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# THE BACKGROUND OF TOTEMISM

BY

E. WASHBURN HOPKINS

*Yale University*

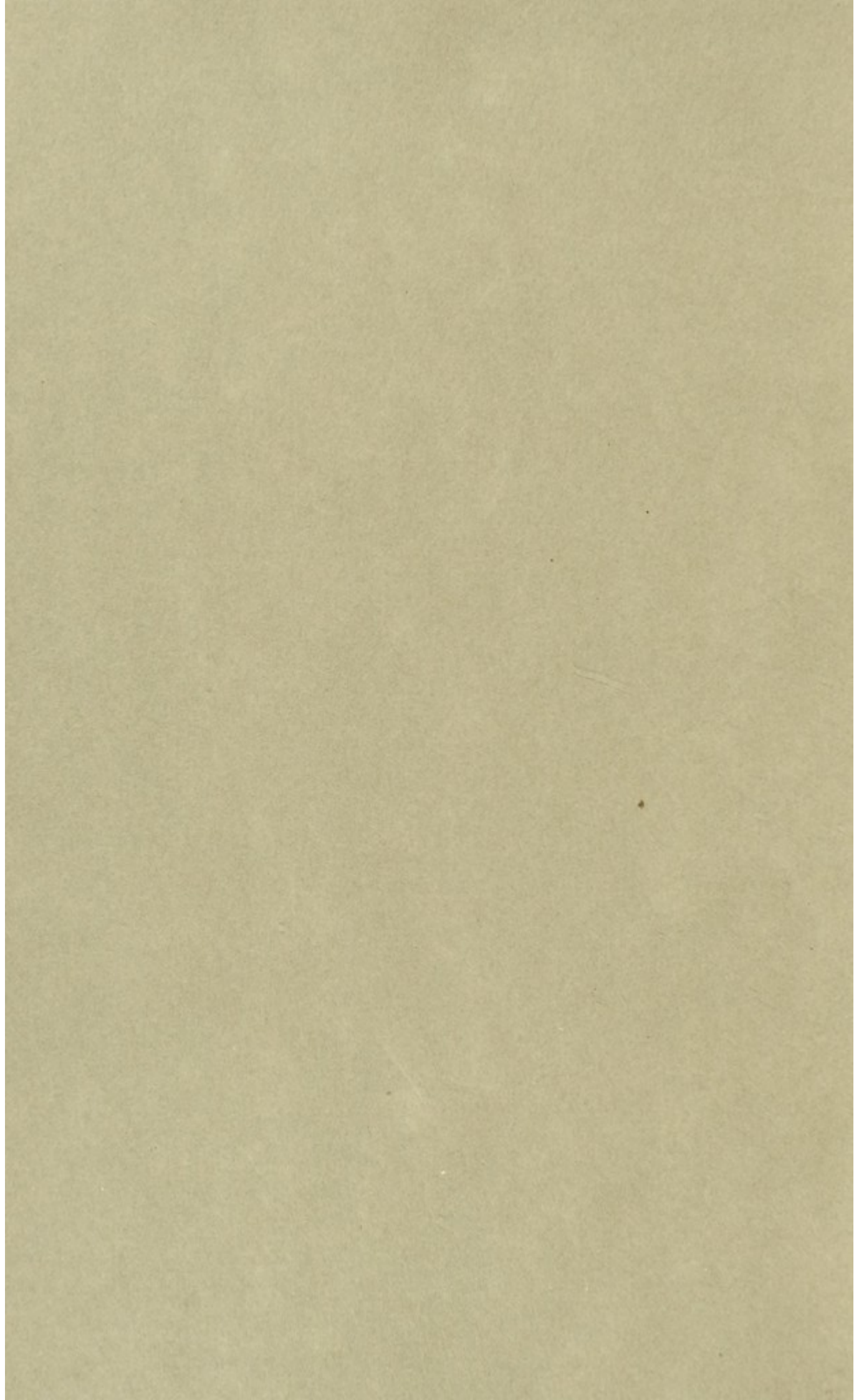
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FROM THE SMITHSONIAN REPORT FOR 1918, PAGES 573-584



(PUBLICATION 2575)

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# THE BACKGROUND OF TOTEMISM.<sup>1</sup>

