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## THE OAK AND THE THUNDER-GOD.

By H. MUNRO CHADWICK, M.A., Fellow of Clare College, Cambridge.

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## INTRODUCTION.

THE object of this paper is to discuss the connection between the sacred oak and the cult of the thunder-god. For this purpose it is necessary to give an account, first, of the cult of the thunder-god as practised by the chief peoples of Europe, and secondly, of the tree-sanctuaries which are found among the same peoples. After this we may consider the evidence for connecting the sacred oak with the cult of the thunder-god; and in conclusion an attempt will be made to give some explanation of this connection. Since the myths and cults of the Greeks and Romans are comparatively well known, it seemed unnecessary in most cases to do more than give references to easily accessible authorities. On the other hand I have thought it advisable to illustrate at somewhat greater length the less familiar religions of the northern peoples. In the course of the discussion I hope to show that the thunder-god was the chief deity of the early inhabitants of Europe, and further that the temples of late heathen times were, to a great extent, developed out of tree-sanctuaries. I think, therefore, it will be admitted that the subject is one of considerable importance for the study of early European religion.

## CHAPTER I.

§ 1. *The Thunder-God in the North.*

H. Petersen in his book *Om Nordboernes Gudedyrkelse og Gudetro i Hedenold*, has shown that in the North during the last centuries of the heathen age Thor was more worshipped than any other god, and that his cult bears every sign of a remote antiquity. This subject has been so fully and ably discussed by Petersen that it is needless here to do more than briefly recapitulate the main arguments which he has advanced.

They are as follows:—(1) Whenever mention is made of figures of the gods in temples, Thor's figure seems always to take the chief place. In no case is it stated that the central position was occupied by any other god. In several cases Thor's figure is the only one mentioned. (2) In compound personal names *Thór-* is vastly more frequent than the name of any other god. Thus in the *Landnáma* Bók *Thór-* occurs in 30 men's and 21 women's names, distributed over about 800

and 300 persons respectively. On the other hand *Frey-* occurs only in two men's names and one woman's name (four persons in all), while *Óðin-* does not occur. The significance of these statistics is shown by the fact that persons who bore the name of a god were regarded as being under his special protection.<sup>1</sup> In place-names also *Thór-* is far more frequent than the name of any other god. (3) When Scandinavian gods are mentioned by foreign writers, either Thor is mentioned alone or he is represented as the chief of the gods. (4) Especially significant is the title *Míðgards Véurr* "sanctifier of the earth" which is applied to Thor in the *Edda*. Petersen illustrates this by the use of the phrase *þur wíki þísi kuml* (or *þ.u. þási runar*) "may Thor sanctify these mounds" (or "these letters") which occurs on two monuments in Jutland. The same idea is symbolically expressed by the representation of the hammer on several inscriptions in Jutland and Sweden. That the hammer was used at funerals is made probable by the account of Balder's funeral in *Gylfaginning* 49, where Thor consecrates the pyre with his hammer. A similar usage at weddings may be inferred from the story in *Thrymskviða*. Petersen infers that the hammer was used on many other important occasions, especially at the opening of the assembly. Hammers used as personal adornments have frequently been found. That they were used also in public worship is made probable by Saxo's account (xiii, p. 630) of the large metal hammers (*malleos Iouiales*) which Magnus Nielsen carried away from a temple of Jupiter on one of the Swedish islands (about A.D. 1130). As sanctifier and guardian of the home Thor's figure was carved upon the *öndvegissúlur* "pillars of the high-seat" (the place of honour reserved for the head of the house). The reverence attached to these pillars is shown by several stories dealing with the colonisation of Iceland. The colonists brought their high-seat pillars with them. Thorolfr threw the high-seat pillars of his temple overboard on approaching land and accepted the direction which they took as an indication where to fix his new home.<sup>2</sup> Hallsteinn, son of Thorolfr, prayed Thor to send him high-seat pillars.<sup>3</sup> (5) It is likely also that Thor was regarded as the patron of the assembly. In Iceland, Thursday was the day on which the *Alþingi* (general assembly) was opened. This was also the case with the *Gulaping* in Norway and with most of the district assemblies in the Danish islands. (6) Evidence for the cult of Thor in time of war is given by the account of Styrbjörn's campaign against Eirekr, king of Sweden, and by Dudo in his account of the Normans.

Such are, according to Petersen, the main features of the cult of Thor. The importance of the cult may be estimated by the fact that it embraces every side of public and private life, whereas the cult of Othin is concerned chiefly with the military side. Lastly Thor seems to embody the ideal of the national character; he is represented as fearless, impetuous, but benevolent towards men. Othin on the other hand is distinguished rather by shrewdness and cunning.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *Eyrbyggja Saga*, c. 7, 11, and the passage from *Greenl. Annáll.* appended to Vigfusson's edition of the *Saga*.

<sup>2</sup> *Eyrbyggja*, s. 4.

<sup>3</sup> *Landnáma Bók*, i, 23.

It is unfortunate that no figures have survived which may be identified with certainty as representations of Thor. Yet there can be little doubt how he was depicted, for the Sagas contain several stories of his appearing to his friends or enemies upon earth.<sup>1</sup> He is represented as a man of large and powerful build, in the prime of life, and having a red beard. The equipment of the god as depicted in the mythological poems is remarkable, especially from the negative side. His weapon is almost always the hammer.<sup>2</sup> He is never represented as possessing spear, sword, shield, helmet, or coat of mail. Again in travelling he either goes on foot or drives in a carriage drawn by goats. A horse is never ascribed to him. In *Grímnismál* 29, immediately before the enumeration of the horses which the gods ride when they come to do justice under Yggdrasil's Ash, it is stated that Thor has to wade through several streams on his way thither. The horses of Othin, Freyr, Heimdallr and Balder are mentioned also elsewhere. The antiquity of the representation of Thor may be estimated by the absence of the horse and of all the ordinary weapons of war. His equipment indeed resembles that of a hero of the Stone Age rather than of any subsequent period. Both from the shape of the hammer as depicted on Runic stones, etc., and from the fact that the word (O.Norse *hamarr*) also means "rock" and is perhaps related to O.Bulg. *kamy* "stone" and kindred words, it appears not unlikely that Thor's hammer was originally a stone implement.

Human sacrifices in connection with this cult are seldom mentioned. They were known, however, both among the Normans (*Dudo*, i, 1) and in Iceland (*Eyrbyggja*, s. 10<sup>b</sup>), though in the latter case the victims were probably condemned criminals.<sup>4</sup> It is somewhat remarkable that in both these cases death seems to have been inflicted by felling with a wooden instrument. Elsewhere sacrifices of horses and oxen<sup>5</sup> and offerings of bread and meat<sup>6</sup> are mentioned. Besides the sacrifices there is one other point which deserves mention. In Icelandic temples it seems to have been the custom to keep a sacred fire in the *afhús* (cf. p. 28) which was never allowed to die out. Since the temple described in *Kjalnesingas.* 2, where this notice occurs, was primarily a Thor-temple, it is likely that this holy fire was connected with the cult of Thor.

It has been shown by Petersen (see above) that the blessings conferred by Thor apply to all departments of human life. His connection with weather and natural phenomena is surprisingly little evidenced in Norwegian-Icelandic literature. This is no doubt due in part to the disuse of the old word for "thunder." In Denmark and Sweden on the other hand, where the words *torden* and *aska* (*toraka*) are preserved, the connection seems to have been more clearly kept. But it is rather as the protector of the human race against trolls (the

<sup>1</sup> Cf. especially *Fornmanna Sögur*, ii, 182.

<sup>2</sup> *Saxo*, iii, p. 118, provides him with a club.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. *Kjalnesingas.* 2.

<sup>4</sup> For a similar custom among the Gauls cf. *Cæsar*, B.G., vi, 16.

<sup>5</sup> *Flateyjarbók*, ii, 184.

