

The Making of Religion

Andrew Lang

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THE MAKING OF RELIGION

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SECOND EDITION
1900

_TO THE PRINCIPAL
OF THE

UNIVERSITY OF ST. ANDREWS

DEAR PRINCIPAL DONALDSON,

I hope you will permit me to lay at the feet of the University of St. Andrews, in acknowledgment of her life-long kindnesses to her old pupil, these chapters on the early History of Religion. They may be taken as representing the Gifford Lectures delivered by me, though in fact they contain very little that was spoken from Lord Gifford's chair. I wish they were more worthy of an Alma Mater which fostered in the past the leaders of forlorn hopes that were destined to triumph; and the friends of lost causes who fought bravely against Fate--Patrick Hamilton, Cargill, and Argyll, Beaton and Montrose, and Dundee.

Believe me

Very sincerely yours,

ANDREW LANG_.

* * * * *

PREFACE TO THE NEW EDITION

By the nature of things this book falls under two divisions. The first eight chapters criticise the current anthropological theory of the origins of the belief in _spirits_. Chapters ix.-xvii., again, criticise the current anthropological theory as to how, the notion of _spirit_ once attained, man arrived at the idea of a Supreme Being. These two branches of the topic are treated in most modern works concerned with the Origins of Religion, such as Mr. Tyler's "Primitive Culture," Mr. Herbert Spencer's "Principles of Sociology," Mr. Jevons's "Introduction to the History of Religion," the late Mr. Grant Allen's "Evolution of the Idea of God," and many others. Yet I have been censured for combining, in this work, the two branches of my subject; and the second part has been regarded as but faintly connected with the first.

The reason for this criticism seems to be, that while one small set of students is interested in, and familiar with the themes examined in the first part (namely the psychological characteristics of certain mental states from which, in part, the doctrine of spirits is said to have arisen), that set of students neither knows nor cares anything about the matter handled in the second part. This group of students is busied with "Psychical Research," and the obscure human faculties implied in alleged cases of hallucination, telepathy, "double personality," human automatism, clairvoyance, and so on. Meanwhile anthropological readers are equally indifferent as to that branch of psychology which examines the conditions of hysteria, hypnotic trance, "double personality," and the like. Anthropologists have not hitherto applied to the savage mental conditions, out of which, in part, the doctrine of "spirits" arose, the recent researches of French, German, and English psychologists of the new school. As to whether these researches into abnormal psychological conditions do, or do not, indicate the existence of a transcendental region of human faculty, anthropologists appear to be unconcerned. The only English exception known to me is Mr. Tylor, and his great work, "Primitive Culture," was written thirty years ago, before the modern psychological studies of Professor William James, Dr. Romaine Newbold, M. Richet, Dr. Janet, Professor Sidgwick, Mr. Myers, Mr. Gurney, Dr. Parish, and many

others had commenced.

Anthropologists have gone on discussing the trances, and visions, and so-called "demoniacal possession" of savages, as if no new researches into similar facts in the psychology of civilised mankind existed; or, if they existed, threw any glimmer of light on the abnormal psychology of savages. I have, on the other hand, thought it desirable to sketch out a study of savage psychology in the light of recent psychological research. Thanks to this daring novelty, the book has been virtually taken as two books; anthropologists have criticised the second part, and one or two Psychical Researchers have criticised the first part; each school leaving one part severely alone. Such are the natural results of a too restricted specialism.

Even to Psychical Researchers the earlier division is of scant interest, because witnesses to successful abnormal or supernormal faculty in savages cannot be brought into court and cross-examined. But I do not give anecdotes of such savage successes as evidence to facts; they are only illustrations, and evidence to beliefs and methods (as of crystal gazing and automatic utterances of "secondary personality"), which, among the savages, correspond to the supposed facts examined by Psychical Research among the civilised. I only point out, as Bastian had already pointed out, the existence of a field that deserves closer study by anthropologists who can observe savages in their homes. We need persons trained in the psychological laboratories of Europe and America, as members of anthropological expeditions. It may be noted that, in his "Letters from the South Seas," Mr. Louis Stevenson makes some curious observations, especially on a singular form of hypnotism applied to himself with fortunate results. The method, used in native medicine, was novel; and the results were entirely inexplicable to Mr. Stevenson, who had not been amenable to European hypnotic practice. But he was not a trained expert.

Anthropology must remain incomplete while it neglects this field, whether among wild or civilised men. In the course of time this will come to be acknowledged. It will be seen that we cannot really account for the origin of the belief in spirits while we neglect the scientific study of those psychical conditions, as of hallucination and the hypnotic trance, in which that belief must probably have had some, at least, of its origins.

As to the second part of the book, I have argued that the first dim surmises as to a Supreme Being need not have arisen (as on the current anthropological theory) in the notion of spirits at all. (See chapter xi.) Here I have been said to draw a mere "verbal distinction" but no distinction can be more essential. If such a Supreme Being as many savages acknowledge is not envisaged by them as a "spirit," then the theories and processes by which he is derived from a ghost of a dead man are invalid, and remote from the point. As to the origin of a belief in a kind of germinal Supreme Being (say the Australian Baiame), I do not, in this book, offer any opinion. I again and again decline to offer an opinion. Critics, none the less, have said that I attribute the belief to revelation! I shall therefore here indicate what I think probable in so obscure a field.

As soon as man had the idea of "making" things, he might conjecture as to a Maker of things which he himself had not made, and could not make. He would regard this unknown Maker as a "magnified non-natural man." These speculations appear to me to need less reflection than the long and complicated processes of thought by which Mr. Tylor believes, and probably believes with justice, the theory of "spirits" to have been evolved. (See

chapter iii.) This conception of a magnified non-natural man, who is a Maker, being given; his Power would be recognised, and fancy would clothe one who had made such useful things with certain other moral attributes, as of Fatherhood, goodness, and regard for the ethics of his children; these ethics having been developed naturally in the evolution of social life. In all this there is nothing "mystical," nor anything, as far as I can see, beyond the limited mental powers of any beings that deserve to be called human.