By E. WASHBURN HOPKINS,  
*Yale University.*

The secret of the totem has been successfully veiled for many years through the ingenious efforts of would-be interpreters, some of whom have even ventured to explain all religion as an outgrowth of totemism. Others, less rash, have been content to find totemism where it never existed. A typical case of invented totemism may be seen in the Hindu deluge story, where Manu is rescued by a fish and the fish is interpreted as "probably a totem." This tale really illustrates the "grateful animal" category of folklore. A fish, saved by Manu, in turn saves him. It is a fish that grows too rapidly to be a normal fish, yet it is identified with the *jhasha*, of which genus the *makara* is the best species. Manu does not revere it; it is at first no divinity. Only long afterwards, when the chief god becomes Brahman, and again when Vishnu is exalted, does the fish become a divine form and Avatar.

The people of the Vedic age knew the boar, the wolf, the monkey, the swan or goose, the eagle, the crocodile, the serpent, and before its close the elephant, and the tiger, yet they worshiped none of them, nor showed any sign that they felt themselves akin to any one of these animals. It is true that sometimes a Vedic god is said to "rage like a terrible beast," but only a perverted intelligence could find in this statement evidence that the god had previously been the animal.<sup>2</sup> Divinity of real animals is borrowed afterwards from the wild tribes (who have totems) or is a later growth which recognizes divinity as in a cow because the cow gives food. The (cloud) cows of the air like the (lightning) snake of the sky may be ignored as due to poetic diction. So the fact that the sun is a bull, an eagle, a horse, is no indication that any one of the three was regarded *quâ* animal as a totem or even as divine.

Most attempts to find totemism where it is not remind one of the clever old Brahman who instructed Madam Blavatsky that all things were known to the seers of the Rig Veda. "Even the steam engine?"

<sup>1</sup> Reprinted by permission from the Journal of the American Oriental Society, vol. 38, pages 145-159.

<sup>2</sup> This is the absurdity to which Wundt is led, who says that because Homer's heroes are like lions therefore they are totemistic survivals (Mythus und Religion, 2, 285).

he was asked. "Certainly," he replied, "for, look you, in this place is mentioned smoke, here they speak of fire, and here again they sing of a car, and what is a locomotive save a car with fire and smoke?" So, to prove the existence of totemism, it is not enough to point to descent from a lion or to an individual name. In Africa clan-totemism often reverts to animal names given to one chief in flattery, "O thou elephant," "O thou lion among men."

Totem is said to mean "token," implying group relationship; but not blood relationship, since this would exclude plant totems, unless these are all secondary. But at present there is a tendency to deprive the word totem of every meaning it ever had. The totem of British Columbia is a protective spirit (often not animal) seen in a vision and has no relation to relationship; it is individual, not clannish. An African chief, on dying, said that he would become a butterfly. Straightway the butterfly became the "totem" of his clan (i. e., they would not kill it). And what shall we say of totems defined as "odds and ends" and "knots" (in Samoa), or the "heart of all animals" and "intestines" (African Kiziba "totems")? What is the use of calling these totemic phenomena? Each is simply a case of taboo; to one clan "intestines," *quâ* taboo, became sacred; but that is not a totem. So sex totems, honorific totems, color totems, cloud totems (Austrian), twins as totems (Bantu Bahima)—are these totems at all? Or shall we say with Doctor Goldenweiser that, since every characteristic of totemism is negligible,<sup>1</sup> there remains as totemism nothing save a vague tendency for social groups to become associated "with objects and symbols of emotional value," and that totemism is merely a "specific socialization of emotional values"? Would not this tenuous definition apply to a Baptist church as well as to a totemic clan?

It may not be superfluous to remind the general student that totemism as the foundation of religion is only one of many suggested foundations, not one of which by itself will uphold the burden placed upon it. It was thought to be fundamental because it was said to be universal. But despite Robertson Smith's great work it has not been proved to be Semitic.<sup>2</sup> Nor has it been found among the Aryans, where even in the Lupercalia it cannot be discovered.<sup>3</sup> In Africa what is called totemism is not religious and is usually derived

<sup>1</sup> The "invariable characteristics" of totemism are supposed to be exogamy, taboo, religious veneration (totem worship), name, and descent. But none of these is a necessary factor in totemism. Dr. River's "three essentials" are in typical form exogamy, descent, and taboo (of totem flesh), whereas totemism may exist without any of these characteristics and essentials. See "Totemism, an Analytical Study," by A. A. Goldenweiser, *Journal of American Folklore*, 23 (1910), p. 182, 266, 275.