<sup>6</sup> *Olafs s. helga*, 33f.

spirits of the desert), as the granter of land, the guardian of the laws and customs of civilised life that Thor is best known. In connection with Petersen's supposition that Thor was regarded as the patron of the assembly it is perhaps worth recalling *Grímnismál* 29, where Thor is represented as proceeding to do justice under Yggdrasill's Ash. None of the other gods are mentioned by name in this passage.

In conclusion a few words must be said in regard to Thor's family relationships. He is called the son of Othin, but this can hardly be an original feature, for his cult appears to be much older than that of Othin. His mother is called Fiörgyn<sup>1</sup> or Iörd ("earth"). His wife is Sif,<sup>2</sup> his sons Móði ("the courageous") and Magni ("the mighty"), his daughter Þrúðr.<sup>3</sup> The lateness of the last four names is shown by their allegorical character. The nature of Thor's relationship to the human community is well illustrated by the choice of *Sif* as the name of his wife. Lastly it is worth observing that no royal or noble family seems to have traced its genealogy to Thor.

### § 2. *The Thunder-God of the Continental Germans.*

Among the continental Germans and in England very few traces of this cult have survived. In the "Old Saxon" renunciation formula *Thunær* is mentioned together with *Woden* and *Saxnot*. Again the inscription on the Nordendorf brooch, the meaning of which is not altogether clear, ends with the words *wigi þonar*, which corresponds exactly to the formula employed on certain monumental stones in Jutland (*cf.* p. 23). The earliest certain evidence for the existence of the cult is the phrase O.H.G. *donares tag*, O.Engl. *þunres dæg* as a translation of Lat. *dies Iouis*.<sup>4</sup> It is worth observing that among the Franks in the seventh century St. Eligius († 659) found it necessary to forbid the celebration of Thursday festivities.<sup>5</sup> With this may perhaps be compared the fact that in many parts of Germany Thursday has been the favourite day for weddings down to modern times. The German thunder-god is sometimes mentioned under his Latin name, *e.g.* in the *Indiculus Superstitionum* and in Bonifacius, *Epist.* 25, where mention is made of a priest who "sacrificed to Iupiter and ate the sacrificial meat."<sup>6</sup>

It is uncertain how far the attributes by which Thor was distinguished in the North were applied to the thunder-god on the continent. In the Frisian

<sup>1</sup> Identical with Goth. *fairguni* "mountain," O.Engl. *firgen*- "forest," etc.

<sup>2</sup> The same word is found in the other Germanic languages (Goth. *sibja*, O.Engl. *sib*, O.Sax. *sibbia*, O.H.G. *sippa*), in the sense of "relationship" (in O.Engl. and O.H.G. also "friendship," "peace"). In Old Norse only the pl. *sifjar* "relationship," occurs.

<sup>3</sup> Identical with O.Engl. *þryþ* "strength."

<sup>4</sup> The names of the days of the week were borrowed probably between the second and fourth centuries.

<sup>5</sup> Grimm, *Deutsche Mythologie*, iii, 402.

<sup>6</sup> It is somewhat remarkable that the Germanic Iupiter is not mentioned by the earlier Latin writers. The only god besides Mercurius and Mars to whom Tacitus refers at all frequently is "Hercules," and it has been generally assumed that under this name he meant the thunder-god. This, however, does not seem to me to have been satisfactorily established.

story of the twelve Asegen,<sup>1</sup> if the implement borne by the god is an axe,<sup>2</sup> it is very likely that it is the thunder-god who is meant. If so this would be valuable evidence for proving the connection of the thunder-god with the laws. Another possible reference to the axe of the thunder-god occurs in the Old English dialogue of Salomon and Saturn (ed. Kemble, p. 148).<sup>3</sup>

### § 3. *The Keltic Thunder-God.*

Very little is known about the gods of the ancient Kelts. There was, however, a god named *Taran*, who is mentioned by Lucan (I. 446) and whose name appears also in inscriptions as *Tanarus*, *Taranucus*, *Taranucus*.<sup>4</sup> Lucan says that he was honoured with human sacrifices. Now the form *Tanarus* corresponds exactly to \**Þunuraz*, the Germanic name for thunder and the thunder-god, while *Taran-* differs therefrom only by metathesis of *-n-* and *-r-*. The latter may be identical also with Mod. Welsh *taran* "thunder." It is known that the Kelts had a god "Iupiter"; Cæsar (B.G., vi. 17) states that, like other nations, they regarded him as the ruler of the gods. Since the Latin Iupiter is likewise the thunder-god, there can be little doubt that *Taran* is the god meant by Cæsar. This conclusion is further confirmed by the dedicatory inscription *I. O. M. Tamaro* found at Chester and dating from A.D. 154.<sup>5</sup> It is likely enough that the god corresponded to some extent in attributes, as well as in name, to the Germanic thunder-god, for there seems to have been much similarity between the two nations. But the evidence is not sufficient to enable us to arrive at any certain conclusions.

### § 4. *The Baltic Thunder-God.*

The evidence for the cult of the thunder-god amongst the ancient Prussians is much more extensive, but unfortunately it is late and not free from suspicion. Grunau gives the god's name as *Perkuno*<sup>6</sup> and says that together with the gods *Patollo* and *Potrimpo* he was believed to inhabit the sacred oak at Romove. He was supposed to commune with the priests there in thunderstorms. In this way the fundamental laws of the nation were believed to have been imparted by him. In his honour a perpetual fire was kept burning under the oak. The priest who allowed this to die out was condemned to death. According to Grunau (Tr. II, cap. v, § 1) *Perkuno*'s likeness, as depicted on King Widowuto's banner, was that of a middle-aged man with black beard and wrathful expression of countenance;

<sup>1</sup> v. Richtofen, *Friesische Rechtsquellen*, p. 439f.

<sup>2</sup> The reading is uncertain.

<sup>3</sup> There is no direct reference to the god in this passage, but cf. Saxo, xiii, p. 630.

<sup>4</sup> *Taranucus* in a Dalmatian inscription (C.I.L. 3, 2804); *Taranucus* in two Rhenish inscriptions (Brambach, C.I.Rh. 1589, 1812); on these names see Much, *Festgabe f. Heinzel*, p. 227f.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. also *Taranin Iouen* in a scholion to the above passage of Lucan (Usener).

<sup>6</sup> Identical with Lith. *perkūnas* "thunder," which is still used personally in folk-songs; cf. also Michov in Grynaeus, *Novus Orbis Terrarum ac Insularum Veteribus Incognitarum*, Basel 1537, p. 519, who says of the Samagitti (in East Prussia): *diis suis falsis, præcipue deo lingua eorum appellato Perkuno, id est tonitru, ad focos quisque suos offerebat libamina.*

his head was crowned with flames. Among the holy symbols of the Lithuanians, according to Æneas Sylvius, was a huge iron hammer. From the place-name *Heiligenbeil* it is likely that similar symbols were used among the Prussians.

At the present time it is customary to regard the authorities for the ancient Prussian religion, especially Grunau, with the greatest scepticism. Some writers have even gone so far as to doubt the existence of a god Perkuno. This, however, is certainly unjustifiable.<sup>1</sup> What especially makes for the credibility of Grunau's account in the main, distorted and embellished though it is without doubt, is the fact that there is scarcely one of the religious observances mentioned by him for which a parallel can not be found in some other European people, generally at a very early period of history.<sup>2</sup> In many cases these foreign customs can not have been known to Grunau. The Northern cult of Thor offers several points of resemblance to Grunau's account of Perkuno. It has been shown above that there is some reason for regarding Thor as the god of the Assembly. This goes far towards confirming the conception of Perkuno as the law-giver. Again the perpetual fire in honour of Perkuno may be compared with the perpetual fire which was kept burning in Thor's temples in Iceland. Lastly the portraiture of Perkuno on the banner strongly resembles the Northern portraiture of Thor. The banner is no doubt fabulous, but the picture may have been drawn from figures of the god such as the one which is stated to have stood in the oak.<sup>3</sup>

#### § 5. *The Slavonic Thunder-God.*

In the treaties mentioned by Nestor (*Chron.* 21, 36, etc.) the Varangians call to witness their god Perun. It is very likely that the Northern god Thor is meant, but he would seem to have been identified with a native god and to have adopted the Slavonic name.<sup>4</sup> That the cult of the thunder-god was nothing new among the Slavs is clear from Procopius' statement (Gothic War, iii, 14) that "they consider one god, the creator of the lightning, to be the only lord of all things."