But I hasten to add that another theory may be entertained. Since this book was written there appeared "The Native Tribes of Central Australia," by Professor Spencer and Mr. Gillen, a most valuable study.[1] The authors, closely scrutinising the esoteric rites of the Arunta and other tribes in Central Australia, found none of the moral precepts and attributes which (according to Mr. Howitt, to whom their work is dedicated), prevail in the mysteries of the natives of New South Wales and Victoria. (See chapter x.) What they found was a belief in 'the great spirit, _Twanyirika_, ' who is believed 'by uninitiated boys and women' (but, apparently, not by adults) to preside over the cruel rites of tribal initiation.[2] No more is said, no myths about 'the great spirit' are given. He is dismissed in a brief note. Now if these ten lines contain _all_ the native lore of Twanyirika, he is a mere bugbear, not believed in (apparently) by adults, but invented by them to terrorise the women and boys. Next, granting that the information of Messrs. Spencer and Gillen is exhaustive, and granting that (as Mr. J.G. Frazer holds, in his essays in the 'Fortnightly Review,' April and May, 1899) the Arunta are the most primitive of mortals, it will seem to follow that the _moral_ attributes of Baiame and other gods of other Australian regions are later accretions round the form of an original and confessed bugbear, as among the primitive Arunta, 'a bogle of the nursery,' in the phrase repudiated by Maitland of Lethington. Though not otherwise conspicuously more civilised than the Arunta (except, perhaps, in marriage relations), Mr. Howitt's South Eastern natives will have improved the Arunta confessed 'bogle' into a beneficent and moral Father and Maker. Religion will have its origin in a tribal joke, and will have become not '_diablement_', 'but '_divinement_', '_changee en route_.' Readers of Messrs. Spencer and Gillen will see that the Arunta philosophy, primitive or not, is of a high ingenuity, and so artfully composed that it contains no room either for a Supreme Being or for the doctrine of the survival of the soul, with a future of rewards and punishments; opinions declared to be extant among other Australian tribes. There is no creator, and every soul, after death, is reincarnated in a new member of the tribe. On the other hand (granting that the brief note on Twanyirika is exhaustive), the Arunta, in their isolation, may have degenerated in religion, and may have dropped, in the case of Twanyirika, the moral attributes of Baiame. It may be noticed that, in South Eastern Australia, the Being who presides, like Twanyirika, over initiations is _not_ the supreme being, but a son or deputy of his, such as the Kurnai Tundun. We do not know whether the Arunta have, or have had and lost, or never possessed, a being superior to Twanyirika.

With regard, to all such moral, and, in certain versions, creative Beings as Baiame, criticism has taken various lines. There is the high a priori line that savage minds are incapable of originating the notion of a moral Maker. I have already said that the notion, in an early form, seems to be well within the range of any minds deserving to be called human. Next, the facts are disputed. I can only refer readers to the authorities cited. They speak for tribes in many quarters of the world, and the witnesses are laymen as well as missionaries. I am accused, again, of using a misleading rhetoric, and of thereby covertly introducing Christian or

philosophical ideas into my account of "savages guiltless of Christian teaching." As to the latter point, I am also accused of mistaking for native opinions the results of "Christian teaching." One or other charge must fall to the ground. As to my rhetoric, in the use of such words as 'Creator,' 'Eternal,' and the like, I shall later qualify and explain it. For a long discussion between myself and Mr. Sidney Hartland, involving minute detail, I may refer the reader to Folk-Lore, the last number of 1898 and the first of 1899, and to the Introduction to the new edition of my 'Myth, Ritual, and Religion' (1899).

Where relatively high moral attributes are assigned to a Being, I have called the result 'Religion;' where the same Being acts like Zeus in Greek fable, plays silly or obscene tricks, is lustful and false, I have spoken of 'Myth.' [3] These distinctions of Myth and Religion may be, and indeed are, called arbitrary. The whole complex set of statements about the Being, good or bad, sublime or silly, are equally Myths, it may be urged. Very well; but one set, the loftier set, is fitter to survive, and does survive, in what we still commonly call Religion; while the other set, the puerile set of statements, is fairly near to extinction, and is usually called Mythology. One set has been the root of a goodly tree: the other set is being lopped off, like the parasitic mistletoe.

I am arguing that the two classes of ideas arise from two separate human moods; moods as different and distinct as lust and love. I am arguing that, as far as our information goes, the nobler set of ideas is as ancient as the lower. Personally (though we cannot have direct evidence) I find it easy to believe that the loftier notions are the earlier. If man began with the conception of a powerful and beneficent Maker or Father, then I can see how the humorous savage fancy ran away with the idea of Power, and attributed to a potent being just such tricks as a waggish and libidinous savage would like to play if he could. Moreover, I have actually traced (in 'Myth, Ritual, and Religion') some plausible processes of mythical accretion. The early mind was not only religious, in its way, but scientific, in its way. It embraced the idea of Evolution as well as the idea of Creation. To one mood a Maker seemed to exist. But the institution of Totemism (whatever its origin) suggested the idea of Evolution; for men, it was held, developed out of their Totems-animals and plants. But then, on the other hand, Zeus, or Baïame, or Mungun-ngaur, was regarded as their Father. How were these contradictions to be reconciled? Easily, thus: Zeus was the Father, but, in each case, was the Father by an amour in which he wore the form of the Totem-snake, swan, bull, ant, dog, or the like. At once a degraded set of secondary erotic myths cluster around Zeus.