<sup>2</sup> What Dr. Robertson Smith showed to exist among the Semites were elements of a possible totemism; but he could not show their combination. See his *Religion of the Semites*, p. 42 f. and 287; and (opposed) Lyall, in *JRAS*, 1904, p. 589.

<sup>3</sup> See L. Deubner in the *Archiv für Religionswissenschaft*, 1910, p. 481 f. For other Aryan fields, see Saussaye, *The Religion of the Teutons*, p. 74, 98; and A. B. Keith, *JRAS*, 1907, p. 939.

from the personal totem.<sup>1</sup> In South America even Dr. Frazer admits that totemism and exogamy exist in only two tribes (the Goajiros and Arawaks, withal "almost surely," not quite), and the "mother sea" and "mother maize" of Peru were only ancestral food-givers (not totems). Moreover the admitted fact that the skin of the "lion ancestor" worn at festivals by the Chanchas is no evidence of totemism reacts on the explanation of such skin-clad revelers elsewhere, as in Greece and Rome.<sup>2</sup>

But by dint of calling almost anything totemism, totemism has been found almost everywhere. It really does exist in many different parts of the world, North America, Africa, Polynesia, Australia, etc. We will take it as we find it in some of its most primitive forms, where it has nothing to do necessarily with religion or with marriage.

In Australia, where we have been assured that there is no religion, only magic (but this is a fallacy), and where at any rate we find totemism without religious implication, there are two things to be considered. First, is this Australian culture unique or is it only part of a greater complex, taking in the Melanesians? Indications point to a common substratum rather than to isolation. How the connection arose is not difficult to imagine; why it stopped is harder to guess. At any rate there is the possibility that Australian savages represent not the most primitive stage but a decadent form of an earlier stage of culture, when, for example, these savages could sail the sea. Then, secondly, there is to be considered the complex of totemic groups. For the purpose of this paper I have stressed the kind of totemism in which the totem is eaten and exogamy is not considered. But no one kind of totemism can be posited for Australia. If totemism imply a relation (magical or religious) between a clan and a class of animals or plants, Australian totemism may be either in the female line (the child then belongs to the class of the mother), or in the male line (the child then belongs to the father's class of animals), the former sort being found more in the eastern part of the country, the latter in other parts. But the Australian group may be merely a fortuitous class of collective owners of a certain territory, and in this case the child belongs to its father's totemic class, but the group is not exogamous (a western sort of totemism). Besides these sorts there is the totemism of the cult society, in which all are totem members; the divided society, in which each half of the tribe has a different totem; and that of the four or eight divisions of relationship; while, in addition, sex-totemism again divides the tribe into two totemic parts. Moreover, per-

<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Ellis, *The Tshi-speaking Peoples*, etc., p. 205 f.; Nassau, *Fetichism in West Africa*, p. 210. Bantu totemism is usually of this sort. There is here no veneration for the totem.

<sup>2</sup> See Frazer, *Totemism*, p. 95; *The Golden Bough*, 2. 293; *Totemism and Exogamy*, 2. 230; 3. 571, 579.

sonal totemism (New South Wales) gives every individual a separate totem. In some of these there is a definite ritual; in some, no ritual at all or a negative ritual.<sup>1</sup>

Australian custom has thus cast fresh light on totemism. But whereas in Australia reincarnation is associated with totemism and the guardian spirit is not associated with it, in British Columbia the guardian spirit is intimately associated with totemism and reincarnation is not associated with it. Moreover, descent from the totem is assumed in Australia and may be absent in British Columbia (it appears only in some tribes and then not clearly).

A very peculiar form of totemism has recently been found in the matrilinear society of the Fiji (a race probably connected with the Australians). There a man may eat his own clan totem, but may not eat his father's.<sup>2</sup> His own totem is derived from his mother. He may eat it, but his son may not. All the food growing on his father's tribal area (a sacred place) is taboo to the son, whether it be a banana or an eel, or both; to the son it is all "spirit food," taboo (but called "totemic"). As a converted Fiji Christian explained the matter:

Bananas and eels were forbidden to me by religious scruples because they belonged to my father. Formerly, if I ate them, they would make my mouth sore, but now that I have become a Methodist without any religious scruples, they do not hurt me.