#### § 6. *The Thunder-God amongst the other peoples of Europe.*

It is unnecessary here to discuss the cult of the thunder-god among the ancient Greeks and Romans. That the Greek god Zeus bore this character is

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Zeuss, *Die Deutschen und die Nachbarstämme*, p. 41. It should, moreover, be remembered that the latest of the writers whom I have quoted, Grunau and Michov, wrote within a century of the death of Vitoldus (Vitovt), in whose reign (1392-1430) the Baltic tribes were still mainly heathen. Æneas Sylvius (Pius II, Pope 1458-1464) is practically a contemporary authority.

<sup>2</sup> I hope that in several cases this parallelism will be made clear in the following pages.

<sup>3</sup> It is possible, though hardly likely, that the religion of the Prussians was influenced by that of the North in late heathen times. Gothic influence at a very much earlier period is more probable.

<sup>4</sup> The name is identical with Russ., Čech. *perun* "thunderbolt," and probably also with Lith. *perkūnas*, though the loss of the *-k-* is still unexplained. Much (*Festgabe f. Heinzel*, p. 212ff) holds that both *perun* and *perkūnas* are loan-words from Germanic, but his theory seems to me to be beset with overwhelming difficulties.

clear from the epithets applied to him such as *τερπικέραννος, ἀργικέραννος ἰψιβρεμέτης, ἐριβρεμέτης, στεροπηγερέτα*. He was also a god of the rain. In this connection it is worth noting that a rain-charm was in time of drought practised by the priest of Zeus on Mount Lykaioi in Arcadia. The ceremony consisted in dipping an oak twig in the sacred stream (cf. Paus. viii, 38, 3). With this may be compared the Roman *aqualicium* which took place at the temple of Iupiter on the Capitol.<sup>1</sup> The connection of the god Iupiter with the thunder and with the phenomena of the weather in general is so well known that it will be sufficient here to refer to Preller, *Römische Mythologie*, p. 190ff.

### § 7. Conclusion.

The foregoing brief summary is enough to show that the cult of the thunder-god was in early times common to most of the Indo-Germanic speaking peoples of Europe. The Greek and Roman thunder-gods, as might reasonably be expected from the identity of their names *Zeús* (Voc. *Zeú πάτερ*, Hom.)—*Iū-piter* (*Iuppiter*), seem to have had common features even apart from the influence which was exercised by the one people upon the other in historical times. It may reasonably be supposed also that such was the case with the Keltic *Taranos* (*Taranos*) and the Germanic *Þunraz*, where there is the same identity of name. Lastly, it has been shown that the Prussian cult had several points of resemblance to that of the northern Germans. Here also a similarity of names is not wanting, for *Perkúnas* is closely related to *Fiörgyn*, the name of Thor's mother.

## CHAPTER II.

### § 1. *The Germanic Tree-Sanctuary.*

The Northern temple in late heathen times seems to have been shaped much like a church with an apse-shaped building (*afhús*) at the east end. The *afhús*, which in Iceland seems not to have been open to the rest of the building, was the sanctuary proper and contained the figures of the gods, the altar with the oath-ring and blood-kettle and the perpetual fire. Petersen, however (*op. cit.* Kap. 2), believes that there was another form in use, namely the round temple, of which he thinks the round churches, which occur in all Teutonic lands, are a relic. He believes that this is the more original form and that it is a development of the grove-sanctuary. In the more usual type of temple the *afhús* was the original sanctuary, while the long rectangular building (*langhús*) was a later addition and due to the exigencies of the sacrificial feast.<sup>2</sup>

Temples were known among the other heathen Germanic nations in the early middle ages. In the sixth century a Frankish temple was destroyed by

<sup>1</sup> Tertullian, *Ap.* 40.

<sup>2</sup> It is possible, of course, that the form of the temple was influenced by that of Christian churches in the British Isles.



Radegund, wife of Chlotar.<sup>1</sup> Gregory of Tours<sup>2</sup> describes a temple at Cologne which contained figures of the gods and in which sacrificial feasts were held. In Augustine's time the English had temples which were capable of being turned into churches.<sup>3</sup> The Frisians and Old Saxons also seem to have had temples, but the notices are not always clear. The word *fanum*, by which these sanctuaries are usually denoted, is also used of the "Irminsul," which was an upright pillar. In other cases again it is clear that the Germanic invaders had appropriated Roman temples to the use of their own gods. The true Germanic temples, except in Iceland, seem to have been usually, if not always, made of wood.

In earlier times the evidence for the existence of Germanic temples is very meagre. The clearest case is Tacitus, *Ann.* i, 51, where it is stated that Germanicus "raised to the ground the temple which they called the temple of Tamfana and which was most frequented by those tribes." In *Germ.* 40 mention is made of the "templum" of Nerthus, but it is not unlikely that the word is loosely used for "sanctuary" and refers to the holy grove mentioned just before.

According to *Germ.* 9 the Germans "deem it to be inconsistent with the majesty of the gods to confine them within walls or to represent them after any similitude of a human face; they dedicate groves and woods and call by the name of gods that invisible thing which they see only with the eye of faith." Sacred groves are mentioned by Tacitus in several other places. According to *Germ.* 39, the Semnones had a wood of immemorial antiquity and holiness; according to *Germ.* 43, the Nahanaruali had a grove of ancient sanctity. The sanctuary of Nerthus (*Germ.* 40) was an island grove. Arminius' forces assemble in a wood sacred to Hercules (*Ann.* ii, 12); Civilis brings his army together in a sacred wood (*Hist.* ii, 14). These sacred groves contained altars (*Ann.* i, 61), and *effigies et signa quaedam* which the priests carried into battle (*Germ.* 7). With the last passage may be compared *Hist.* iv, 22, from which it appears that the *effigies* were figures of wild beasts.

The accounts of later writers fully agree with Tacitus' evidence. Claudian (*Cons. Stil.* i, 288) speaks of "groves grim with ancient religious rites and oaks resembling a barbaric divinity" which he hoped the Roman axes would fell. In the *Translatio S. Alexandri* (*Mon. Germ.* ii, 676) it is stated that the Saxons worshipped trees and streams. Similar evidence is given by the occurrence of place-names such as *Heiligenloh*, *Heiligenforst*, *Heiligenholtz*. In the North place-names ending in *-lund* probably denote the former presence of grove-sanctuaries. There was a holy grove beside the Swedish temple at Upsala, one evergreen tree being regarded as especially sacred. The legendary sanctuary at Glæsisvöllr (*Hervarar Saga* 1; *Forn. Sög.* i, 411) was probably connected with a holy grove; *Glæsir* here is, perhaps, identical with *Glæsir*, the name of the tree in Valhöll (Othin's dwelling-place).

There is an obvious connection between these sacred groves and the "guardian

<sup>1</sup> *Acta Bened.* s. i, p. 327.

<sup>2</sup> *Vitæ Patrum*, 6.

