

Bowing to their Strains

The Queer Worship of Queer Peoples.



Hindu Women Sacrificing their Children to the Gods in the Ganges.

Photos from the Phila. Commercial Museum.

WHEREVER the sun shines mankind is engaged in the worship of a superior being. It may be a wooden idol such as the Maori of New Zealand carves for himself and sets up, or an embodiment of natural forces such as the River Ganges, upon whose receding tide the Hindu woman confides her infant; but whatever shape it takes, the concrete idea demands reverence.

Jamaican coolies, whose ancestors came from India, erect altars in the dark undergrowth of forests, where the mystic rites are celebrated; Orientals enthrone their deities in temples, while the Alaskan sets up his totem poles in the village streets.

Both the Chinese and the Japanese worship their ancestors. During and since the war of the latter country with Russia the attention of the world has been called to the Shintoism of the little brown men, which, with them, goes hand-in-hand with patriotism.

There are sun worshipers in Chicago, Buddhists in New York and voodooists in the Gulf States, so that even in this country people appear to be "running after strange gods." Yet the most peculiar and, at times, picturesque forms of worship are found in other lands.

NEARLY every man and woman of today read, years ago, in the school books, of the Hindu mother who committed her child to the bosom of the Ganges river, hoping, should it survive a journey on the holy waters, that it would be purified for the career to come. That was a true story. The Hindu mother is doing the same today.

With these superstitious people such a practice means sacrifice, for the river is infested with crocodiles and the chances of an infant escaping their hideous jaws are slim.

For centuries the Ganges has played an important part in Hindu mythology and religion. In the religion of all classes of Hindus—the classes in that land are almost as the sands of the seashore for number—the Ganges is held in particular veneration as the cleanser of sin and, finally, the gateway to Paradise. When death reaches one upon its banks burial is made there.

Almost from the source of the Ganges to its mouth temples and shrines line the banks; the junctions of the river's various affluents are especially sanctified spots. That of the Jumna, at Allahabad, is considered the

most sacred, and is, consequently, the most frequented place of ablutions, annually visited by thousands of pious pilgrims.

The lower sections of the river are infested with crocodiles, while tigers and other wild animals roam on the banks. Yet the Hindu mother, with blind devotion to the teachings of her religion, calmly launches her little one upon the Ganges' tide.

Of late years the British Government has taken a firm stand against this practice, although emotionally inspired women still stealthily commit their children to the waters when they are able to slip past the sentinels on the banks.

A relic, perhaps, of the same period of worship superstition, although manifest on another side of the world, are the semi-secret sacerdotal practices of the laboring classes of Jamaica.

Fearful Voodoo Rites

It is well known that the rites of voodooism are observed in Jamaica and other West Indian islands, and to some extent, among the negroes of the Southern States. Pure voodoo worship has the snake as its embodiment of deity or supernatural power. Many horrible practices, including cannibalism, have been ascribed to the followers of this faith.

In Jamaica, too, the East Indian coolie still worships the god of his native land, represented by a queer image, in front of which, book in hand, he gathers to the music of an Eastern drum.

