

MYTHOLOGY.

The religious belief of the Polynesians reminds us of the classical mythology. There is a small number of gods of the first class, commonly not more than ten, who have various attributes. One is the creator of the islands, another the god of war, another of thieving, another the ruler of the region of departed spirits, &c. After these come a multitude of inferior deities, gods of the sea and the winds; tutelar divinities of islands, towns, and families, with malignant sprites haunting the woods, caves, and desert places, whose delight it is to torment and annoy the human race. Many of the gods are said to have been men deified after death, or sometimes, perhaps, during life. The first rulers of a country frequently received divine honours. This was the case with 'Oro at Raiatea, Tangiia at Rarotonga, and Atea at the Sandwich Islands.

With one, or perhaps two exceptions, there was no deity who was the object of worship throughout the greater part of Polynesia. The gods of Samoa were unlike those of New Zealand, nor did the latter country have the same objects of worship as the Society Islands. The eastern groups, however, (Tahiti, Rarotonga, Hawaii, &c.,) had several of their gods in common. Tane, Tu, Rongo, (Rono or Roo,) were worshipped in most of them, and appear to have been of Tahitian origin.

The exception alluded to, is in the case of *Tangaloa*, (or *Tangaroa*, *Tanaloa*, *Taaroa*,) who is worshipped in all the islands, except, perhaps, New Zealand. He is regarded as self-existent, and as the creator of the earth, or at least the islands of the sea, and of the human race. His usual epithet at Samoa is *Tangaloa langi*, heavenly Tangaloa. At Tahiti and Rarotonga he is termed *Taaroa* or *Tangaroa nui*, great Taaroa. At the little newly discovered island of Fakaafo, the natives spoke of him with great awe, as "*Tangaloa i lunga i te langi*," Tangaloa above in the heavens. At Depeyster's Group the natives at first refused to pronounce the name, and then said that Tangaloa was sacred or tabu on their island. It seems likely that this was the original deity of the Polynesians, perhaps, before they left their pristine seat in the East Indian Archipelago. In the Tongan traditions, he is represented as living at *Bulotu*, a kind of terrestrial paradise, situated far to the northwest, and sending thence his two sons to people the islands.