<sup>3</sup> Bede, *Hist. Eccl.*, i, 30.

tree" (Vårdräd) which is found standing beside the homestead in many districts of Sweden.<sup>1</sup> Mannhardt describes how formerly every house in the sailors' quarter of Copenhagen possessed an elder tree which was tended with the greatest reverence and regarded as the dwelling-place of the guardian spirit of the house. In the Northern mythology Valhöll has beside it a sacred grove or tree (*Lœraðr, Glasir*). I have tried elsewhere<sup>2</sup> to show that the evergreen tree at Upsala was regarded as the Vårdräd of the Swedish nation and that the conception of the "world tree," Yggdrasil's Ash, may have arisen from the idea of a Vårdräd of the divine community.

We may now return to the discussion of the Northern temple. The "langhús" seems to have closely resembled the hall of an ordinary large dwelling house. Like this it contained the "high-seat pillars" which stood beside the seat of the owner of the temple. Indeed there can be little doubt that the langhús is copied directly from the hall and that originally it formed no part of the temple proper. Originally it would seem to have been the residence of the priest or chief who presided over the temple and provided the feasts.

Petersen's suggestion that the "afhús" (the sanctuary proper) is a development of the holy grove is rendered probable by the following considerations:—(1) The temple appears to have been of comparatively late origin among the Germanic peoples. The passage quoted above from Tacitus (*Germ.* 9) practically amounts to a statement that the Germans had no temples, though in one or two instances temples seem to be actually mentioned by him. (2) The Old English word *hearg, herg*, which is used to translate *sacellum, lupercal, simulacrum, fanum, templum*, is apparently also used for "grove" and is identical with O.H.G. *haruc* which is used to translate *lucus, nemus, fanum, ara*.<sup>3</sup> (3) The sacred tree or grove is sometimes found standing beside the temple, as at Upsala. The same phenomenon is found among other European peoples, as in the case of the oak at Stettin destroyed by Bishop Otto (*cf.* p. 33), and the pine destroyed by St. Martin (*cf.* p. 34). In every case the tree seems to have been regarded with greater reverence than the temple. (4) In other European countries certain temples are distinctly stated to have been erected on the site of a holy tree or grove. Such was the case with the temple at Dodona and, according to tradition, with the temple of Jupiter Capitolinus at Rome. From these considerations it seems to me not unlikely that if the *langhús* is a development of the chief's dwelling, the *afhús* may bear some close relationship to the sacred grove or tree (Vårdräd) which originally stood beside the dwelling.

In conclusion it is worth mentioning that the sacred groves of the ancient Germans seem to have been used also as places of assembly, the meeting of the Thing being no doubt closely connected with religious festivals. Passages have been quoted above (p. 29) showing that the German armies assembled in sacred groves

<sup>1</sup> Mannhardt, *Baumkultus*, s. 51ff.

<sup>2</sup> *Cult of Odin*, p. 75ff.

<sup>3</sup> With this may be compared O.H.G. *paro*, which is used to translate both *lucus* and *ara*, and is identical with O.Engl. *bearu* "grove."

during their wars with the Romans. It is probable that at the national assemblies in the wood of the Semnones (*Germ.* 39) the business transacted was political as well as sacral. Certainly the great assemblies at the Upsala grove-sanctuary met for more than merely religious purposes. The usual name for the place of assembly in the North is *þingvöllum* which must originally have meant "wood of the assembly," though *völlum* has come to mean "field" in the North.<sup>1</sup> It is in a forest-clearing that the gods meet to decide the fate of Starkadr in *Gautreks Saga* 7. According to a mythological poem (*Grímn.* 30) the gods meet every day to dispense justice under Yggdrasil's Ash.

### § 2. *The Baltic Tree-Sanctuary.*

The only reference of which I know to the existence of temples among the Baltic tribes is a passage in Michov<sup>2</sup> which describes how Vladislaus extinguished the sacred fire at Vilna and destroyed the *templum et ara* at which the Lithuanians offered their sacrifices. That this was a real temple is made probable by the fact that shortly afterwards he speaks of the *turris* in which the sacred fire was kept.

On the other hand there is no other European people with whom the sacred grove occupies so prominent a position. Æneas Sylvius (*Hist. de Eur.* xxvi) describing the missionary journeys of Jerome of Prag among the Lithuanians, states that he came to a people who worshipped woods dedicated to devils. There was one wood sacred above all others, and in its centre an oak of great age which was especially regarded as the abode of their god. As Jerome continued to cut these trees down, a great crowd of women betook themselves with lamentations to Vitoldus<sup>3</sup> complaining that "their sacred grove had been cut down and the house of their god taken away; in it they had been wont to solicit the divine favour and from it they had obtained rain and sunshine; now they did not know where to seek the god whose habitation they had taken away." Michov (*l.c.* p. 518) states that the Lithuanians "deemed woods and groves to be holy and regarded them as the habitations of the gods." In a subsequent passage he relates that the Samagitti considered even the birds and beasts which entered the sacred woods to be holy. They believed that if anyone injured these woods or anything in them, the devils would make his hands or feet to grow crooked. According to Erasmus Stella (*de Borussiae Antiquitatibus*, ii<sup>4</sup>), the Prussians said that the gods dwelt in groves and woods; here sacrifices were to be offered to them; from hence sunshine and rain were to be obtained. "They said that the gods inhabited the finest trees, such as oaks; from these trees enquirers heard replies given to them; therefore they did not cut down trees of this kind but tended them religiously as the houses of their deities. They treated the alder and several other trees in the same way."

<sup>1</sup> The word is identical with O.Engl., O.H.G. *wald* "forest." A similar change of meaning (from "grove" to "meadow") is seen in O.Engl. *lēah*.

<sup>2</sup> Grynaeus, *Novus Orbis*, etc., Basel, 1537, p. 518f.

<sup>3</sup> Prince of Lithuania, see p. 27, footnote.

<sup>4</sup> Grynaeus, *Novus Orbis*, etc., Basel, 1537, p. 581.

According to Helmold (*Chron. Slav.* i, 1), Germans were, in his day, admitted to all privileges among the Pruži (Prussians) except the right of access to groves and springs; they thought that these would be polluted by the presence of Christians. A similar statement is made by Stella (*l.c.*) who adds that atonement for the intrusion of strangers could only be made by the sacrifice of a human victim.

Among the Letts a custom is found similar to that connected with the Vårdträäd in the North. According to Mannhardt (*Baumkultus*, p. 52ff) it was usual even up to the present century to find beside the homestead a small grove which was regarded as the dwelling-place of the *Mahjas kungs* ("lord of the home") and honoured with small offerings.

Among the Prussians the nearest approach to a temple seems to have been the holy oak at Romove (Rickoiot), the chief sanctuary of the Prussians.<sup>1</sup> This was an evergreen tree with foliage so thick that, according to Grunau, no rain could penetrate it. In the stem stood busts of the three chief gods, and in front of each of these was placed the emblem of his cult, Perkuno's emblem being the perpetual fire. Round the oak were hung fine silk curtains within which no one was allowed to enter except the chief priests; the curtains might, however, be partially withdrawn to enable visitors to see the busts. The priests lived in tents round the oak; according to one authority<sup>2</sup> the *kirwaito*<sup>3</sup> or high-priest lived within the curtain. In this oak Perkuno was believed to commune with the kirwaito, who was known as "God's mouth." The other priests and priestesses (*waidlotten*) were old widowers and widows, living in celibacy, and had to make known to the people the commands of the kirwaito. In the neighbourhood of the oak the Prussians held their religious, and no doubt also their political, assemblies.

Michov (*l.c.*) states that on the first of October the Samagitti<sup>4</sup> held a great festival in their sacred woods at which the whole population came together and sacrificed to their gods, especially Perkunus. He states, moreover, that each family had in these woods a hearth at which they burnt their dead, and seats made of cork, on which were set food and drink for the souls of the departed.