This is "totemism" in terms of legal right to property. Anything growing or living on the paternal land is "totem;" i. e., taboo.

In northern Australia the majority of the tribes do not eat, or eat only sparingly, of the totem; but in some the mother's totem, if given by a member of the group, may be eaten. Here, too, it is a question of legal rights rather than a religious matter. In the Kakadu (northern Australian) form of totemism, the totem is determined by the spirit of a deceased person thought to be reincarnated in the totemist, and in this case there is no food restriction at all, simply because it is not a case of real totemism, since the spirit may come from any ancestor.<sup>3</sup>

It is evident that totemism raises the whole question of the fundamental relation between things secular and things religious in primitive mentality. Are they radically divided, is there a distinct

<sup>1</sup> Compare the paper of Mr. A. R. Brown at the Meeting of the British Association for the Advancement of Science, August, 1914, in which the different forms of Australian totemism are classified.

<sup>2</sup> Compare A. M. Hocrat, "The Dual Organization in Fiji," *Man*, 1915, no. 3. A man may eat his own clan animal ("dispose of his own"), "but he may not eat his father" (sic), because his father's is not his to dispose of.

<sup>3</sup> Spirit children swarm about and enter women, as in the Central Australian Arunta belief. See Baldwin Spencer, *Tribes of the Northern Territory of Australia* (1914). On the connection between Australia and Melanesia, see Rivers, *History of Melanesian Society*. Apropos of possible ancestors in the New Hebrides a tribe traces its descent to a boomerang which became a woman ancestress of the clan.

cleavage between them, as is assumed in Durkheim's system, or shall we say that, as among the primitive Veddas, no such cleavage exists originally, but it develops gradually in accordance with the part played by religion in the social life? Conduct seems to have an accidental connection with religious life; not an intrinsic connection sufficient to produce a system of religious ethics. Even in the same race and clan totemic systems differ in regard to their social bearings.<sup>1</sup>

Once it was supposed that totemism conditioned the bed and board of the totemist; he must marry out of his totem group (his kin) and he must not eat his totem except as a religious sacrament. On this assumption all the old theories of totemism were based. Exogamy, it was thought, arose from totemism.<sup>2</sup>

But as exogamy exists without totemism (e. g., in Assam and Polynesia), so totemism has nothing to do fundamentally with exogamy. "The Australian totemic clan is not as such exogamous."<sup>3</sup> Again, the totemist may or may not eat his totem. The totem also as a "receptacle of life" of the totemist has been imagined to be exercising its primitive function; but this theory (of the origin of totemism) has also been seen to be faulty. The personal totem has influenced the aspect of totemism in America. Much of what is called totemism in Africa originates in personal, not tribal totems, though it may become tribal. In Coomassie, for example, vultures are sacred to the royal family either through the caprice of a ruler or because they are useful as scavengers.<sup>4</sup> This is the kind of "totem" one finds as the totem of the royal house of Oudh in India, a fish that is really the symbol of a water god who was once a Mohammedan saint.

The totemism of the name is the prevailing Polynesian and Micronesian type and apparently it is there the earliest. Among the most primitive Micronesians there is nothing religious in the use of totem names or the plants and animals regarded as totems. It is to be observed also that here plants are as natural as animals in a totemic capacity. Since this is true also of primitive Australian totemism, it is evidently a false assumption that blood kinship underlies totemism, especially when the totem may be, e. g., lightning, as in Australia. In the Efatese (Micronesian) group, which is regarded as extremely primitive, women names are usually those of vegetables, and as the clan name is given by the ancestress there is really more vegetal than animal totemism.<sup>5</sup> Both kinds are found,

<sup>1</sup> Compare B. Malinowski in *Man*, 1914, no. 89.

<sup>2</sup> J. F. McLennan, *Primitive Marriage*. A number of other works embody the same theory.

<sup>3</sup> Goldenweiser, *op. cit.*, p. 241.

<sup>4</sup> Ellis, *Tshi-speaking Peoples*, p. 213.

