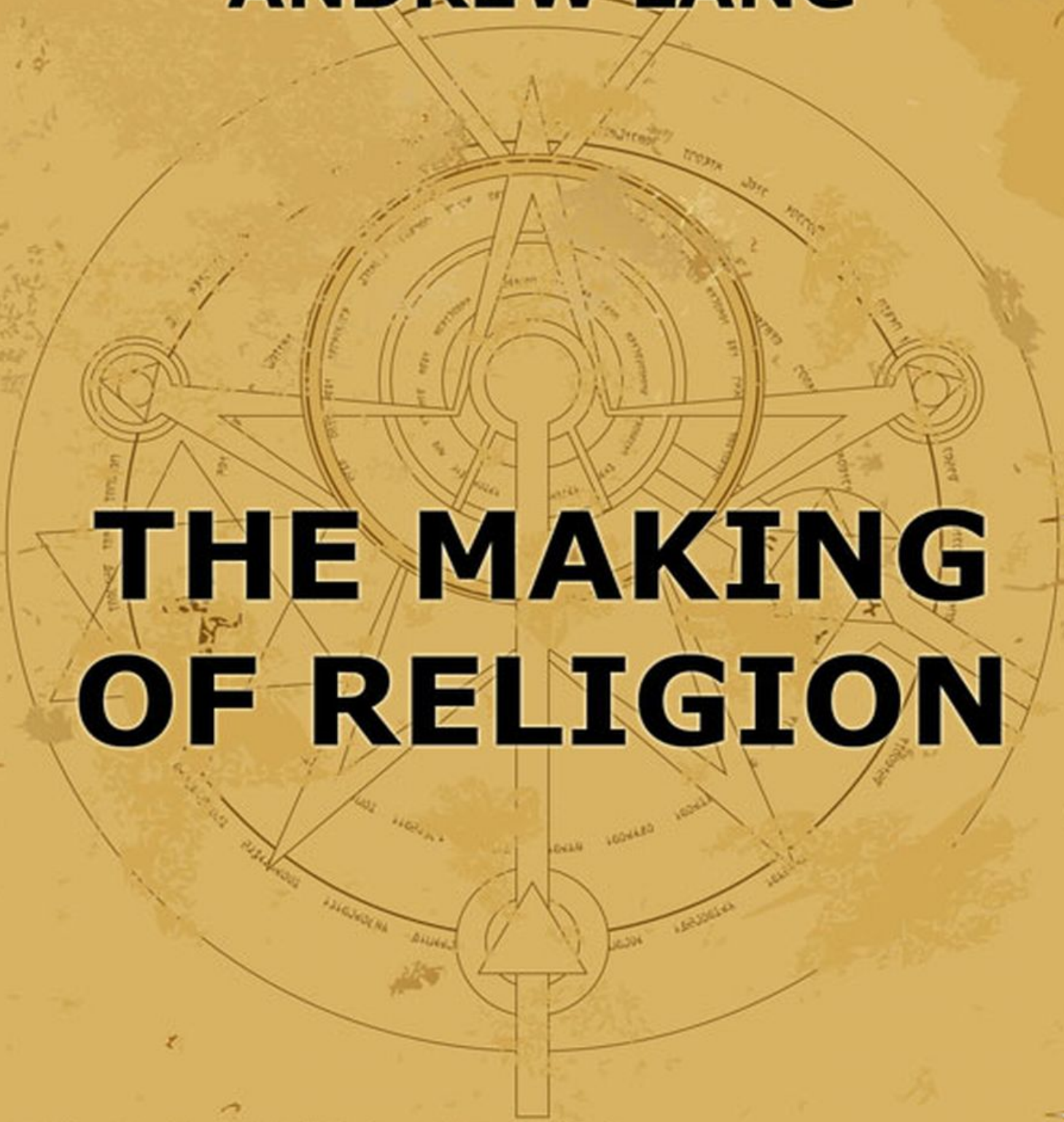
ANDREW LANG



THE MAKING OF RELIGION

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The Making Of Religion

Andrew Lang

Contents:

The Making Of Religion, A. Lang
Jazzybee Verlag Jürgen Beck
86450 Altenmünster, Germany

ISBN: 9783849622572

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ANDREW LANG (1844-1912)

Biographical Sketch from "Portraits And Sketches" by Edmund Gosse

INVITED to note down some of my recollections of Andrew Lang, I find myself suspended between the sudden blow of his death and the slow development of memory, now extending in unbroken friendship over thirty-five years. The magnitude and multitude of Lang's performances, public and private, during that considerable length of time almost paralyse expression; it is difficult to know where to begin or where to stop. Just as his written works are so extremely numerous as to make a pathway through them a formidable task in bibliography, no one book standing out predominant, so his character, intellectual and moral, was

full -of so many apparent inconsistencies, so many pitfalls for rash assertion, so many queer caprices of impulse, that in a whole volume of analysis, which would be tedious, one could scarcely do justice to them all. I will venture to put down, almost at haphazard, what I remember that seems to me to have been overlooked, or inexactly stated, by those who wrote, often very sympathetically, at the moment of his death, always premising that I speak rather of a Lang of from 1877 to 1890, when I saw him very frequently, than of a Lang whom younger people met chiefly in Scotland.

When he died, all the newspapers were loud in proclaiming his "versatility." But I am not sure that he was not the very opposite of versatile. I take "versatile" to mean changeable, fickle, constantly ready to alter direction with the weather-cock. The great instance of versatility in literature is Ruskin, who adopted diametrically different views of the same subject at different times of his life, and defended them with equal ardour. To be versatile seems to be unsteady, variable. But Lang was through his long career singularly unaltered; he never changed his point of view; what he liked and admired as a youth he liked and admired as an elderly man. It is true that his interests and knowledge were vividly drawn along a surprisingly large number of channels, but while there was abundance there does not seem to me to have been versatility. If a huge body of water boils up from a crater, it may pour down a dozen paths, but these will always be the same; unless there is an earthquake, new cascades will not form nor old rivulets run dry. In some authors earthquakes do take place as in Tolstoy, for instance, and in S. T. Coleridge but nothing of this kind was ever manifest in Lang, who was extraordinarily multiform, yet in his varieties strictly consistent from Oxford to the grave. As this is not generally perceived, I will take the liberty of expanding my view of his intellectual development.

To a superficial observer in late life the genius of Andrew Lang had the characteristics which we are in the habit of identifying with precocity. Yet he had not been, as a writer, precocious in his youth. One slender volume of verses represents all that he published in book-form before his thirty-fifth year. No doubt we shall learn in good time what he was doing before he flashed upon the world of journalism in all his panoply of graces, in 1876, at the close of his Merton fellowship. He was then, at all events, the finest finished product of his age, with the bright armour of Oxford burnished on his body to such a brilliance that humdrum eyes could hardly bear the radiance of it. Of the terms behind, of the fifteen years then dividing him from St. Andrews, we know as yet but little; they were years of insatiable acquirement, incessant reading, and talking, and observing gay preparation for a life to be devoted, as no other life in our time has been, to the stimulation of other people's observation and talk and reading. There was no cloistered virtue about the bright and petulant Merton don. He was already flouting and jesting, laughing with Ariosto in the sunshine, performing with a snap of his fingers tasks which might break the back of a pedant, and concealing under an affectation of carelessness a literary ambition which knew no definite bounds.