### § 3. *The Slavonic Tree-Sanctuary.*

Holy trees and groves are found also among the Slavs. Thietmar of Merseburg (*Mon. Germ.* v, 812) states that Riedegost was completely surrounded by a forest, which was regarded with veneration and never touched by the inhabitants. In a subsequent passage (*l.c.* p. 816) he relates how in the year 1008

<sup>1</sup> Grunau, *Preussische Chronik*, Tr. ii, cap. v, s. 2; iii, cap. i, s. 2; cap. iv, s. 1.

<sup>2</sup> "Prisca Antiquorum Prutenorum Religio" in *Respublica sive Status Regni Poloniae, etc.*, Leyden, Elzevir, 1642, p. 297ff).

<sup>3</sup> This word seems to be identical with Lith. *krivaitis* on which Schleicher says: "jezt unbekant . . . es musz eine hohe würde bezeichnen."

<sup>4</sup> From Grynaeus *op. cit.*, p. 524, it is likely that this passage refers, in part at least, to the assemblies at Romove.

Wigbert destroyed a grove called Zutibure,<sup>1</sup> which was honoured by the inhabitants in all respects as a god, and which had never been injured since the beginning of time. In the year 1124 Bishop Otto of Bamberg destroyed three Slavonic temples at Stettin.<sup>2</sup> He then prepared to cut down an oak which was regarded with great veneration by the inhabitants, as they believed it to be the dwelling place of a deity. Beneath the oak was a spring. The people, though they had allowed him to destroy the temples, besought him earnestly to spare the tree.

The Slavs, however, as has already been mentioned, also possessed temples. One of the temples destroyed by Otto contained a three-headed figure (*Triglavus*). A temple at Riedegost is mentioned by Thietmar in the passage to which reference has been made above. Saxo (xiv, 822ff, 841ff) gives a full account of certain Slavonic temples in Rügen which were destroyed by King Waldemar in the year 1169. One of these temples consisted simply of purple hangings, the roof being supported by pillars. It contained an oaken figure of Rugieuitus with seven faces. Another temple had an outer enclosure of walls and an inner one consisting of hangings, the roof here also being supported by pillars. In the temple stood a wooden figure of Suantouitus with four heads. The priest alone was allowed to enter within the curtains and was not allowed to take breath there. Another temple contained a figure with five heads.

These Slavonic temples bear a curious resemblance to the Prussian tree-sanctuary at Romove. Boetticher<sup>3</sup> has made it probable that among the Greeks the earliest figures of the gods were made out of tree-stems, especially from the stem of that tree which was sacred to the god. The statue was in fact a development of the natural tree. If a similar development may be assumed for the Slavonic temple, the latter must come from a form very similar to the Prussian tree-sanctuary. An oaken image in a temple which had curtains for walls may very well come from a living oak surrounded with curtains. Possibly even the multiplicity of heads in the Slavonic idols may be due to the custom, which is found at Romove, of inserting busts in the trunk of the tree. These arguments seem to me to make it probable that the sanctuary at Romove faithfully preserved a type which was once common to the Slavonic and Baltic peoples. The very close relationship subsisting between these peoples is shown by the resemblance between their languages; for, so far as phonology is concerned, there can have been little difference between them at the beginning of the Christian era.

#### § 4. *The Keltic Tree-Sanctuary.*

In spite of the paucity of our information concerning the religion of the ancient Kelts, it is quite clear that they had sacred groves and trees. Pliny (*N. H.* xvi, 249) states that the Gauls consider nothing more holy than the mistletoe and the tree on which it grows, provided that this is an oak. He then goes on to

<sup>1</sup> Apparently for *Svetibor* "holy forest"; cf. Russ. *bor'* "pine-forest."

<sup>2</sup> *Mon. Germ. Script.*, xii, 794.

<sup>3</sup> *Der Baumkultus der Hellenen u. Römer*, p. 215ff.

describe the ceremonies connected with the cutting of the mistletoe, adding that they never practise any of their religious rites without oak-leaves. In conclusion he proposes an etymology of *Druidæ* from Greek  $\delta\rho\upsilon\varsigma$  "oak."<sup>1</sup> Lucan (i, 453) says that the Druids inhabit deep groves amid secluded woods. In another passage (iii, 399ff) he describes a grove-sanctuary in the neighbourhood of Marseilles. In Britain also the Druids had sacred groves; Tacitus (*Ann.* xiv, 29) relates how Suetonius Paulinus destroyed the Druids' groves in Anglesey. Though Druidism was put down by the Romans, tree-worship long continued in Gaul. Sulpicius Severus (*Vita S. Martini*, c, 10) states that St. Martin destroyed an ancient temple without meeting with any opposition from the inhabitants, but on his subsequently proceeding to cut down a pine-tree which was consecrated to a devil in the neighbourhood, he at once encountered resistance. It is worth noting that the Gaulish word for temple, *nemeton*, seems to have originally meant "grove."

### § 5. *The Greek and Roman Tree-Sanctuaries.*

For the tree-worship of these nations it will be sufficient to refer to Boetticher (*op. cit.*). Here it need only be observed that in classical times the tree-sanctuary had in most places been either wholly or partially displaced by the temple.

## CHAPTER III.

### § 1. *The Association between the Thunder-God and the Oak.*

In the preceding chapter evidence has been given to show that among the Baltic tribes (1) the cult of groves and trees was exceedingly prevalent; (2) the explanation of this cult given by the people themselves was that these groves and trees were the habitations of the gods; (3) the tree most revered was the oak.

Is there any evidence to show that this tree-cult was connected with one god more closely than the rest? In most of the notices no particular god is specified, while in Grunau's account the oak at Romove contains the busts of three gods. Yet there is reason to believe that it is Perkuno, the thunder-god, with whom the reverence for the oak was originally connected. The thunder-god is essentially a god of the weather;<sup>2</sup> it is rain and sunshine which the Lithuanians hope to obtain from their trees. Again though three gods are mentioned in connection with the oak at Romove, yet it is always Perkuno who appears individually. It is he who speaks with the high-priest in the oak. Further it is stated that Perkuno's emblem was a sacred fire of oak-wood which was kept up perpetually. Lastly Hirt (*Idg. Forschungen* I, 479ff) has made it probable that the word (Lith.) *perkūnas* is

<sup>1</sup> In spite of what has been said to the contrary it seems to me probable that Kelt. *druid* is a derivative of a Kelt. stem *drū*- "oak," though there is no evidence for precisely this form in Keltic. The derivation is especially favoured by the Welsh re-formate *derwydd* "druid" from *derw* "oak." Cf. also the *Dru-nemeton* ("oak-grove" ?), where the Galatian council met (Strabo, xii, 5, 1.)

<sup>2</sup> According to Adam of Bremen, iv, 26, "Thor presides over thunder and lightning, winds and showers, sunshine and the fruits of the earth."

related to Lat. *quercus* (Idg. \**perkyus*) "oak." Consequently the word can originally have meant nothing else than "oaken," and must have been an epithet: "the god of" (or "in") "the oak."

Among the ancient Germans also a similar association may be traced. Bonifacius<sup>1</sup> is said to have destroyed at Geismar in Hesse a huge tree which the inhabitants called "Jupiter's oak."<sup>2</sup> That groves sacred to the thunder-god were known among the ancient English is shown by such place-names as *þunres-lēah* which must originally have meant "grove of thunder." In the North the association seems to be forgotten, yet an important trace of it is preserved in the word *Fjörgyn*, the name of Thor's mother. This word is closely related to Lith. *Perkūnas*, and like it, in all probability, a derivative of Idg. \**perkyus*, "oak."

In regard to the Kelts it has been shown above:—(1) that the cult of the thunder-god seems to have been an important element in their religion; (2) that veneration for groves and trees was prevalent amongst them; (3) that the oak was apparently the tree most revered. The connection between the cult of the thunder-god and the reverence for the oak is shown by Maximus Tyrius, viii, 8:— "The Kelts worship Zeus; the Keltic image of Zeus is a lofty oak."