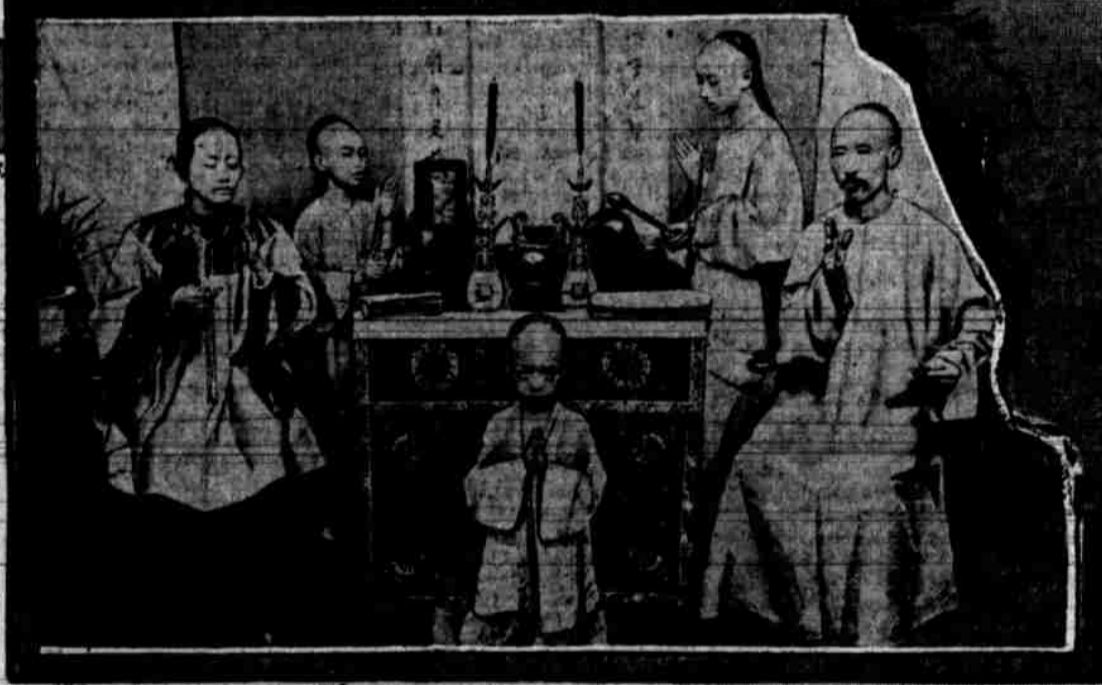
In most religious ceremonies music plays an important part. The people of Cochín-China rely upon its soothing strains almost entirely to placate their gods whom they suspect of being angry.

Upon a propitiatory occasion the inhabitants of a village assemble at the temple of the war god, which, and offer him their choicest tributes of music. Horns, flutes and various other instruments have parts in this ceremony, until the god is presumed to be satisfied and removes from the community the threat of his displeasure.

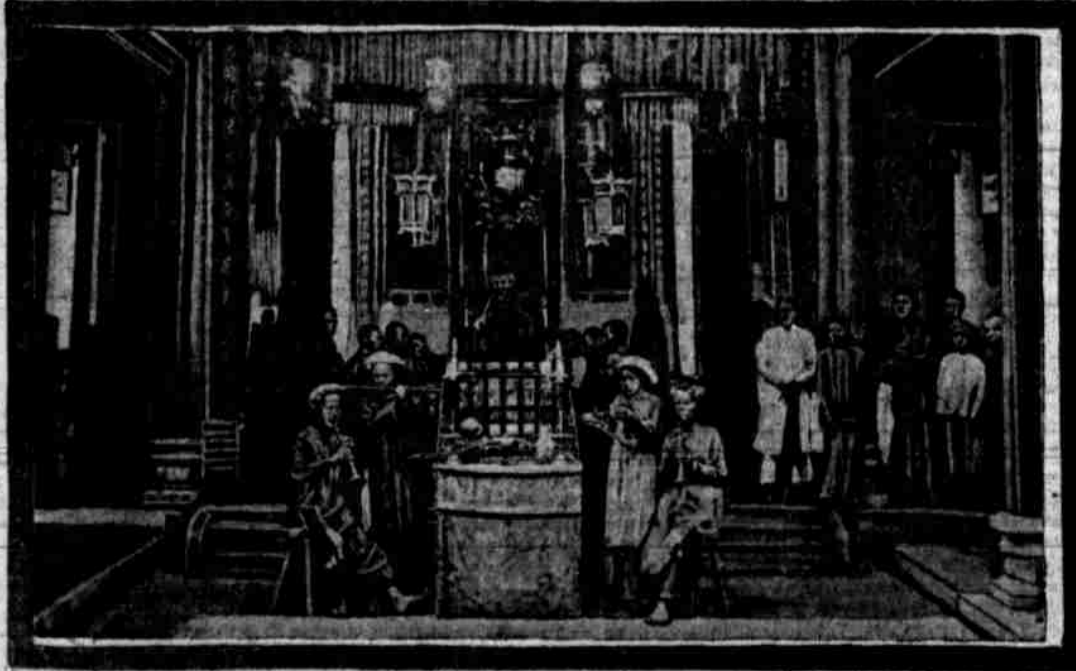
A very important part of the devotional duties of the people of Ceylon lies in humoring the war god. This deity is represented by a wooden statue of great height and ferocious aspect, kept in one of the principal temples.

Near him is the gigantic figure of a peacock, which, supposedly, is able to soar away, bearing upon its back the blessings of peace or the terrors of war.

