Nana-Nuu" the flood came and destroyed all living beings but "Nuu" his wife "Lili-Nae" and his three sons and their wives. "Nuu" was commanded to build a big vessel with a house on it. When the flood subsided the vessel stranded on the top of Mauna-Kea the highest mountain

of Hawaii (about 14,800 feet high). The Fijians have a legend somewhat similar to the statement made about the "Tower of Babel" in the Bible. Among the Hawaiians in their genealogical records, there is a legend that the tenth descendant of "Nuu" (of deluge fame) called Lua-Nuu was a second kind of Nuu and that it was he who introduced circumcision which was almost a universal custom among the Polynesians. This has a striking similarity to the Biblical account of Abraham. Before finishing this brief sketch of the greater gods of the Hawaiians and passing to their Auma-Kuas, it should be said that Professor Alexander in his work holds that "Ku" rather than "Kana-loa" was the malevolent one of the deities. He says, "Ku appears to have been feared as a dark and malevolent being, delighting in the sufferings and immolation of human victims." There was a very strong tendency to multiply deities among the Polynesians. For instance they had "Kane-makua", who was the special god of some fishermen-- "Kana-puaa", the agricultural god. Kane-nui-akea", who inspired prophets; and as local gods, "Kane-hoa-lani," the god of the sky, Kane-huli-Koa" the god of the sea, "Kane-wahi-lani" the god of the lightning. This will give an idea of how they multiplied their deities by ascribing to Kane, formerly looked upon as doing all the work, the epithet which indicated his relation to the particular

thing of which they were thinking, or the occupation in which they were engaged, thus soon making another god. This same method was pursued with reference to "Ku" and "Lono". The Hawaiians also deified men and women and worshipped them. Pele and her family form a class of gods by themselves. Pele was the name given to the goddess who lived in and presided over the volcanos of Kilauea, and Mokuaweoweo on the side and top of Mauna Loa. The fine hair-like glass which is drawn out by the falling drops of lava when the lava fountains are in play--sometimes to the height of over 300 feet--is still called Pele's hair and can be gathered on the cliffs beside the pit of "Hale-mau-mau", Pele's supposed headquarters. "Maui"--from whom one of the Hawaiian Islands is named--was celebrated in all Polynesian legend as the one who lassoed the sun, in order to make it go slow, who fished up islands from the bottom of the sea with his magic hook, and obtained fire for men.

There were also professional gods, such as "Kaili" the god of war, worshipped by soldiers,and "Ku-ula", and his wife "Hina-hele" and "Moku-halii" the shark god worshipped by fishermen.

The Hawaiians believed that the woods were inhabited by multitudes of "Kini akua" or elf-like beings, with whom it was well to have a good understanding. They had also

"Kupuas" or demi-gods who (like Hercules and other Greek demi-gods) were worshipped. To this class belonged "Maui" (who got fire for men) and Kama puaa and Kana.

Auma-Kuas.

These were for the most part deified ancestors. For instance, a very high chief upon death was put in a shallow pit until the flesh had decayed and then dug up and his flesh carefully stripped from the bones; these were then tied with cinet made of cocoanut fibers and the bundle either hidden very carefully in some cave, or put into the "Hale o Keawe" (House of Keawe) to be worshipped. These deified ancestors had to be propitiated with prayers and offerings, and were especially particular about the fulfillment of vows. The Hawaiians often threw the bodies of their dead relatives to the sharks in order that the spirit of the departed might enter into the shark and defend or assist the one sacrificing. Bodies of dead relatives were sometimes cast into Hale-mau-mau, Pele's home, in the hope that the spirit of the dead might have influence with the fiery Pele and her family and thus good accrue to the living.

No sketch, even of the"Hawaiian Pantheon" would be complete without noticing its priests, Kahunas of many kinds; the sacrifices made, the tabu system and the thousand and one things inseparably bound up with the worship of the

warm-hearted, easy-going, easily led, sensuous race inhabiting the fairest spot on God's footstool. But it cannot be done in the limit allowed to this paper.