Among the Romans also the oak was associated with the cult of the thunder-god (*Jupiter*). Several writers<sup>3</sup> give lists of trees which were sacred to various gods, and in these it is always the oak which is associated with Jupiter.<sup>4</sup> Some of these passages may not perhaps be accepted as unimpeachable evidence for genuine Roman tradition, since the suspicion of Greek influence is possible. But there is other evidence of a less questionable character. The "civic crown" of oak-leaves which was given to a soldier who had saved the life of a comrade in war, and which was regarded as one of the highest distinctions which a Roman could gain, seems to have been associated with the cult of Jupiter.<sup>5</sup> The temple of *Jupiter Feretrius* on the Capitol stood on the site of a sacred oak, to which, according to Livy (I. 10), Romulus brought the *spolia opima* which he had gained by killing the king of Caenina.

That the oak was associated with the cult of the Greek thunder-god Zeus is clear from several passages relating to the oak-sanctuary at Dodona (see below). The association was not peculiar to Dodona, as it was found also at the sanctuary of Zeus on Mount Lykaïos. For the rest it will be sufficient here to refer to a scholion on Aristophanes, *Birds* 480 which states that "the oak is sacred to Zeus."

The association therefore between the oak and the thunder-god is found among the Prussians, Germans, Kelts, Romans and Greeks. In conclusion mention may be made of the Albanian word *perndi*, *perndi* "god." If, as has been suggested,

<sup>1</sup> *Mon. Germ.*, ii, 343.

<sup>2</sup> If the customary identification of "Hercules" with the thunder-god is correct, Tacitus *silva Herculi sacra* (Ann. ii, 12) may be added.

<sup>3</sup> Pliny, *N.H.*, xii, 2 (cf. xvi, 4); Phaedrus, *Fab.* iii, 17.

<sup>4</sup> Ovid (*Met.* 106) calls the oak "Jupiter's tree."

<sup>5</sup> Cf. *Servius ad Aen.*, vi, 772.

this word is related to Lith. *perkūnas*, it is likely that the association may be traced also here.

### § 2. *The Sanctuary of the Thunder-God.*

The sanctuary of Zeus at Dodona, near Jannina, was one of the oldest, and in early times perhaps the most important of all the sanctuaries in Greece. In later times Zeus, together with Dione, had a temple at Dodona; but the early authorities mention only an oak or grove. The first reference is in the *Iliad* (xvi, 233ff):—"O lord Zeus of Dodona Pelasgian, who dwellest afar, who rulest over stormy Dodona, around thee dwell the Selloi, thy interpreters, with unwashed feet, sleeping upon the ground." The statement that the priests or Selloi slept on the ground is repeated by Sophocles (*Trach.* 1166f), who mentions also that the tree stood in a grove. Oracles were given by the rustling of the leaves<sup>1</sup>—whence the tree is represented as endowed with speech—and by the murmuring of a stream which issued forth from beneath the oak.<sup>2</sup> The stream is called by Pliny (N.H. II, 228) "Jupiter's spring." The pigeons which frequented the grove were regarded as sacred.

There are several points of close resemblance between the Greek sanctuary at Dodona and the Prussian sanctuary at Romove. In both cases the oak is the dwelling-place of the thunder-god.<sup>3</sup> The neighbourhood of Dodona is famous for thunderstorms;<sup>4</sup> Perkuno manifests his presence in the thunder. Oracular responses are given forth by the oak at Dodona; so also by the sacred oaks of the Prussians. The priests sleep on the ground round the oak at Dodona; the Prussian priests live in tents round the oak at Romove. The sanctity attached to the pigeons in the grove at Dodona may be compared with the sanctity attached to the birds and animals which frequented the sacred groves of the Prussians.

These points of resemblance, however, are not confined to the Greek and Prussian sanctuaries. If "the Keltic image of Zeus is a lofty oak" and if, as Lucan states, the Druids lived in groves, sanctuaries like those at Dodona and Romove must have been in existence among the Kelts. Again the following passage from Claudian (*De Bello Getico* 545ff) seems to show that oracular responses were given by the sacred trees of the ancient Germans:—"Moreover we have encouragement from the gods. It is not dreams nor birds (which guide us), but clear speech issuing from the grove." It is also frequently stated, both in the North and among other German tribes, that no harm was allowed to be done to any living being in the neighbourhood of a sanctuary. Again for the spring beneath the oak parallels may be found in northern Europe. The sacred oak which Otto found at Stettin (*cf.* p. 33) had a spring beneath it. There was a spring in

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *Od.*, xiv, 327ff.; *Æsch. Prom.*, 848ff.; *Soph. Trach.*, 170f.; 1164ff.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. *Servius ad Aen.*, iii, 466.

<sup>3</sup> For Dodona this is implied by *Il.*, xvi, 233ff. (quoted above). In a fragment of *Hesiod* also (No. 156 in Rzach's edition) Zeus is represented as living in the oak, but this depends on an emendation (*παίει* or *παίει* for MSS. *παίει*).

<sup>4</sup> Leke, *Travels in Northern Greece*, 4, 198.



the neighbourhood of the sacred tree at Upsala.<sup>1</sup> It is stated that the nature of this tree was not known; but like the oak at Romove it was evergreen. It is, perhaps, worth observing that the Upsala sanctuary may primarily have been connected with the worship of Thor. At all events Thor's image occupied the chief position in the temple. Lastly the world-tree, Yggdrasill's Ash, is likewise represented as evergreen, and stands over the "spring of Fate."

The results of this discussion may be briefly summarised as follows: There were sanctuaries of the thunder-god among the Greeks and Prussians, probably also among the Kelts, consisting of oaks standing within groves. Perhaps the sacred oaks were originally chosen by preference from one or other of the evergreen kinds.<sup>2</sup> Round these oaks the priests lived under somewhat primitive conditions of life. Further, there are resemblances in points of detail between the tree-sanctuaries of the Germans and Slavs on the one hand, and those of the Greeks and Prussians on the other, sufficiently striking to justify the suspicion that similar conditions may once have prevailed in the sanctuaries of these nations.

As regards the Germans<sup>3</sup> perhaps some objection may reasonably be taken to the assumption in the last statement. There is, however, some indirect evidence to support it. It has been suggested above that in the Northern temple the "langhús" is a development of the dwelling-house, probably that of the priest or chief<sup>4</sup> of the community, while the "afhús" seems to have taken the place of the sacred grove and to bear some close relationship to the Vårdträd which is found standing beside the ordinary house. Now there are traces that in early times the relative positions of the house and tree were sometimes different. In the hall of Völsung's palace, according to *Völsunga Saga* 2 (*Fornald. Sög.* I, 119), stood the stem of a huge oak, the branches and foliage of which spread out above the roof. A house of this type may obviously be a development of a tree-dwelling similar to the sanctuary at Romove. I do not know of any other example of a house of this kind in the North.<sup>5</sup> Perhaps, however, the following possibility is worth taking into account. Can the "high-seat pillars" which stood within the hall, both of secular and sacred buildings, and were regarded with peculiar reverence, owe their origin to the former presence of an oak in the same position? It is not stated that they were made of oak-wood, but from their association with the thunder-god it is likely that such was originally the case.<sup>6</sup> The figure of Thor which was carved upon them may be compared with the Slavonic idols discussed above.

<sup>1</sup> Schol. 134 to Adam of Bremen.

<sup>2</sup> It is worth noting that the Roman "civic crown" was originally made from the leaves of the evergreen oak (*ilex*); cf. Pliny, *N.H.*, xvi, 4.

<sup>3</sup> In regard to the Slavs, I have tried to show above (p. 33) that the Slavonic temples in Rügen may come from tree-sanctuaries similar to that at Romove.

<sup>4</sup> In the North the temporal chief seems to have been also the priest of the community.

<sup>5</sup> The description of the thalamus of Odysseus (*Od.*, xxiii, 190ff.) may be compared.