Again, it is notoriously the nature of man to attribute every institution to a primal inventor or legislator. Men then, find themselves performing certain rites, often of a buffooning or scandalous character; and, in origin, mainly magical, intended for the increase of game, edible plants, or, later, for the benefit of the crops. Why do they perform these rites? they ask: and, looking about, as usual, for a primal initiator, they attribute what they do to a primal being, the Corn Spirit, Demeter, or to Zeus, or to Baïame, or Manabozho, or Punjel. This is man's usual way of going back to origins. Instantly, then, a new set of parasitic myths crystallises round a Being who, perhaps, was originally moral. The savage mind, in short, has not maintained itself on the high level, any more than the facetious mediaeval myths maintained themselves, say, on the original level of the conception of the character of St. Peter, the keeper of the keys of Heaven.

All this appears perfectly natural and human, and in this, and in other ways, what we call low Myth may have invaded the higher realms of Religion: a lower invaded a higher element. But reverse the hypothesis. Conceive that Zeus, or Baiame, was originally, not a Father and guardian, but a lewd and tricky ghost of a medicine-man, a dancer of indecent dances, a wooer of other men's wives, a shape-shifter, a burlesque droll, a more jocular bugbear, like Twanyirika. By what means did he come to be accredited later with his loftiest attributes, and with regard for the tribal ethics, which, in practice, he daily broke and despised? Students who argue for the possible priority of the lowest, or, as I call them, mythical attributes of the Being, must advance an hypothesis of the concretion of the nobler elements around the original wanton and mischievous ghost.

Then let us suppose that the Arunta Twanyirika, a confessed bugbear, discredited by adults, and only invented to keep women and children in order, was the original germ of the moral and fatherly Baiame, of South Eastern Australian tribes. How, in that case, did the adults of the tribe fall into their own trap, come to believe seriously in their invented bugbear, and credit him with the superintendence of such tribal ethics as generosity and unselfishness? What were the processes of the conversion of Twanyirika? I do not deny that this theory may be correct, but I wish to see an hypothesis of the process of elevation.

I fail to frame such an hypothesis. Grant that the adults merely chuckle over Twanyirika, whose 'voice' they themselves produce; by whirling the wooden tundun, or bull-roarer. Grant that, on initiation, the boys learn that 'the great spirit' is a mere bogle, invented to mystify the women, and keep them away from the initiatory rites. How, then, did men come to believe in him as a terrible, all-seeing, all-knowing, creative, and potent moral being? For this, undeniably, is the belief of many Australian tribes, where his 'voice' (or rather that of his subordinate) is produced by whirling the tundun. That these higher beliefs are of European origin, Mr. Howitt denies. How were they evolved out of the notion of a confessed artificial bogle? I am unable to frame a theory.

From my point of view, namely, that the higher and simple ideas may well be the earlier, I have, at least, offered a theory of the processes by which the lower attributes crystallised around a conception supposed (argumenti gratia) to be originally high. Other processes of degradation would come in, as (on my theory) the creed and practice of Animism, or worship of human ghosts, often of low character, swamped and invaded the prior belief in a fairly moral and beneficent, but not originally spiritual, Being. My theory, at least, is a theory, and, rightly or wrongly, accounts for the phenomenon, the combination of the highest divine and the lowest animal qualities in the same Being. But I have yet to learn how, if the lowest myths are the earliest, the highest attributes came in time to be conferred on the hero of the lowest myths. Why, or how, did a silly buffoon, or a confessed 'bogle' arrive at being regarded as a patron of such morality as had been evolved? An hypothesis of the processes involved must be indicated. It is not enough to reply, in general, that the rudimentary human mind is illogical and confused. That is granted; but there must have been a method in its madness. What that method was (from my point of view) I have shown, and it must be as easy for opponents to set forth what, from their point of view, the method was.

We are here concerned with what, since the time of the earliest Greek philosophers, has been the crux of mythology: why are infamous myths told about 'the Father of gods and men'? We can easily explain the nature

of the myths. They are the natural flowers of savage fancy and humour. But wherefore do they crystallise round Zeus? I have, at least, shown some probable processes in the evolution.

Where criticism has not disputed the facts of the moral attributes, now attached to, say, an Australian Being, it has accounted for them by a supposed process of borrowing from missionaries and other Europeans. In this book I deal with that hypothesis as urged by Sir A.B. Ellis, in West Africa (chapter xiii.). I need not have taken the trouble, as this distinguished writer had already, in a work which I overlooked, formally withdrawn, as regards Africa, his theory of 'loan-gods.' Miss Kingsley, too, is no believer in the borrowing hypothesis for West Africa, in regard, that is, to the highest divine conception. I was, when I wrote, unaware that, especially as concerns America and Australia, Mr. Tylor had recently advocated the theory of borrowing ('Journal of Anthrop. Institute,' vol. xxi.). To Mr. Tylor's arguments, when I read them, I replied in the 'Nineteenth Century,' January 1899: 'Are Savage Gods Borrowed from Missionaries?' I do not here repeat my arguments, but await the publication of Mr. Tylor's 'Gifford Lectures,' in which his hypothesis may be reinforced, and may win my adhesion.

It may here be said, however, that if the Australian higher religious ideas are of recent and missionary origin, they would necessarily be known to the native women, from whom, in fact, they are absolutely concealed by the men, under penalty of death. Again, if the Son, or Sons, of Australian chief Beings resemble part of the Christian dogma, they much more closely resemble the Apollo and Hermes of Greece.[4] But nobody will say that the Australians borrowed them from Greek mythology!

In chapter xiv., owing to a bibliographical error of my own, I have done injustice to Mr. Tylor, by supposing him to have overlooked Strachey's account of the Virginian god Ahone. He did not overlook Ahone, but mistrusted Strachey. In an excursus on Ahone, in the new edition of 'Myth, Ritual, and Religion,' I have tried my best to elucidate the bibliography and other aspects of Strachey's account, which I cannot regard as baseless. Mr. Tylor's opinion is, doubtless, different, and may prove more persuasive. As to Australia, Mr. Howitt, our best authority, continues to disbelieve in the theory of borrowing.