Away off in the south seas are people who firmly believe in the gods of their own manufacture. They



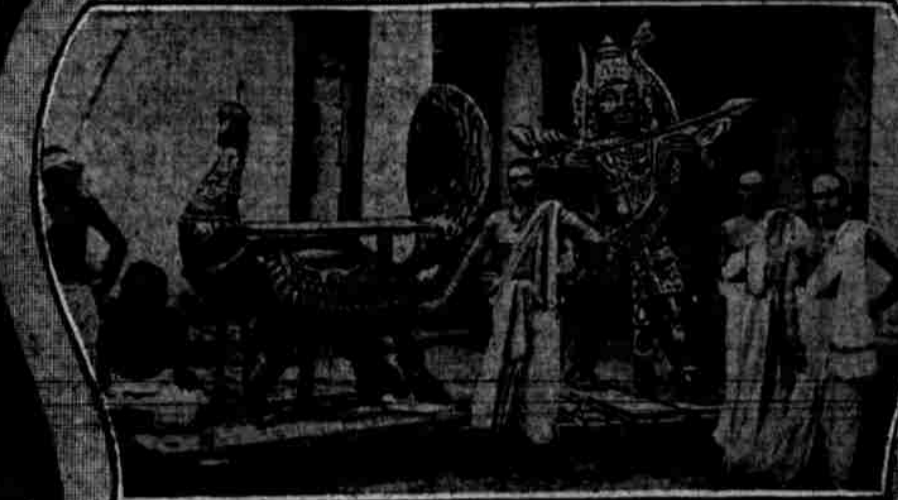
Worshipping the Shades of their Ancestors—in China.



Music to Soothe an Angry God—in Cochín, China.

are the Maoris of New Zealand and the surrounding islands. In many respects a Maori god resembles the totem dignity of the Alaskan. It is carved from a log, and occidental ideas of beauty are not respected in its construction. Those who would conciliate a neighborhood god approach it reverentially and rub their noses against its cold and unresponsive frontispiece. Maori girls often do this. It is one way they have of making an appeal for a suitable husband. In the great Buddha temples of the Orient, especially in China and Japan, one may observe worship of

that deity. An immense figure of Buddha in the temple at Hio-go, Japan, is almost continually confronted by kneeling worshippers. Both the Chinese and the Japanese worship their ancestors, too. The former people make it a more elaborate ceremony than do the islanders. When a Chinese family prepares to honor its ancestors, or to appeal to them for aid and encouragement, a special altar, more or less elaborate, is erected. Upon it candles burn, costly vessels are displayed, and sacred inscriptions surround it. Before such a shrine the entire family gathers to plead with the spirits that have gone before.



At the Shrine of the Fearsome God of War—in Japan.



Making Oblation to Buddha—Hio-go, Japan.



Coolies and their Queer God.—Jamaica.



Propitiating the Maori God Wha Karewarewa—New Zealand.

Ancestral worship is the basis of the Shinto worship of Japan, which was brought more forcibly to the attention of the world at the close of that country's war with Russia. Shintoism is simply an appeal or prayer to ancestors. The Japanese believe that the spirits of the dead are ever about them, interested in their welfare, and should, in common courtesy and respect, be told of all that transpires. Japanese Shinto altars are simple affairs. One is maintained for every household; there are others for communities, and still others for the nation at large. At the conclusion of the recent war the Japanese Emperor and his court proceeded in state to the imperial ancestral shrines at Ise and made devotion to the spirits of the ancestors of the Emperor.

Shrines Not for Show

As a rule, the shrines are simple. They include a rude wooden structure, or booth, before which strips of white paper, symbolizing purity, are hung. There is little else of external show, but the spirit of devotion is always deep and sincere.

Away up in Afghanistan is Sabzawar, one of the most peculiar religious Meccas of the world. There, on the anniversary of Mohammed's burial, Moslem believers gather to confess and expiate their sins.

It is a veritable city of torture. Penitents permit their eyes to be put out, their tongues cut off, their ears removed, and even suffer death.

Recently an American traveler saw 800 Moslems expiate their sins there. One young woman, of her own choice, was hanged, head downward, upon white-hot stones; an old robber, with hands upstretched, without resistance, was slowly tortured to death by bags of hot sand placed upon his head; another sat for a week upon sharp nails, and later died of blood poisoning.

In such ways the human mind the world over responds to religious sentiment. Many of the practices are barbaric, according to American ideas, but they are a fixed part of the plan of salvation as accepted in other lands.