<sup>6</sup> It is perhaps worth suggesting that the *regin-naglar*, which stood in the pillars, may have been pegs used for ignition by friction, perhaps for the re-kindling of the perpetual fire, which, in view of certain customs existing in later times, may have been extinguished once a year. Or again it may have been for the kindling of the "need-fire" which was also perhaps connected

## CHAPTER IV.

It has been shown above : (1) That the cult of the thunder-god can be proved to have existed among most of the Indogermanic-speaking nations of Europe. He appears to have been the chief deity of the Greeks, Romans, and Kelts, in pre-historic times probably also of the Germans (at all events in the North). Further if Procopius' statement (*Gothic War*, iii, 14), that in his time (the sixth century) the thunder-god was the only deity worshipped by the Slavs, be compared with the prominent position occupied by Perkuno in the religion of the Prussians, there can be little doubt that the thunder-god was originally the chief, if not the only deity of the Baltic and Slavonic peoples. (2) That among all these nations holy trees and groves are found. The tree most generally venerated seems to have been the oak. (3) That the oak seems to have been associated with the cult of the thunder-god among the Greeks, Romans, Kelts, Germans, and Prussians ; further, that oak-sanctuaries of the thunder-god showing striking features of resemblance are found among the Greeks and Prussians, and that there are grounds for suspecting that similar sanctuaries have existed among the Kelts, Germans, and Slavs. It remains now to enquire what can have been the original nature of the association between the thunder-god and the oak.

§ 1. *Mr. Frazer's Theory.*

Mr. Frazer holds that the oak was originally not merely the symbol or habitation of the god, but was itself the object of worship. In *The Golden Bough*, vol. ii, p. 291ff, he writes :—" If then the great god of both Greeks and Romans was represented in some of his oldest shrines under the form of an oak, and if the oak was the principal object of worship of Celts, Germans, and Slavs, we may certainly conclude that this tree was one of the chief, if not the very chief divinity of the Aryans before the dispersion." This passage must be read in connection with vol. i, p. 62 :—" In these cases the spirit is viewed as incorporate in the tree ; it animates the tree and most suffer and die with it. But according to another, and no doubt later view, the tree is not the body, but merely the abode of the tree-spirit, which can quit the injured tree as men quit a dilapidated house." Also with vol. i, p. 65 :—" When a tree comes to be viewed no longer as the body of the tree-spirit, but simply as its dwelling place which it can quit at pleasure, an important advance has been made in religious thought. Animism is passing into polytheism."

Originally therefore the oak was itself the deity ; the conception of it as the dwelling-place of the deity is a later development.

Mr. Frazer seems to me to assume too much in his statement (vol. ii, p. 291) that the oak was "not only the sacred tree, but the principal object of worship with the cult of Thor ; cf. Adam of Bremen, iv, 26 : *si pestis uel fames imminet Thor ydolo tibatur*. In later times the sparks for the kindling of the "need-fire" were sometimes obtained by twisting a wooden peg round in an caken post (cf. Grimm, *Deutsche Mythologie*, i, 502ff).

of both Celts and Slavs." His authorities for this statement are the passages quoted above regarding the tree-cult of the Lithuanians and Prussians,<sup>1</sup> and Pliny's account of the cutting of the mistletoe. But it is clearly stated in many places that the Lithuanians and Prussians regarded their groves and trees as the dwelling-places of the gods. Again Pliny, though he says that "the Druids . . . esteem nothing more holy than the mistletoe and the tree on which it grows, provided only that this is an oak," yet adds the following explanation for this fact:—"they believe that whatever grows on these trees is sent from heaven, and is a sign that the tree has been chosen by the god himself." The god is clearly not inseparable from the tree here. For illustrations of the original form of cult, wherein the tree and the tree-spirit are identical, Mr. Frazer has to go far beyond Europe.<sup>2</sup>

### § 2. *Objections to the above theory.*

Mr. Frazer's statements would lead one to the conclusion that among the Indogermanic-speaking peoples the development of polytheism from animism, or at all events the development of the thunder-god from the oak, took place subsequently to the "dispersion." Against this supposition, however, there are several serious objections:—

I. Though several of the Indogermanic languages possess words for "god" peculiar to themselves, yet it is practically certain that one word must have been used with this meaning even in the parent language. This is shown by the identity of the Indian, Italic, Keltic, Germanic, and Baltic words for "god" (Sansk. *devas*, Lat. *deus*, *dīvus*, O.Irish *día*, O.Norse *tívar* (pl.),<sup>3</sup> Lith. *dēvas*).

II. No tree-name is ever used for "god," nor is the thunder-god ever denoted by a word which may have been a tree-name. The Baltic-Slavonic designation of the thunder-god seems indeed to be derived from the Indogermanic name of the oak (*\*perkūsus*), but it is a derivative and not the word itself. Hence it would seem to have been originally an epithet, "having something to do with the oak,"<sup>4</sup> perhaps "living in the oak."

III. The name of the thunder-god in Keltic and Germanic is identical with the word for thunder. It is probable that a similar word must once have existed in Baltic and Slavonic. Otherwise the use of the words *perkūnas*, *perun* for "thunder," "thunderbolt" is difficult to explain. On the other hand the name of the thunder-god in Italic and Greek seem to have originally meant "sky," "daylight" (cf. Sanskr. *dyāus* "sky," "day," also personified; Lat. *dies* "day"). But, further, this word seems to be ultimately connected with Indogerm. *\*deiwos*

<sup>1</sup> I ought here to acknowledge my obligations to Mr. Frazer's book for several of these references.

<sup>2</sup> I have not the qualifications necessary for entering into a discussion of these examples, but I suspect that some of them might be capable of more than one interpretation.

<sup>3</sup> The singular is only used as the proper name of a god: O.Norse, *Týr*; O.H.G., *Zio*; O.Engl., *T̃, T̃w*.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Gk. *φηγωναίος* as an epithet of Zeus (Stephanus Byzantinus under *Δαδώνη*).

“god.” This tends to show that among the Indogermanic-speaking peoples the conception of “god” in general was bound up with that of “sky,” and that this was more especially the case with the conception of the thunder-god. It must be admitted that it is at all events more natural that the thunder should be conceived of as coming from the sky<sup>1</sup> than as proceeding from an oak or any other tree.

These arguments seem to me to tell greatly against the probability of Mr. Frazer’s hypothesis, and in favour of the supposition that the conception of the thunder-god was originally bound up with or developed out of the conception of “sky.” Therefore, since it is obvious that the two hypotheses are mutually exclusive, it remains to be seen whether the association of the thunder-god with the oak may be of secondary origin. In the following pages I will endeavour to show that this may be the case.

### § 3. *Conclusion.*

It has been shown above that in the Greek and Prussian sanctuaries of the thunder-god the priests lived beneath the sacred tree, and that there is some reason for supposing that the same custom may once have prevailed among the Kelts, Germans, and Slavs. One might, perhaps, say “chiefs” for “priests,” for in the earliest times it is probable that the two offices were united. Such appears to have always been the case in the North,<sup>2</sup> while among the Prussians it is noteworthy that Bruteno, the legendary first high-priest, had formerly been king.

The question must now be asked: Is it necessary to suppose that the priests lived beneath the oak because it was sacred? Is it not possible that the oak acquired its sanctity from the fact that the priests lived beneath it?