I have to withdraw in chapters x. xi. the statement that 'Darumulun never died at all.' Mr. Hartland has corrected me, and pointed out that, among the Wiraijuri, a myth represents him as having been destroyed, for his offences, by Baiame. In that tribe, however, Darumulun is not the highest, but a subordinate Being. Mr. Hartland has also collected a few myths in which Australian Supreme Beings do (contrary to my statement) 'set the example of sinning.' Nothing can surprise me less, and I only wonder that, in so savage a race, the examples, hitherto collected, are so rare, and so easily to be accounted for on the theory of processes of crystallisation of myths already suggested.

As to a remark in Appendix B, Mr. Podmore takes a distinction. I quote his remark, 'the phenomena described are quite inexplicable by ordinary mechanical means,' and I contrast this, as illogical, with his opinion that a girl 'may have been directly responsible for all that took place.' Mr. Podmore replies that what was 'described' is not necessarily identical with what occurred. Strictly speaking, he is right; but the evidence was copious, was given by many witnesses, and (as offered by me) was in part contemporary (being derived from the local newspapers), so that here Mr. Podmore's theory of illusions of memory on a large scale, developed in the

five weeks which elapsed before he examined the spectators, is out of court. The evidence was of contemporary published record.

The handling of fire by Home is accounted for by Mr. Podmore, in the same chapter, as the result of Home's use of a 'non-conducting substance.' Asked, 'what substance?' he answered, 'asbestos.' Sir William Crookes, again repeating his account of the performance which he witnessed, says, 'Home took up a lump of red-hot charcoal about twice the size of an egg into his hand, on which certainly no asbestos was visible. He blew into his hands, and the flames could be seen coming out between his fingers, and he carried the charcoal round the room.' [5] Sir W. Crookes stood close beside Home. The light was that of the fire and of two candles. Probably Sir William could see a piece of asbestos, if it was covering Home's hands, which he was watching.

What I had to say, by way of withdrawal, qualification, explanation, or otherwise, I inserted (in order to seize the earliest opportunity) in the Introduction to the recent edition of my 'Myth, Ritual, and Religion' (1899). The reader will perhaps make his own kind deductions from my rhetoric when I talk, for example, about a Creator in the creed of low savages. They have no business, anthropologists declare, to entertain so large an idea. But in 'The Journal of the Anthropological Institute,' N.S. II., Nos. 1, 2, p. 85, Dr. Bennett gives an account of the religion of the cannibal Fangs of the Congo, first described by Du Chaillu. 'These anthropophagi have some idea of a God, a superior being, their Tata ("Father"), a bo mam merere ("he made all things"), Anyambi is their Tata (Father), and ranks above all other Fang gods, because a'ne yap (literally, "he lives in heaven").' This is inconsiderate in the Fangs. A set of native cannibals have no business with a creative Father who is in heaven. I say 'creative' because 'he made all things,' and (as the bowler said about a 'Yorker') 'what else can you call him?' In all such cases, where 'creator' and 'creative' are used by me, readers will allow for the imperfections of the English language. As anthropologists say, the savages simply cannot have the corresponding ideas; and I must throw the blame on people who, knowing the savages and their language, assure us that they have. This Fang Father or Tata 'is considered indifferent to the wants and sufferings of men, women, and children.' Offerings and prayers are therefore made, not to him, but to the ghosts of parents, who are more accessible. This additional information precisely illustrates my general theory, that the chief Being was not evolved out of ghosts, but came to be neglected as ghost-worship arose. I am not aware that Dr. Bennett is a missionary. Anthropologists distrust missionaries, and most of my evidence is from laymen. If the anthropological study of religion is to advance, the high and usually indolent chief Beings of savage religions must be carefully examined, not consigned to a casual page or paragraph. I have found them most potent, and most moral, where ghost-worship has not been evolved; least potent, or at all events most indifferent, where ghost-worship is most in vogue. The inferences (granting the facts) are fatal to the current anthropological theory.

The phrases 'Creator,' 'creative,' as applied to Anyambi, or Baiame, have been described, by critics, as rhetorical, covertly introducing conceptions of which savages are incapable. I have already shown that I only follow my authorities, and their translations of phrases in various savage tongues. But the phrase 'eternal,' applied to Anyambi or Baiame, may be misleading. I do not wish to assert that, if you talked to a savage about 'eternity,' he would understand what you intend. I merely mean what Mariner says that the Tongans mean as to the god Ta-li-y Tooboo. 'Of his origin they had no idea, rather supposing him to be eternal.' The savage

theologians assert no beginning for such beings (as a rule), and no end, except where Unkulunkulu is by some Zulus thought to be dead, and where the Wiraijuri declare that their Darumulun (_not_ supreme) was 'destroyed' by Baiame. I do not wish to credit savages with thoughts more abstract than they possess. But that their thought can be abstract is proved, even in the case of the absolutely 'primitive Arunta,' by their myth of the _Ungambikula_, 'a word which means "out of nothing," or "self-existing,"' say Messrs. Spencer and Gillen.[6] Once more, I find that I have spoken of some savage Beings as 'omnipresent' and 'omnipotent.' But I have pointed out that this is only a modern metaphysical rendering of the actual words attributed to the savage: 'He can go everywhere, and do everything.' As to the phrase, also used, that Baiame, for example, 'makes for righteousness,' I mean that he sanctions the morality of his people; for instance, sanctions veracity and unselfishness, as Mr. Howitt distinctly avers. These are examples of 'righteousness' in conduct. I do not mean that these virtues were impressed on savages in some supernatural way, as a critic has daringly averred that I do. The strong reaction of some early men against the cosmical process by which 'the weakest goes to the wall,' is, indeed, a curious moral phenomenon, and deserves the attention of moralists. But I never dreamed of supposing that this reaction (which extends beyond the limit of the tribe or group) had a 'supernatural' origin! It has been argued that 'tribal morality' is only a set of regulations based on the convenience of the elders of the tribe: is, in fact, as the Platonic Thrasymachus says, 'the interest of the strongest.' That does not appear to me to be demonstrated; but this is no place for a discussion of the origin of morals. 'The interest of the strongest,' and of the nomadic group, would be to knock elderly invalids on the head. But Dampier says, of the Australians, in 1688, 'Be it little, or be it much they get, every one has his part, as well the young and tender, and the old and feeble, who are not able to go abroad, as the strong and lusty.' The origin of this fair and generous dealing may be obscure, but it is precisely the kind of dealing on which, according to Mr. Howitt, the religion of the Kurnai insists (chapter x.). Thus the Being concerned does 'make for righteousness.'