<sup>5</sup> Compare D. MacDonald, *The Oceanic Languages*, p. xii.

however, and the point is chiefly that in the Efatese custom we have evidence of primitive totemism absolutely without reference to religion. The Efatese came perhaps from Arabia and may represent a primitive Semitic condition, where a purely economic and social matter became gradually overlaid with a religious coloring. So our Iroquois did not worship their totems, nor descend from their totems. Nor did the taboos of the Omahas have anything to do with their totems, and they also may descend from guardians. Even the name of the Omaha group is not that of the totem. Thus totemism is not a homogeneous institution. Under the appearance of uniformity it conceals a heterogeneous collection of social and religious conditions as vague and unsystematic as are those of taboo and fetishism. It consists, if it means anything specific, in clan respect for a class of plants or animals and usually in a regard for ancestors; but there is no proof that the most primitive totemism represents a condition in which these elements were already fused and confused, so that the plant or animal was the clan ancestor, whose descendants have human brothers who will not slay them. The clan worship of an inviolate totem is a late, not a primitive form. Originally, real totemism may or may not be religious; it starts with a certain relation to the source of food and is apt to end with food, but on its course it is obnoxious to all the ills of a diseased religious consciousness. The taboo of eating totem flesh is general in North America (though not universal), but such a taboo is not necessarily coterminous with the class; it may include a larger group, hence it may not be totemic in origin.

Certain aspects of totemism, such as tattooing and the use of totempoles and the "medicine" carried by totemists, may be omitted from the discussion of primitive totemism. So the various taboos incidental to totemism are results which in themselves do not explain totemism. A vital error is that the sacrifice of the totem is fundamental; this leads to the idea that all sacrifice is based on totemism. Lastly, there is a bookful of errors based on false notions of "original totemism" and to be avoided as idle speculations. One well-known writer has declared that all domestication of animals reverts to totemism; wild animals, finding that as totems they were not molested, came to man and became household pets; wolves became dogs, tigers became cats. So plants were cultivated first as totems until man discovered that maize was good to eat and tobacco to smoke! Wundt explains man's present dislike to a diet of vermin on the assumption that we have inherited the feeling that vermin are sacred ancestral totems. This incredible suggestion is made in all serious-

ness and is merely an instance of what imagination can suggest under the guise of science.<sup>1</sup>

The name theory of totemism is an old error. Herbert Spencer derived totemism from names; Jevons derives names from totemism. Andrew Lang attempted to explain the totem as a name and part of a system of naming.<sup>2</sup> Something similar has also been tried by Pikler and Somló, who hold that the totem is a kind of writing—that is, that the totem animal, painted, served originally as a mark to distinguish one clan from another.<sup>3</sup>

Other theories refer totemism to a belief in metempsychosis or to a belief in a personal guardian spirit. The first was favored by E. B. Tylor; but as metempsychosis is held by non-totemic people and totemists do not all believe in metempsychosis, this theory does not suffice, though it applies to certain selected examples, like the Bantus. The guardian-spirit theory has been dubbed the American theory, because it was invented here<sup>4</sup> and is illustrated by American tribes. Yet the fact that this type of totemism is lacking in many places; for example, among the wild tribes of India, where totemism is common, does not make for its acceptance as a general explanation of the phenomena. The phase is, in fact, not tribal but individual, and against the theory stands the circumstance that it excludes women, who have no personal totem. The guardian spirit (which may or may not be an animal-spirit) is in truth not a totem but rather resembles the bush soul. In higher form it becomes the genius and guardian angel.

Sir J. G. Frazer has advanced several theories in regard to the origin of totemism. He used to hold that the totem was the soul-keeper; but he then abandoned this view in favor of the theory that totemism was a system of magic intended to provide a supply of food for somebody else. This altruistic theory he explained as follows: In a group of clans every clan killed its own totem for some other clan and subsisted itself on the kill of a third clan. Clan A

<sup>1</sup> In his *Mythus und Religion*, 2, 298, Wundt thus explains by inherited "Gefühlston" man's otherwise inexplicable aversion to a diet of worms, mice, snakes, etc. What is true is that there is a common superstition to the effect that vermin represent the souls of demons or of evil persons (in India due to Karma; hence holy water keeps off noxious insects). Wundt of course derives all nature gods from animal gods. He ignores completely the cogent evidence to the contrary. In Churchill's *Weatherwords of Polynesia* (1907), men are derived direct from divine weather aspects, rain, clouds, etc., which, as gods, generate all the races of earth. The savages who thus invent gods of phenomena as ancestors can not be ignored; they represent a religious phase as primitive as totemism.

<sup>2</sup> *The Secret of the Totem* (1905).

