

A Study of Primitive Religion.

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Fundamental Forms of Religion.

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Ghosts.

Legends.

2. Fetichism.

Fetich.

Knids.

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Fixed object of fancy.

Purpose.

3. Nature Worship.

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Animals.

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4. Shamanism.

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5. Idolatry.

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Conclusion.

Man is naturally religious.

Man feels the need of support.

Mind attempts to explain

mysteries.

The soul yearns for the Infinite.

A Study of Primitive Religion.

The original meaning of religion is that of "binding fast the human mind to a sense of the obligation which it owes to supernatural powers."

We find in the primitive history of all nations a religion, that is a conscious relation between man and some higher power and the manifestation of that relation in human conduct.

The oldest religion of all nations is mythology which represents the earliest attempt of the mind to account for the mysteries of the world. For man in his most primitive stage had too weak an understanding to enable him to attain at once to a clear and definite conception of a deity. He knew nothing about laws, nothing about physical forces, and nothing about the relation of cause to effect. In his total

ignorance of cause he wondered at everything and tried to get the meaning of life by what he could hear, see, and feel. He had developed no reasoning faculties, and had not learned to observe and draw conclusions. He had only his fancies and beliefs and these often lead him far from the truth, for in primitive times there was no check upon fancy. In the absence of all such literature as the present day affords, the savages only information was what his associates could tell him, and this in turn he told. Being ignorant, uncultured, and a creature of great nervous susceptibility this acceptance of ideas without reasoning was an easy matter and the only thing at that stage that could be expected. A story

of obscure origin thus told and retold gives rise to a legend or myth, the chief characteristic of which is simply what people have always heard tell: A collection of these myths constitutes one phase of mythology.

The prominent form of religion in this myth making stage is a dread of ghosts and a fear of malignant spirits. The savage gets the idea of a spirit as distinct from the body from sleep and dreams. He asks himself what happens to the spirit during sleep. As the body lies, as it were, lifeless he naturally thinks that the spirit has left it. In this he seems to find proof in the phenomena of dreams which are

very real and important to him. During sleep the spirit seems to leave the body, as in dreams other lands and perhaps distant friends and even other worlds are visited. Hence primitive man considered the events that take place in his dreams as real as those of his waking hours. As a result he comes to feel that he has a spirit that is independent of and can leave the body, and go to other worlds. This world he calls the spirit world. This spirit world is then the first conception of our modern idea of heaven. Again, when primitive man dreams that his departed friends visit him he thinks that

their spirit has visited him and therefore must survive the body. Any event he does not understand he attributes to spirits. Hence the cause of an epidemic is attributed to a malignant spirit and not to imperfect drainage and foul air. Likewise internal pain is thought to be due to internal demons. On the other hand ghosts were supposed to be souls without bodies yet beings who were endowed with the sense of hearing and seeing and who could love hate and remember. In short they were men without bodies who could appear and disappear without notice. This belief is universal among savages.

Thus the most primitive type of religion is a belief in a soul which exists after death and a spirit world from which souls can return to earth. This belief comes wholly from within.

We will pass now to what may be considered the second stage in religious development.

Fetichism.

Fetichism means to "make by art." It is a form of belief by which supernatural attributes are ascribed to material objects, especially those of artificial character. The practice includes sorcery with ceremonies and observances of various kinds. A fetich may be some fixed object of nature as some lofty mountain, grove, or tree, or it may be an animal.

or it may be some object that has appealed to the fancy, as the beak of a bird or the fin of a fish, etc. It is not infrequently a figure carved or molded from wood, clay, or stone. Almost anything that can be mentioned will answer the purpose if the worshipper can believe that his God resides therein, and this he is easily lead to do if the fetich pleases or is useful to him. The savage thinks he can control his Deity by means of his fetich. The fetich may be worn about the neck or attached to the clothing or hung up in the hut. Superstition leads to many absurd and disgusting uses of the fetich. From this crude conception of Fetichism religion

develops into nature worship.

Nature Worship.