With these explanations I trust that my rhetorical use of such phrases as 'eternal,' 'creative,' 'omniscient,' 'omnipotent,' 'omnipresent,' and 'moral,' may not be found to mislead, or covertly to import modern or Christian ideas into my account of the religious conceptions of savages.

As to the evidence throughout, a learned historian has informed me that 'no anthropological evidence is of any value.' If so, there can be no anthropology (in the realm of institutions). But the evidence that I adduce is from such sources as anthropologists, at least, accept, and employ in the construction of theories from which, in some points, I venture to dissent.

A.L.

[Footnote 1: Macmillans, 1899.]

[Footnote 2: Op. cit. p. 246, note.]

[Footnote 3: See the new edition of _Myth, Ritual, and Religion_, especially the new Introduction.]

[Footnote 4: See Introductions to my _Homeric Hymns_. Allen. 1899.]

[Footnote 5: _Journal S.P.R._, December 1890, p. 147.]

[Footnote 6: _Native Tribes of Central Australia_, p. 388.]

PREFACE TO THE FIRST EDITION

'The only begetter' of this work is Monsieur Lefebure, author of 'Les Yeux d'Horus,' and other studies in Egyptology. He suggested the writing of the book, but is in no way responsible for the opinions expressed.

The author cannot omit the opportunity of thanking Mr. Frederic Myers for his kindness in reading the proof sheets of the earlier chapters and suggesting some corrections of statement. Mr. Myers, however, is probably not in agreement with the author on certain points; for example, in the chapter on 'Possession.' As the second part of the book differs considerably from the opinions which have recommended themselves to most anthropological writers on early Religion, the author must say here, as he says later, that no harm can come of trying how facts look from a new point of view, and that he certainly did not expect them to fall into the shape which he now presents for criticism.

ST. ANDREWS: _April 3, 1898._

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THE MAKING OF RELIGION

I

INTRODUCTORY CHAPTER

The modern Science of the History of Religion has attained conclusions which already possess an air of being firmly established. These conclusions may be briefly stated thus: Man derived the conception of 'spirit' or 'soul' from his reflections on the phenomena of sleep, dreams, death, shadow, and from the experiences of trance and hallucination. Worshipping first the departed souls of his kindred, man later extended the doctrine of spiritual beings in many directions. Ghosts, or other spiritual existences fashioned on the same lines, prospered till they became gods. Finally, as the result of a variety of processes, one of these gods became supreme, and, at last, was regarded as the one only God. Meanwhile man retained his belief in the existence of his own soul, surviving after the death of the body, and so reached the conception of immortality. Thus the ideas of God and of the soul are the result of early fallacious reasonings about misunderstood experiences.

It may seem almost wanton to suggest the desirableness of revising a system at once so simple, so logical, and apparently so well bottomed on facts. But there can never be any real harm in studying masses of evidence from fresh points of view. At worst, the failure of adverse criticism must help to establish the doctrines assailed. Now, as we shall show, there are two points of view from which the evidence as to religion in its early stages has not been steadily contemplated. Therefore we intend to ask, first, what, if anything, can be ascertained as to the nature of the 'visions' and hallucinations which, according to Mr. Tylor in his celebrated work 'Primitive Culture,' lent their aid to the formation of the idea of 'spirit.' Secondly, we shall collect and compare the accounts which we possess of the High Gods and creative beings worshipped or believed in, by the most backward races. We shall then ask whether these relatively Supreme Beings, so conceived of by men in very rudimentary social conditions, can be, as anthropology declares, mere developments from the belief in ghosts of the dead.

We shall end by venturing to suggest that the savage theory of the soul may be based, at least in part, on experiences which cannot, at present, be made to fit into any purely materialistic system of the universe. We shall also bring evidence tending to prove that the idea of God, in its earliest known shape, need not logically be derived from the idea of spirit, however that idea itself may have been attained or evolved. The conception of God, then, need not be evolved out of reflections on dreams and 'ghosts.'