<sup>3</sup> "Der Ursprung des Totemismus," in the *Jahrbuch für Vergleichende Rechtswissenschaft*, 1902. On the deficiencies as well as advantage of the name theories, Wundt has some sound remarks, *op. cit.* 2, 265.

<sup>4</sup> Miss Fletcher, *The Import of the Totem* (1895); Boas, in *U. S. National Museum* (1897). The personal guardian (seen in a dream) taken from the animal world is found also among the Iban of Borneo (originally from Sumatra). See *The Pagan Tribes of Borneo*, by Charles Hose and William McDougall (1912).



killed for Clan B, Clan B for Clan C, etc.<sup>1</sup> It is difficult to believe that savages, whose main business in life is to look out for number one, ever arranged their hope of a dinner on the precarious promise of some other clan to supply them with food; and in fact Dr. Frazer himself abandoned this *sic vos non vobis* theory in favor of still a third explanation, which he now thinks will be his last theory. At any rate, it is his latest, though we may venture to hope it will not be his last. It is based on the fact that some savages believe that their offspring comes not from intercourse between men and women, but from the spirits of animals or quasi-animals seen by a woman, or from the food she eats. They think that the spirits which thus become their children are really the animals they have seen or whose flesh they have eaten before conceiving. Hence Dr. Frazer calls this the conceptional theory.<sup>2</sup>

Curiously enough, almost all these theories absolutely ignore the usual foundation of totemism. The works of Spencer and Gillen on the tribes of central Australia have shown that here totemism generally reverts to the principle of food-utility. The so-called Opossums in central Australia received their totemic name because they "subsisted principally on this little animal."<sup>3</sup> Is not this the most natural reason in the world? They that eat 'possum are called 'possums. They that eat meat in India are called Meaters. Do not we also have frog eaters, beef eaters, etc.? It is much to be regretted that Dr. Frazer in his latest theory has flung away completely all connection between food and totem, or admits it only as an accidental element in the conceptional theory. In fact, most totemism rests on food supply. The ancients tell us that the totemic troglodytes at the time of Agatharcides regarded their cattle as parents. Why? Because (they said) their cattle supplied them with food.<sup>4</sup> In the Harivansha, which reflects Hindu belief of circa 400 A. D., the cowboys say:

The hills where we live and the cows whereby we live are our divinities; let the gods, if they will, make a feast to Indra; as for us, we hold the hills and cows to be the objects worthy of our worship and reverence. For in that

<sup>1</sup> The food theory of Dr. A. S. Haddon is that each clan subsisted on one animal and gave to its neighbors its superfluous supply; if crabs, then they would be called the Crab Clan.

<sup>2</sup> Compare *The Golden Bough* (1900), 3, 417 f.; *Totemism and Exogamy*, 4, 41 f. Dr. Frazer's latest theory is based on the investigations of Dr. W. H. R. Rivers, *Totemism in Polynesia and Melanesia*, *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 1909, p. 172 f., in regard to the belief of the savages of Banks' Islands in the northern New Hebrides, especially the natives of Mota and Motlav. The conceptional idea itself is found, too, not only in Australia but in Germany, where also women were supposed to conceive on sight. On P. W. Schmidt's "trade totemism," *Z. f. E.*, 12 (1909), which follows the lines of Frazer's theory of food exchange, see Goldenweiser, p. 277.

<sup>3</sup> Spencer and Gillen, *The Native Tribes of Central Australia*, p. 209.

<sup>4</sup> Robertson Smith, *The Religion of the Semites*, p. 296.

they serve us they should be requited. That whereby one is supported should be his divinity; hence we will make a festival in honor of our cows.<sup>1</sup>

This is exactly the Toda point of view, though not the Toda rite

The totemless Hindu here recognizes that the provider is the god to him provided for. This is the general background of "real totemism." It is found all over the earth and at times comes to the point of gliding into true totemism.

Thus, in Peru fish are deified on the seacoast and maize is not; but maize is deified inland, simply because it is the staple diet. This is the first step in totemization. The giver of food is the giver of life; the giver of life is conceived either as father and as mother or as both parents and god. Hence the maize is called not only divine but mother.

In the Boston statehouse there hangs to this day the effigy of a huge codfish, an object of almost devout reverence. Why? Because our Yankee ancestors got their food supply to a very great extent from this kind of fish. For that reason only was the cod elevated to a position of such dignity. They did not worship it, but they made it their "token." Their thought was "in Cod we trust," and they expressed this thought openly in the idol of that fish.