In those days, and when he appeared for the first time in London, the poet was paramount in him. Jowett is said to have predicted that he would be greatly famous in this line, but I know not what evidence Jowett had before him. Unless I am much mistaken, it was not until Lang left Balliol that his peculiar bent became obvious. Up to that time he had been a promiscuous browser upon books, much occupied, moreover, in the struggle with ancient Greek, and immersed in Aristotle and Homer. But in the early days of his settlement at Merton he began to concentrate his

powers, and I think there were certain influences which were instant and far-reaching. Among them one was pre-eminent. When Andrew Lang came up from St. Andrews he had found Matthew Arnold occupying the ancient chair of poetry at Oxford. He was a listener at some at least of the famous lectures which, in 1865, were collected as "Essays in Criticism"; while one of his latest experiences as a Balliol undergraduate was hearing Matthew Arnold lecture on the study of Celtic literature. His conscience was profoundly stirred by "Culture and Anarchy" (1869); his sense of prose-form largely determined by "Friendship's Garland" (1871). I have no hesitation in saying that the teaching and example of Matthew Arnold prevailed over all other Oxford influences upon the intellectual nature of Lang, while, although I think that his personal acquaintance with Arnold was very slight, yet in his social manner there was, in early days, not a little imitation of Arnold's aloofness and superfine delicacy of address. It was unconscious, of course, and nothing would have enraged Lang more than to have been accused of "imitating Uncle Matt."

The structure which his own individuality now began to build on the basis supplied by the learning of Oxford, and in particular by the study of the Greeks, and "dressed" by courses of Matthew Arnold, was from the first eclectic. Lang eschewed as completely what was not sympathetic to him as he assimilated what was attractive to him. Those who speak of his "versatility" should recollect what large tracts of the literature of the world, and even of England, existed outside the dimmest apprehension of Andrew Lang. It is, however, more useful to consider what he did apprehend; and there were two English books, published in his Oxford days, which permanently impressed him: one of these was "The Earthly Paradise," the other D. G. Rossetti's " Poems." In after years he tried to divest himself of the

traces of these volumes, but he had fed upon their honey-dew and it had permeated his veins.

Not less important an element in the garnishing of a mind already prepared for it by academic and aesthetic studies was the absorption of the romantic part of French literature. Andrew Lang in this, as in everything else, was selective. He dipped into the wonderful lucky-bag of France wherever he saw the glitter of romance. Hence his approach, in the early seventies, was threefold: towards the mediaeval *lais* and *chansons*, towards the sixteenth-century Pleiade, and towards the school of which Victor Hugo was the leader in the nineteenth century. For a long time Ronsard was Lang's poet of intensest predilection; and I think that his definite ambition was to be the Ronsard of modern England, introducing a new poetical dexterity founded on a revival of pure humanism. He had in those days what he lost, or at least dispersed, in the weariness and growing melancholia of later years a splendid belief in poetry as a part of the renown of England, as a heritage to be received in reverence from our fathers, and to be passed on, if possible, in a brighter flame. This honest and beautiful ambition to shine as one of the permanent benefactors to national verse, in the attitude so nobly sustained four hundred years ago by Du Bellay and Ronsard, was unquestionably felt by Andrew Lang through his bright intellectual April, and supported him from Oxford times until 1882, when he published " Helen of Troy." The cool reception of that epic by the principal judges of poetry caused him acute disappointment, and from that time forth he became less eager and less serious as a poet, more and more petulantly expending his wonderful technical gift on fugitive subjects. And here again, when one comes to think of it, the whole history repeated itself, since in " Helen of Troy " Lang simply suffered as Ronsard had done in the "Franciade." But the fact that 1882 was his year of crisis,