If these two positions can be defended with any success, it is obvious that the whole theory of the Science of Religion will need to be reconsidered. But it is no less evident that our two positions do not depend on each other. The first may be regarded as fantastic, or improbable, or may be 'masked' and left on one side. But the strength of the second position, derived from evidence of a different character, will not, therefore, be in any way impaired. Our first position can only be argued for by dint of evidence highly unpopular in character, and, as a general rule, condemned by modern science. The evidence is obtained by what is, at all events, a legitimate anthropological proceeding. We may

follow Mr. Tylor's example, and collect savage _beliefs_ about visions, hallucinations, 'clairvoyance,' and the acquisition of knowledge apparently not attainable through the normal channels of sense. We may then compare these savage beliefs with attested records of similar _experiences_ among living and educated civilised men. Even if we attain to no conclusion, or a negative conclusion, as to the actuality and supernormal character of the alleged experiences, still to compare data of savage and civilised psychology, or even of savage and civilised illusions and fables, is decidedly part, though a neglected part, of the function of anthropological science. The results, whether they do or do not strengthen our first position, must be curious and instructive, if only as a chapter in the history of human error. That chapter, too, is concerned with no mean topic, but with what we may call the X region of our nature. Out of that region, out of miracle, prophecy, vision, have certainly come forth the great religions, Christianity and Islam; and the great religious innovators and leaders, our Lord Himself, St. Francis, John Knox, Jeanne d'Arc, down to the founder of the new faith of the Sioux and Arapahoe. It cannot, then, be unscientific to compare the barbaric with the civilised beliefs and experiences about a region so dimly understood, and so fertile in potent influences. Here the topic will be examined rather by the method of anthropology than of psychology. We may conceivably have something to learn (as has been the case before) from the rough observations and hasty inferences of the most backward races.

We may illustrate this by an anecdote:

'The Northern Indians call the _Aurora Borealis_ "Edthin," that is "Deer." Their ideas in this respect are founded on a principle one would not imagine. Experience has shown them that when a hairy deer-skin is briskly stroked with the hand on a dark night, it will emit many sparks of electrical fire.'

So says Hearne in his 'Journey,' published in 1795 (p. 346).

This observation of the Red Men is a kind of parable representing a part of the purport of the following treatise. The Indians, making a hasty inference from a trivial phenomenon, arrived unawares at a probably correct conclusion, long unknown to civilised science. They connected the Aurora Borealis with electricity, supposing that multitudes of deer in the sky rubbed the sparks out of each other! Meanwhile, even in the last century, a puzzled populace spoke of the phenomenon as 'Lord Derwentwater's Lights.' The cosmic pomp and splendour shone to welcome the loyal Derwentwater into heaven, when he had given his life for his exiled king.

Now, my purpose in the earlier portion of this essay is to suggest that certain phenomena of human nature, apparently as trivial as the sparks rubbed out of a deer's hide in a dark night, may indicate, and may be allied to a force or forces, which, like the Aurora Borealis, may shine from one end of the heavens to the other, strangely illumining the darkness of our destiny. Such phenomena science has ignored, as it so long ignored the sparks from the stroked deer-skin, and the attractive power of rubbed amber. These trivial things were not known to be allied to the lightning, or to indicate a force which man could tame and use. But just as the Indians, by a rapid careless inference, attributed the Aurora Borealis to electric influences, so (as anthropology assures us) savages everywhere have inferred the existence of soul or spirit, intelligence that

'Does not know the bond of Time,
Nor wear the manacles of Space,'

in part from certain apparently trivial phenomena of human faculty. These phenomena, as Mr. Tylor says, 'the great intellectual movement of the last two centuries has simply thrown aside as worthless.' [1] I refer to alleged experiences, merely odd, sporadic, and, for commercial purposes, useless, such as the transference of thought from one mind to another by no known channel of sense, the occurrence of hallucinations which, *_prima facie_*, correspond coincidentally with unknown events at a distance, all that is called 'second sight,' or 'clairvoyance,' and other things even more obscure. Reasoning on these real or alleged phenomena, and on other quite normal and accepted facts of dream, shadow, sleep, trance, and death, savages have inferred the existence of spirit or soul, exactly as the Indians arrived at the notion of electricity (not so called by them, of course) as the cause of the Aurora Borealis. But, just as the Indians thought that the cosmic lights were caused by the rubbing together of crowded deer in the heavens (a theory quite childishly absurd), so the savage has expressed, in rude fantastic ways, his conclusion as to the existence of spirit. He believes in wandering separable souls of men, surviving death, and he has peopled with his dreams the whole inanimate universe.

My suggestion is that, in spite of his fantasies, the savage had possibly drawn from his premises an inference not wholly, or not demonstrably erroneous. As the sparks of the deer-skin indicated electricity, so the strange lights in the night of human nature may indicate faculties which science, till of late and in a few instances, has laughed at, ignored, 'thrown aside as worthless.'

It should be observed that I am not speaking of 'spiritualism,' a word of the worst associations, inextricably entangled with fraud, bad logic, and the blindest credulity. Some of the phenomena alluded to have, however, been claimed as their own province by 'spiritists,' and need to be rescued from them. Mr. Tylor writes:

'The issue raised by the comparison of savage, barbaric, and civilised spiritualism is this: Do the Red Indian medicine-man, the Tatar necromancer, the Highland ghost-seer, and the Boston medium, share the possession of belief and knowledge of the highest truth and import, which, nevertheless, the great intellectual movement of the last two centuries has simply thrown aside as worthless?'

Distinguo! That does not seem to me to be the issue. In my opinion the issue is: 'Have the Red Indian, the Tatar, the Highland seer, and the Boston medium (the least reputable of the menagerie) observed, and reasoned wildly from, and counterfeited, and darkened with imposture, certain genuine by-products of human faculty, which do not *_prima facie_* deserve to be thrown aside?'

That, I venture to think, is the real issue. That science may toss aside as worthless some valuable observations of savages is now universally admitted by people who know the facts. Among these observations is the whole topic of Hypnotism, with the use of suggestion for healing purposes, and the phenomena, no longer denied, of 'alternating personalities.' For the truth of this statement we may appeal to one of the greatest of Continental anthropologists, Adolf Bastian. [2] The missionaries, like Livingstone, usually supposed that the savage seer's declared ignorance--after his so-called fit of inspiration--of what occurred in that state,

was an imposture. But nobody now doubts the similar oblivion of what has passed that sometimes follows the analogous hypnotic sleep. Of a remarkable cure, which the school of the Salpetriere or Nancy would ascribe, with probable justice, to 'suggestion,' a savage example will be given later.