Nature worship is the worship of natural objects such as the moon and stars, trees, lakes, animals etc. Man began to realize that by means of his fetich he could not command divine service, that the Deity was beyond his control. Yet that there was a divine power he saw ever increasing evidence in the many daily occurrences that were not subject to his will or control. He saw that there is a higher power that caused the sun to rise each morning and called this power the "God of Light," that there was another power which caused the rain to fall, "The God of Wind and Storm" etc.

Thunder was thought to be a voice from heaven. Plants shooting out of the earth were considered the work of Gods and worshipped. The worship of serpents was also quite prevalent. The worship of animals probably originated from the custom of naming children after particular animals from lack of other names to give them. This led to an interest in animals which gradually developed into a feeling of worship. While in Fetishism the gods were non-human in nature. Worship they attained to a somewhat higher conception and are superhuman but not yet creators — only a part of nature.

The next stage in religious progress is Shamanism.

Shamanism.

Shamanism is a belief in sorcery and a conciliation of evil demons by sacrifice and frantic motions of the body. The priests are either men or women married or single. The character is acquired by pretending that the spirit of the deceased has come to them in a dream and appointed them his successor. The followers of Shamanism have neither altars nor idols but hold their meetings in huts raised on an open space in a forest or on a hill side. The time for holding these meetings is not fixed but births, sickness, marriage, any uncommon atmospheric occurrence or public calamity are usually the occasions which call for them.

When a meeting is called the people and priests assemble at the hut, the priests enter chanting certain words and performing certain customs after which the animal to be sacrificed is killed and eaten by those present. In Shaman religion the deities live in a world of their own, and have little communion with those here. The Shamans however are occasionally honored by a visit from them or are allowed to visit the heavenly regions.

Idolatry.

The next stage of religious development is idolatry in which the Gods take still more completely the nature of man, but are more powerful. As in former stages they are still a part of nature and not creators.

Idolatry is "any worship paid to any other than the supreme being as conceived by Judaism, Christianity or Islamism." The tendency of Idolators is to invest material things with magical virtue. A Savage who by chance has always been successful when hunting with a certain weapon soon believes it possesses a particular virtue. He extends this belief to his other belongings, which are supposed to bring luck, and also to human images. These images are supposed to represent a deity and are adored as such. Idolators of all nations try to please their divinity by sacrifice and may punish it when their prayers are not answered. These images are supposed to possess more than human powers. When an

Idolator is wounded he expects the image to repair the injury. Thus Idolatry, as the forms of religion previously considered, is an attempt to furnish some evidence of the powers upon which man feels himself so dependent.

Later, when man has attained to a more advanced mental condition and includes faith as well as feeling, belief as well as mystery, he first conceived the Deity as a being similar to himself but more wise and powerful. It is upon this conception that modern religions are based.

Thus we trace the beginnings and early growth in the development of religious thought. Correl with the lowest type of civilization we find the lowest type of religion and trace in a gradual evolution of the one a gradual

evolution of the other. The early fears and superstitions gave place as civilization moved onward to a larger, nobler and more reasonable faith. At first vague and incomprehensive, religion develops thru the various stages into something definite and precise.

Of all ideas that that in any way influence the mind and actions of man there is none so influential and universal as those of religion. This leads us to conclude that man is naturally religious. The first manifestation of this tendency had its origin in the attempt to explain the mysteries of the universe. The workings of nature's forces impress in a powerful manner the mind of the simple savage and there is

aroused in him vague wonderings. He sees misfortune befall some while others are excluded. He naturally tries to find or invent the charm that will be for him a protection, that will ward off danger, and possibly bring discomfort to his enemies. Then man is a dependent being. He has a feeling of weakness, and the pressing need of some support leads him to look to God as the only available source of strength. Lastly, man is conscious of an inherent religious impulse which spontaneously manifests itself in some way throughout life. The language of the soul early lead to acts of worship, and

reverence. Hence the "grand duty of human life felt as such in all nations is to know God truly and serve him acceptably".

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