and the tomb of his brightest ambition, must be recognised by every one who closely followed his fortunes at that time. Lang's habit of picking out of literature and of life the plums of romance, and these alone, comes to be, to the dazzled observer of his extraordinarily vivid intellectual career, the principal guiding line. This determination to dwell, to the exclusion of all other sides of any question, on its romantic side is alone enough to rebut the charge of versatility. Lang was in a sense encyclopaedic; but the vast dictionary of his knowledge had blank pages, or pages pasted down, on which he would not, or could not, read what experience had printed. Absurd as it sounds, there was always something maidenly about his mind, and he glossed over ugly matters, sordid and dull conditions, so that they made no impression whatever upon him. He had a trick, which often exasperated his acquaintances, of declaring that he had " never heard " of things that everybody else was very well aware of. He had " never heard the name " of people he disliked, of books that he thought tiresome, of events that bored him; but, more than this, he used the formula for things and persons whom he did not wish to discuss. I remember meeting in the street a famous professor, who advanced with uplifted hands, and greeted me with " What do you think Lang says now? That he has never heard of Pascal! " This merely signified that Lang, not interested (at all events for the moment) in Pascal nor in the professor, thus closed at once all possibility of discussion.

It must not be forgotten that we have lived to see him, always wonderful indeed, and always passionately devoted to perfection and purity, but worn, tired, harassed by the unceasing struggle, the lifelong slinging of sentences from that inexhaustible ink-pot. In one of the most perfect of his poems, " Natural Theology," Lang speaks of Cagn, the great hunter, who once was kind and good, but who was spoiled

by fighting many things. Lang was never " spoiled," but he was injured; the surface of the radiant coin was rubbed by the vast and interminable handling of journalism. He was jaded by the toil of writing many things. Hence it is not possible but that those who knew him intimately in his later youth and early middle-age should prefer to look back at those years when he was the freshest, the most exhilarating figure in living literature, when a star seemed to dance upon the crest of his already silvering hair. Baudelaire exclaimed of Theophile Gautier: " Homme heureux! homme digne d'envie! il n'a jamais aimé que le Beau!" and of Andrew Lang in those brilliant days the same might have been said. As long as he had confidence in beauty he was safe and strong; and much that, with all affection and all respect, we must admit was rasping and disappointing in his attitude to literature in his later years, seems to have been due to a decreasing sense of confidence in the intellectual sources of beauty. It is dangerous, in the end it must be fatal, to sustain the entire structure of life and thought on the illusions of romance. But that was what Lang did he built his house upon the rainbow.

The charm of Andrew Lang's person and company was founded upon a certain lightness, an essential gentleness and elegance which were relieved by a sharp touch; just as a very dainty fruit may be preserved from mawkishness by something delicately acid in the rind of it. His nature was slightly inhuman; it was unwise to count upon its sympathy beyond a point which was very easily reached in social intercourse. If any simple soul showed an inclination, in eighteenth-century phrase, to " repose on the bosom " of Lang, that support was immediately withdrawn, and the confiding one fell among thorns. Lang was like an Angora cat, whose gentleness and soft fur, and general aspect of pure amenity, invite to caresses, which are suddenly met by

the outspread paw with claws awake. This uncertain and freakish humour was the embarrassment of his friends, who, however, were preserved from despair by the fact that no malice was meant, and that the weapons were instantly sheathed again in velvet. Only, the instinct to give a sudden slap, half in play, half in fretful caprice, was incorrigible. No one among Lang's intimate friends but had suffered from this feline impulse, which did not spare even the serenity of Robert Louis Stevenson. But, tiresome as it sometimes was, this irritable humour seldom cost Lang a friend who was worth preserving. Those who really knew him recognised that he was always shy and usually tired.

His own swift spirit never brooded upon an offence, and could not conceive that any one else should mind what he himself minded so little and forgot so soon. Impressions swept over him very rapidly, and injuries passed completely out of his memory. Indeed, all his emotions were too fleeting, and in this there was something fairy-like; quick and keen and blithe as he was, he did not seem altogether like an ordinary mortal, nor could the appeal to gross human experience be made to him with much chance of success. This, doubtless, is why almost all imaginative literature which is founded upon the darker parts of life, all squalid and painful tragedy, all stories that " don't end well" all religious experiences, all that is not superficial and romantic, was irksome to him. He tried sometimes to reconcile his mind to the consideration of real life; he concentrated his matchless powers on it; but he always disliked it. He could persuade himself to be partly just to Ibsen or Hardy or Dostoieffsky, but what he really enjoyed was Dumas pêre, because that fertile romance-writer rose serene above the phenomena of actual human experience. We have seen more of this type in English literature than the Continental nations have in theirs, but even we have seen no instance of its strength and weakness so eminent