Savage hypnotism and 'suggestion,' among the Sioux and Arapahoe, has been thought worthy of a whole volume in the Reports of the Ethnological Bureau of the Smithsonian Institute (Washington, U.S., 1892-98). Republican Governments publish scientific matter 'regardless of expense,' and the essential points might have been put more shortly. They illustrate the fact that only certain persons can hypnotise others, and throw light on some peculiarities of *_rapport_*. [3] In brief, savages anticipated us in the modern science of experimental psychology, as is frankly acknowledged by the Society for Experimental Psychology of Berlin. 'That many mystical phenomena are much more common and prominent among savages than among ourselves is familiar to everyone acquainted with the subject. The *_ethnological_* side of our inquiry demands penetrative study.' [4]

That study I am about to try to sketch. My object is to examine some 'superstitious practices' and beliefs of savages by aid of the comparative method. I shall compare, as I have already said, the ethnological evidence for savage usages and beliefs analogous to thought-transference, coincidental hallucinations, alternating personality, and so forth, with the best attested modern examples, experimental or spontaneous. This raises the question of our evidence, which is all-important. We proceed to defend it. The savage accounts are on the level of much anthropological evidence; they may, that is, be dismissed by adversaries as 'travellers' tales.' But the best testimony for the truth of the reports as to actual belief in the facts is the undesigned coincidence of evidence from all ages and quarters. [5] When the stories brought by travellers, ancient and modern, learned and unlearned, pious or sceptical, agree in the main, we have all the certainty that anthropology can offer. Again, when we find practically the same strange neglected sparks, not only rumoured of in European popular superstition, but attested in many hundreds of depositions made at first hand by respectable modern witnesses, educated and responsible, we cannot honestly or safely dismiss the coincidence of report as indicating a mere 'survival' of savage superstitious belief, and nothing more.

We can no longer do so, it is agreed, in the case of hypnotic phenomena. I hope to make it seem possible that we should not do so in the matter of the hallucinations provoked by gazing in a smooth deep, usually styled 'crystal-gazing.' Ethnologically, this practice is at least as old as classical times, and is of practically world-wide distribution. I shall prove its existence in Australia, New Zealand, North America, South America, Asia, Africa, Polynesia, and among the Incas, not to speak of the middle and recent European ages. The universal idea is that such visions may be 'clairvoyant.' To take a Polynesian case, 'resembling the Hawaiian *_wai haru_*.' When anyone has been robbed, the priest, after praying, has a hole dug in the floor of the house, and filled with water. Then he gazes into the water, 'over which the god is supposed to place the spirit of the thief.... The image of the thief was, according to their account, reflected in the water, and being perceived by the priest, he named the individual, or the parties.' [6] Here the statement about the 'spirit' is a mere savage philosophical explanation. But the fact that hallucinatory pictures can really be seen by a fair percentage of educated Europeans, in water, glass balls, and so forth, is now confirmed by frequent experiment, and accepted by opponents, 'non-mystical writers,'

like Dr. Parish of Munich.[7] I shall bring evidence to suggest that the visions may correctly reflect, as it were, persons and places absolutely unknown to the gazer, and that they may even reveal details unknown to every one present. Such results among savages, or among the superstitious, would be, and are, explained by the theory of 'spirits.' Modern science has still to find an explanation consistent with recognised laws of nature, but 'spirits' we shall not invoke.

In the same way I mean to examine all or most of the 'so-called mystical phenomena of savage life.' I then compare them with the better vouched for modern examples. To return to the question of evidence, I confess that I do not see how the adverse anthropologist, psychologist, or popular agnostic is to evade the following dilemma: To the anthropologist we say, 'The evidence we adduce is your own evidence, that of books of travel in all lands and countries. If you may argue from it, so may we. Some of it is evidence to unusual facts, more of it is evidence to singular beliefs, which we think not necessarily without foundation. As raising a presumption in favour of that opinion, we cite examples in which savage observations of abnormal and once rejected facts, are now admitted by science to have a large residuum of truth, we argue that what is admitted in some cases may come to be admitted in more. No a priori line can here be drawn.'

To the psychologist who objects that our modern instances are mere anecdotes, we reply by asking, 'Dear sir, what are your modern instances? What do you know of "Mrs. A.," whom you still persistently cite as an example of morbid recurrent hallucinations? Name the German servant girl who, in a fever, talked several learned languages, which she had heard her former master, a scholar, declaim! Where did she live? Who vouches for her, who heard her, who understood her? There is, you know, no evidence at all; the anecdote is told by Coleridge: the phenomena are said by him to have been observed "in a Roman Catholic town in Germany, a year or two before my arrival at Goettingen.... Many eminent physiologists and psychologists visited the town." Why do you not name a few out of the distinguished crowd?'[8] This anecdote, a rumour of a rumour of a Protestant explanation of a Catholic marvel, was told by Coleridge at least twenty years after the possible date. The psychologists copy it,[9] one after the other, as a flock of sheep jump where their leader has jumped. An example by way of anecdote may be permitted.

According to the current anthropological theory, the idea of soul or spirit was suggested to early men by their experiences in dreams. They seemed, in sleep, to visit remote places; therefore, they argued, something within them was capable of leaving the body and wandering about.

This something was the soul or spirit. Now it is obvious that this opinion of early men would be confirmed if they ever chanced to acquire, in dreams, knowledge of places which they had never visited, and of facts as to which, in their waking state, they could have no information. This experience, indeed, would suggest problems even To Mr. Herbert Spencer, if it occurred to him.