In Yezo a bear is sacrificed annually as a half-divine animal. It is fed and nourished by the women and then "sent to its parents" with every mark of sorrow and respect. Now this Yezo bear is not a totem. The Ainu claim no clan blood-brotherhood with it. Yet in this sacrifice we are at the very edge of true totemism; for the bear is the food supply, hence divine, hence too, sacrificed, that it may take a message to the bear clan, tell how well it has been treated, and return next year. Compare with this the spring sacrifice made by the Mayas of one animal of each species for the sake of getting increase. Are not these (which are not examples of totemism) almost totemistic? The Yezo ceremony is like that of the British Columbian Lillooet, who also sing a song of mourning to the bear they kill and invoke it to send game of its own kind. Even the raising of the head on a pole is found here.<sup>2</sup> Yet this is not a "totemic" clan.

But, it will be urged, why then the prohibition against eating the totem? In Australia the prohibition against eating is, as I have shown, a secondary stage, while in some cases there is merely a hygienic restriction. In America many tribes eat their totem, while

<sup>1</sup> Gāvo hi pūjāh \* \* \* goyajūam kārayisyāmi, Hariv., 2, 16, 1 f. (3807-3851). The cows are garlanded and sacrifice of meat and milk is made to the hills. It is grossly explained in the sequel that god Krishna "became the hill" (transubstantiation); but this is merely an orthodox trick to convert the rustic rite into one in honor of the recognized divinity.

<sup>2</sup> Teit, Jesup Expedition, apud Goldenweiser, op. cit., p. 204.

vegetable totems (maize, for example) are clearly sacred because they are a food supply. Sun supply and food supply in Australia brought forth the same rites. In other words, both rituals were for the same purpose, to increase the power of food giver and light giver as food giver. Nor can it be objected that "things not fit to eat" are made totems. Different times, different stomachs. Even our immediate forefathers ate things that we would rather revere than eat, and savages eat anything edible. Again, inedible things, such as poisonous objects, become holy by way of being hygienically taboo, and such a taboo plant, as holy, tends to confuse totem holiness with taboo holiness. In India there are many taboo trees and taboo plants, though none is a totem to the Aryan. They are taboo either because they are sacred to a god or because they are poisonous. So we have poisonous totems. The Begandas of Africa say that their whole totem system (it is not really totemism, but resembles it) is based on purely hygienic principles. Their "totem" is injurious; it made their ancestors ill; hence it is "holy"; hence not eaten. But others may eat it. Many other peoples permit their neighbors to kill the totem they themselves would like to kill and eat did they dare. The Australian Blackfellow now kills rarely what he used to kill and eat freely. Alabama and Georgia Indians always used to eat their totems. Is it not an assumption to say that these edible totems represent a later stage? Australian custom suggests that the non-edible totem is the later totem, the more edible the earlier. Moreover, worship is a secondary stage. The Omaha Indians never worshiped their totems. The Californians show a middle stage, that of the Egyptians and Todas, who kill but rarely and eat the totem as a sacrament. Then behind that lies the stage in which the totem is killed freely all the year round, but once a year is killed as a sacrament. Such is said to be the totemism found among some tribes of the Caucasus, and it is the usage, but without totemic kinship, of the Ainus already described. The animal killed is offered apologies lest its spirit retaliate; but this apologetic attitude is found with savages even when they kill an ordinary animal or cut down a tree. It is assumed merely to safeguard the slayer from its victim's angry spirit.<sup>1</sup>

One plant and one animal in India have been divine for millenniums—the moon plant and the cow. Their deification as drink and food was gradual. At first anyone might drink the moon-plant beer and any guest had a cow killed for his food. The Soma then became reserved for the priest, the cow became reserved as milk giver. Both

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<sup>1</sup>The apology to any animal slain is made in America; to the tree, for example, in Africa. It does not imply constant worship, but only a passing respectful solicitude, lest the animal or tree, being vexed, retaliate. This attitude results in a sort of momentary "worship" (placation).

became as food and drink divine; Soma as intoxicant became a magical thing, taboo to the vulgar. Yet neither Soma nor cow ever became a totem. Their divinity lay in their use not in their ancestorhood.<sup>1</sup>