According to Robertson Smith (*Religion of the Semites*,<sup>1</sup> p. 197) the oldest sanctuaries among the Phœnicians appear to have been natural or artificial caves. He explains this fact by suggesting that in this district caves were the earliest form of human habitation. Now what is likely to have been the earliest form of human habitation in the more northern parts of the continent of Europe? Over a considerable part of the area, which in the earliest historical times was occupied by Germans and Slavs, caves would not often be available. On the other hand it is known that great portions of these countries were at one time almost completely covered with forest. Is it not probable that in primitive times the inhabitants of these regions made their home under the shelter of the larger forest trees? Though this may be granted, it will, perhaps, be said that such a state of society must lie too far back in the past for any reminiscences thereof to have survived in historical times. Yet according to Erasmus Stella<sup>3</sup> the Prussians

<sup>1</sup> Cf. the Homeric phrase Ζεὺς . . . αἰθέρι ναίων (Il. ii, 412), and Adam of Bremen, iv, 26: *Thor praesidet in aere.*

<sup>2</sup> I hope to deal with this question, so far as the Germanic nations are concerned, on some future occasion.

<sup>3</sup> Grynaeus, *op. cit.*, p. 574.

had a tradition that at one time they did not build houses but protected themselves and their children from rain and cold by caves and by the bark of trees. Iordanes (c. 5) says that the Slavs inhabited forests and marshes instead of cities. The dwellings of the Germans in the first century and of the Slavs in the sixth century, as described by Tacitus and Procopius respectively, seem to have been of a somewhat primitive description. But according to Tacitus the Finns in the first century were still without houses. They slept on the ground, and their homes consisted simply of a network of boughs<sup>1</sup> with which they protected their children and old people. Now the customs of a more primitive state of society are often preserved in sacral use when the community in general has reached a higher grade of civilisation. The life of the priests at Dodona is practically identical with that ascribed by Tacitus to the Finns. It may be conjectured therefore that this manner of life was once practised by the ancestors of the Greek race in general.

The sanctity of the oak has yet to be explained. There is reason for believing that the oak was once the commonest, as well as perhaps the largest tree in the forests of northern Europe. As such it would naturally be chosen for the habitation of the primitive community and consequently of all their belongings, their animals, their guardian spirits and their tribal god.<sup>2</sup> Evergreen trees, such as the oak at Romove or the tree at Upsala, would obviously have the preference. Subsequently, when the art of building had become known, the tree-home was deserted for the purposes of ordinary dwelling, but the sanctity of old associations clung to it, and it continued to be regarded as the home of the tribal god, as Tacitus (Germ. 39) says of the grove of the Semnones: *tanquam inde initia gentis, ibi regnator omnium deus.*

Between the primitive community beneath the oak and the Prussian sanctuary at Romove an intermediate stage may be traced. Herodotus (iv, 23) relates how far to the north of the Scythians, at the foot of lofty mountains, there dwelt a race of holy men called Argippaioi, each under his own tree. This tree was uncovered in summer but in winter was surrounded with an impenetrable covering of white felt. It is interesting to observe that, like the Druids these patriarchs were not only regarded as sacred, but were also appealed to as judges in all cases of dispute. Their homes were inviolable places of asylum and, like the priests of the ancient English, they possessed no weapons of war. Does the curtained tree-dwelling of these patriarchs represent an earlier form of the type seen at Romove? If so it is a natural inference that the curtain was originally no more than a protection for the primitive community against cold and wet.

<sup>1</sup> These dwellings would presumably be somewhat similar to the rough shelters still in use among the dwarf yellow races of Equatorial and Southern Africa.

<sup>2</sup> To this is probably to be added the fact that in primitive times the acorn seems to have been a common article of food. The tradition was preserved by both Greeks and Romans, cf. Frazer, *op. cit.*, ii, p. 292, footnote, and the references there quoted.

To sum up briefly the results of this discussion, I am of opinion that the thunder-god was supposed to inhabit the oak because this had formerly been the dwelling-place of his worshippers. Originally, no doubt, he was conceived of as dwelling in the sky; but from the very close connection which exists in all primitive communities between the god and his people, it became inevitable that he should be regarded as present in the home of the community. When the community took to building and deserted the tree-home, the sanctity of old associations clung to the latter, and the god was still supposed to dwell there. This is the stage of society represented by the Germans of Tacitus' day and by the Prussians up to their conversion.<sup>1</sup> The protection of the god over the new home was obtained, in the North at all events, by the importation into it of a pillar (probably cut from a holy tree) with the image of the god carved upon it. The third and last stage was reached by the accommodation of the god in a temple built like human habitations, but with certain peculiarities which may be due to reminiscences of the grove-sanctuary. This is the stage found in the North in the last days of heathendom. The change, however, was not complete, for, in certain cases at all events, the sacred tree or grove continued to exist by the side of the more modern temple.

It may be objected to this explanation that it is in no way specially applicable to the cult of the thunder-god. Against this I would answer that the thunder-god was *the* god of the primitive European community. He is the only god whose cult is common to the Indogermanic-speaking peoples of Europe. It is probable that these peoples, like the ancient Semites (*cf.* Robertson Smith, *op. cit.*, p. 39), though they recognised the existence of many supernatural beings, were yet not polytheists in the sense that they worshipped more than one god. According to Procopius the Slavs of the sixth century had only one god, namely, the thunder-god, though they also worshipped *δαίμονια*. The same was probably also the case in the North in early times. The cult of Frö seems originally to have been peculiar to Sweden and, together with that of Njörðr, is capable of a special explanation. The worship of Othin was probably introduced at a comparatively late period. No other cult seems ever to have attained much importance in the North. According to Robertson Smith (*l.c.*) pantheons, such as the Greek, do not belong to the primitive stages of society. Each community has its god (and perhaps a goddess), its guardian spirits and tribal heroes. In the primitive European community the god seems always to have been the thunder-god.

#### DISCUSSION.

Mr. W. GOWLAND, after complimenting the author on his extremely interesting paper, called attention to several analogies between the sacredness of trees in early and later times in Europe and in the Far East—in Japan and Korea.

<sup>1</sup> It is noteworthy that the Prussians took their dead to the sacred woods, where, according to Michov, each family had a hearth specially reserved to it for cremation (Grynæus, *op. cit.*, p. 520).

In Japan in most villages there is a sacred tree, the actual tree, however, not being revered *per se*, but as the abode of some god or spirit. It was not regarded as the home of the spirit, for this is always in the sky, but merely as his terrestrial dwelling-place, where he could receive the offerings and reverence



SACRED PINE TREE IN A JAPANESE VILLAGE.

which the inhabitants of the village might wish to offer. The spirit was often held to be the peculiar guardian of the prosperity of the village, even when, as often happened, his nature was malevolent.

The tree was always encircled by a straw rope with pendants of straw or of straw and paper suspended from it resembling a fringe, as shown on p. 43. This is a perfect parallel of the curtain mentioned by the author. The offerings consisted of food and wine, frequently also of round water-worn stones, the latter being piled up around the base of the trunk.

These sacred trees belong essentially to Shintō spirits and the offerings made to them are evidently survivals of an ancient pagan cult. They are sometimes found in the immediate vicinity of a Shintō temple, and occasionally small Shintō shrines are fixed on their trunks. The tree in South and Central Japan is generally the pine (*Pinus Thunbergii*), but sometimes the camphor tree (*Cinnamomum Camphora*), not because there is any special virtue in either tree, but because they are the largest trees in the district.

In Korea he had found the same practice. The sacred tree was the largest in the neighbourhood. Its trunk was encircled by a rope with pendants of straw or of strips of rags. Heaps of water-worn stones offered by the villagers or by passing travellers were piled up at its base.

Groves of trees were not regarded as sacred in Japan, and temples were not built to resemble groves, but every important Shintō temple was erected in a grove, or in front of a clump of trees which were often of gigantic size.

Mr. G. M. ATKINSON said that he would be glad to know if there was any connection or continuity between the Gospel Oaks and the Thunder God, and why the oak leaves are worn on the 29th of May, for the popular explanation is unsatisfactory. The battle of Worcester was fought in September. He thought their structural ornamentation went far to prove the timber origin of the Temples. The ritual of the rag-bush and its connection with Northern Mythology has been explained by Mr. M. J. Walhouse; but it is Yggdrasil's ash-tree that comes in for the greatest share of its attention.