Conversing on this topic with a friend of acknowledged philosophical eminence, I illustrated my meaning by a story of a dream. It was reported to me by the dreamer, with whom I am well acquainted, was of very recent occurrence, and was corroborated by the evidence of another person, to whom the dream was narrated, before its fulfilment was discovered. I am not at liberty to publish the details, for good reasons, but the essence of the matter was this: A. and B. (the dreamer) had common interests. A.

had taken certain steps about which B. had only a surmise, and a vague one, that steps had probably been taken. A. then died, and B. in an extremely vivid dream (a thing unfamiliar to him) seemed to read a mass of unknown facts, culminating in two definite results, capable of being stated in figures. These results, by the very nature of the case, could not be known to A., so that, before he was placed out of B.'s reach by death, he could not have stated them to him, and, afterwards, had assuredly no means of doing so.

The dream, two days after its occurrence, and after it had been told to C., proved to be literally correct. Now I am not asking the reader's belief for this anecdote (for that could only be yielded in virtue of knowledge of the veracity of B. and C.), but I invite his attention to the psychological explanation. My friend suggested that A. had told B. all about the affair, that B. had not listened (though his interests were vitally concerned), and that the crowd of curious details, naturally unfamiliar to B., had reposed in his subconscious memory, and had been revived in the dream.

Now B.'s dream was a dream of reading a mass of minute details, including names of places entirely unknown to him. It may be admitted, in accordance with the psychological theory, that B. might have received all this information from A., but, by dint of inattention--'the malady of not marking'--might never have been consciously aware of what he heard. Then B.'s subconscious memory of what he did not consciously know might break upon him in his dream. Instances of similar mental phenomena are not uncommon. But the general result of the combined details was one which could not possibly be known to A. before his death; nor to B. could it be known at all. Yet B.'s dream represented this general result with perfect accuracy, which cannot be accounted for by the revival of subconscious memory in sleep. Neither asleep nor awake can a man remember what it is impossible for him to have known. The dream contained no prediction for the results were now fixed; but (granting the good faith of the narrator) the dream did contain information not normally accessible.

However, by way of psychological explanation of the dream, my friend cited Coleridge's legend, as to the German girl and her unconscious knowledge of certain learned languages. 'And what is the evidence for the truth of Coleridge's legend?' Of course, there is none, or none known to all the psychologists who quote it from Coleridge. Neither, if true, was the legend to the point. However, psychology will accept such unauthenticated narratives, and yet will scoff at first hand, duly corroborated testimony from living and honourable people, about recent events.

Only a great force of prejudice can explain this acceptance, by psychologists, of one kind of marvellous tale on no evidence, and this rejection of another class of marvellous tale, when supported by first hand, signed and corroborated evidence, of living witnesses. I see only one escape for psychologists from this dilemma. Their marvellous tales are possible, though unvouched for, because they have always heard them and repeated them in lectures, and read and repeated them in books. Our marvellous tales are impossible, because the psychologists know that they are impossible, which means that they have not been familiar with them, from youth upwards, in lectures and manuals. But man has no right to have 'clear ideas of the possible and impossible,' like Faraday, a priori, except in the exact sciences. There are other instances of weak evidence which satisfies psychologists.

Hamilton has an anecdote, borrowed from Monboddo, who got it from Mr. Hans

Stanley, who, 'about twenty-six years ago,' heard it from the subject of the story, Madame de Laval. 'I have the memorandum somewhere in my papers,' says Mr. Stanley, vaguely. Then we have two American anecdotes by Dr. Flint and Mr. Rush; and such is Sir William Hamilton's equipment of odd facts for discussing the unconscious or subconscious. The least credible and worst attested of these narratives still appears in popular works on psychology. Moreover, all psychology, except experimental psychology, is based on anecdotes which people tell about their own subjective experiences. Mr. Galton, whose original researches are well known, even offered rewards in money for such narratives about visualised rows of coloured figures, and so on.

Clearly the psychologist, then, has no *_prima facie_* right to object to our anecdotes of experiences, which he regards as purely subjective. As evidence, we only accept them at first hand, and, when possible, the witnesses have been cross-examined personally. Our evidence then, where it consists of travellers' tales, is on a level with that which satisfies the anthropologist. Where it consists of modern statements of personal experience, our evidence is often infinitely better than much which is accepted by the nonexperimental psychologist. As for the agnostic writer on the Non-Religion of the Future, M. Guyau actually illustrates the Resurrection of our Lord by an American myth about a criminal, of whom a hallucinatory phantasm appeared to each of his gaol companions, separately and successively, on a day after his execution! For this prodigious fable no hint of reference to authority is given.[10] Yet the evidence appears to satisfy M. Guyau, and is used by him to reinforce his argument.

The anthropologist and psychologist, then, must either admit that their evidence is no better than ours, if as good, or must say that they only believe evidence as to 'possible' facts. They thus constitute themselves judges of what is possible, and practically regard themselves as omniscient. Science has had to accept so many things once scoffed at as 'impossible,' that this attitude of hers, as we shall show in chapter ii., ceases to command respect.

My suggestion is that the trivial, rejected, or unheeded phenomena vouched for by the evidence here defended may, not inconceivably, be of considerable importance. But, stating the case at the lowest, if we are only concerned with illusions and fables, it cannot but be curious to note their persistent uniformity in savage and civilised life.

To make the first of our two main positions clear, and in part to justify ourselves in asking any attention for such matters, we now offer an historical sketch of the relations between Science and the so-called 'Miraculous' in the past.

[Footnote 1: *_Primitive Culture_*, i. 156. London, 1891.]

[Footnote 2: *_Ueber psychische Beobachtungen bei Naiurvuelkern_*. Leipzig, Gunther, 1890.]

[Footnote 3: See especially pp. 922-926. The book is interesting in other ways, and, indeed, touching, as it describes the founding of a new Red Indian religion, on a basis of Hypnotism and Christianity.]

[Footnote 4: Programme of the Society, p. iv.]

[Footnote 5: Tylor, *_Primitive Culture_*, i, 9, 10.]

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