as Andrew Lang. He was the fairy in our midst, the wonder-working, incorporeal, and tricksy fay of letters, who paid for all his wonderful gifts and charms by being not quite a man of like passions with the rest of us. In some verses which he scribbled to R.L.S. and threw away, twenty years ago, he acknowledged this unearthly character, and, speaking of the depredations of his kin, he said:

Faith, they might steal me, w? ma will,
And, ken'd I ony fairy hill
I#d lay me down there, snod and still,
Their land to win;
For, man, I maistly had my fill
O' this world's din

His wit had something disconcerting in its impishness. Its rapidity and sparkle were dazzling, but it was not quite human; that is to say, it conceded too little to the exigencies of flesh and blood. If we can conceive a seraph being fanny, it would be in the manner of Andrew Lang. Moreover, his wit usually danced over the surface of things, and rarely penetrated them. In verbal parry, in ironic misunderstanding, in breathless agility of topsy-turvy movement, Lang was like one of Milton's " yellow-skirted fays," sporting with the helpless, moon-bewildered traveller. His wit often had a depressing, a humiliating effect, against which one's mind presently revolted. I recollect an instance which may be thought to be apposite: I was passing through a phase of enthusiasm for Emerson, whom Lang very characteristically detested, and I was so ill-advised as to show him the famous epigram called " Brahma." Lang read it with a snort of derision (it appeared to be new to him), and immediately he improvised this parody:

If the wild bowler thinks he bowls,

Or if the batsman thinks he's bowled,
They know not, poor misguided souls,
They, too, shall perish unconsoled.
I am the batsman and the bat,
I am the bowler and the ball,
The umpire, the pavilion cat,
The roller, pitch and stumps, and all

This would make a pavilion cat laugh, and I felt that Emerson was done for. But when Lang had left me, and I was once more master of my mind, I reflected that the parody was but a parody, wonderful for its neatness and quickness, and for its seizure of what was awkward in the roll of Emerson's diction, but essentially superficial. However, what would wit be if it were profound? I must leave it there, feeling that I have not explained why Lang's extraordinary drollery in conversation so often left on the memory a certain sensation of distress.

But this was not the characteristic of his humour at its best, as it was displayed throughout the happiest period of his work. If, as seems possible, it is as an essayist that he will ultimately take his place in English literature, this element will continue to delight fresh generations of enchanted readers. I cannot imagine that the preface to his translation of " Theocritus," "Letters to Dead Authors," "In the Wrong Paradise," " Old Friends," and " Essays in Little " will ever lose their charm; but future admirers will have to pick their way to them through a tangle of history and anthropology and mythology, where there may be left no perfume and no sweetness. I am impatient to see this vast mass of writing reduced to the limits of its author's delicate, true, but somewhat evasive and ephemeral. genius. However, as far as the circumstances of his temperament permitted, Andrew Lang has left with us the memory of one of our most surprising contemporaries, a man of letters who

laboured without cessation from boyhood to the grave, who pursued his ideal with indomitable activity and perseverance, and who was never betrayed except by the loftiness of his own endeavour. Lang's only misfortune was not to be completely in contact with life, and his work will survive exactly where he was most faithful to his innermost illusions.

THE MAKING OF RELIGION

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. 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. 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*,' '*changée 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.' 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 Baiame, 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 Baiame, 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. 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.' 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 Tá-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 Wiraijuris 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. 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.

PREFACE TO THE FIRST EDITION

'The only begetter' of this work is Monsieur Lefébure, 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.*

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