Wundt thinks he has added something to the history of totemism by saying that in establishing the totem on a cultural basis the cult itself was made permanent; in other words, periodic religious ceremonies leading up to an observance of days in general were introduced by totemism, which (in Wundt's own words) was "the greatest and most important step taken in the development of cult" (that is, of cult in general).<sup>2</sup> Yet this discovery of Wundt is not so significant as it appears to be. For it rests on the conviction that totemism is the base of all other cults. As a matter of fact, savages base their cult much more generally on seasonal changes than on totemic observances; in fact, the latter are often no more than the reflection of the former. Wundt with his overdriven theory of the Fanany-cult fails to recognize the equally old and far more common fear of animals not as totems but as spirit forms of reincarnated human beings. This popular belief is more important than that of the "worm spirit." On the whole, Wundt's theory that totemism underlies all religion and that, underlying totemism, is the belief that the worms crawling out of a dead man's body are his souls is as little likely to satisfy serious investigators as any of the one-sided theories of the origin of religion which preceded it. Not only is totemism not the basis of religion, it represents no religious stage or stratum whatever.<sup>3</sup>

If, then, we have regard to the fact that with all its divergencies in detail totemism in its original habitat (i. e., where the name arose) is in the main a recognition of a peculiar bond subsisting between a group of human and a group of animal or vegetable beings, that this bond is not an individual or sex matter, but that in the great majority of cases it is connected with dietary restrictions, we have the basis of what may reasonably be called totemism. To dub every cult of an animal totemic is like calling any object of religious regard a fetish; it tends to meaninglessness. From this point of view we may then reasonably admit as totemic what appears to be the earlier stage in this human bond, as illustrated by the cases forming what I have ventured to call the background of totemism, Australian, Peruvian, etc., in which the reason for the bond is palpably because the totem (though not yet a real totem) is regarded as the provider of sustenance, primarily because it is the totemist's food, Mother

<sup>1</sup> The divine myrobolan called "chebulic" as an efficacious drug arose from a drop of ambrosia; garlic sprang from drops shed by Rahu and has a demoniac power, etc. The Varuna tree is named for the god. Other plants and trees receive a similar sanctity.

<sup>2</sup> Wundt, *op. cit.* 2, 258.

<sup>3</sup> See on this point the very sensible observations of Dr. Goldenweiser, *op. cit.*, p. 264.

Maize, Grandfather Fish, etc. Even where there is no tribal bond in the individual guardian this motive shows itself in another form, for the guardian is a spirit whose guardianship is especially exercised in leading the ward to his food, directing him on the hunt, just as the father ghost of the Vedda is invoked mainly to guide the suppliant son on the track of his prey.

If we abandon this guiding thread we are lost in the labyrinth. There remains no more than a vague notion that totemism indicates a social apprehension of some spiritual power, or, as a recent scientist has expressed it, "What is totemism anyway except consecration to spirits?" Nothing is gained by such a definition. On the other hand, it is a great gain to recognize that the old limitations imposed upon totemism are not essential; it does not necessarily imply worship, exogamy, descent, or name. All these things are special social variations springing out of totemism according to circumstances.<sup>1</sup>

Thus, finally, the matter becomes a question of definition. Is it well to make totemism synonymous with any trait found in it? After all, the word totemism is American, and in America, until the sociologists began to play with it, it had a pretty definite meaning not necessarily involving name, descent, exogamy, worship, or taboo but always implying a clan connection with a class of animals or plants, and this connection ought to be maintained in our use of the word. That this connection was originally based on economic grounds (as I think) is a secondary matter. But we should not call lightning or intestines "totems." In an already established totemic environment such wierd "totems" may be adopted, as the social need of a totem may be satisfied by calling any object of taboo a totem, but secondary phenomena should not lead us to ignore what totemism really represents.

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<sup>1</sup>Among the Gilyaks a drowned clansman becomes a beast called Master (spirit), who is revered as a guardian. But this spirit lacks the fundamental essence of totemism in that it is (or was) human and individual. A half-human totem is a common Australian phenomenon, but always this monster is invented as an explanation of a bifurcated descent into animal and human categories; either the animal nature is always present, or the human ancestor has a very intimate connection with the totem animal. Association serves as well as descent in America to give the totem, but it is association with a non-human creature. In British Columbia, as in some of our tribes, the totem animal is a regular source of food supply and is freely hunted, killed, and eaten.

