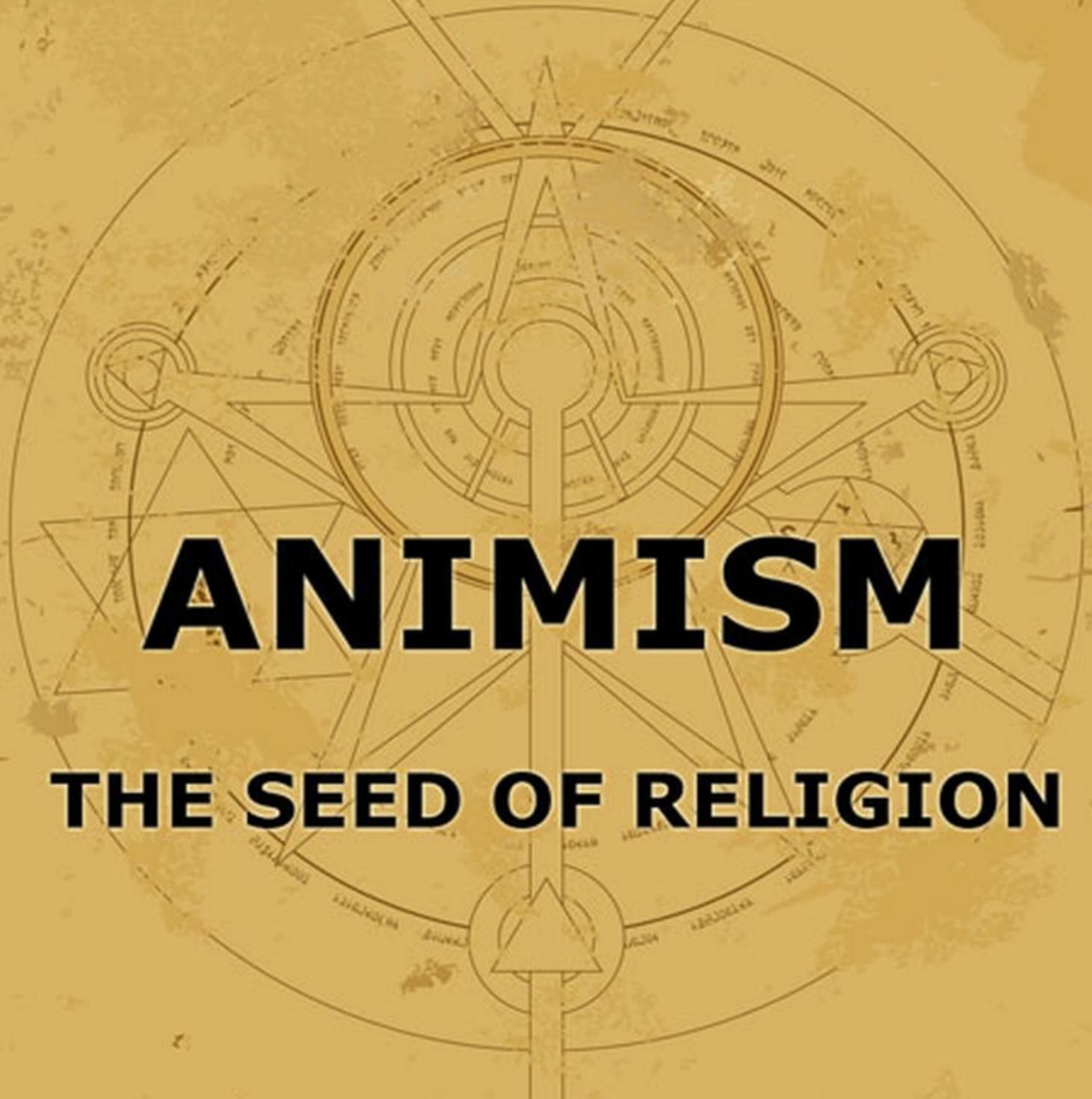


EDWARD CLODD



ANIMISM

THE SEED OF RELIGION

**THE SACRED BOOKS
COLLECTION**

#419

Animism - The Seed Of Religion

Edward Clodd

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1. Pre-Human Elements In Religion

In an article on " Democracy and Reaction," in the Nineteenth Century of April, 1905, Mr. John Morley remarks that "if we want a platitude, there is nothing like a definition. Perhaps most definitions hang between platitude and paradox. There are said to be ten thousand definitions of Religion." One of these is supplied by Parson Thwackum in Tom Jones. " When I mention religion, I mean the Christian religion, and not only the Christian religion, but the Protestant religion, and not only the Protestant religion, but the Church of England." That easy-going cleric expressed what is in the minds of the majority of people when the word " religion " is used. He lived before the birth of the science of comparative theology; those who have applied its methods and profited by its results can pass in larger sympathy from specific creeds to partake of the universal spirit which every creed strives to embody.

To have done this is to have grasped the distinction between Religion and Theology, between what is fundamental and what is accidental, between that which is

one in essence and abiding, and that which is manifold and fleeting. For religion was before all theologies, which are but concrete and partial aspects of it. It is before them all, being born of the emotions; and unaffected by them all, being independent of readjustments of creeds and dogmas. In that storehouse of fact and suggestion, Primitive Culture, Dr. Tylor remarks that " no religion lies in utter isolation from the rest, and the thoughts and principles of modern Christianity are attached to intellectual clues which run back through far pre-Christian ages to the very origin of human civilization, perhaps even of human existence." One object of the present brief treatise is to pursue those clues still farther back, even beyond the human to the pre-human in the life-history of our globe. For nearly every book on the Origin of Religion assumes a non-religious stage as preceding a religious stage in man's development, while many of them assume what are now known to be secondary stages as sole and primary. All in vain, so far as approach to solution of the problem goes, because the writers have not travelled beyond the historic period, and have looked for consistency of ideas where only confusion was possible. " I believe," says Mr. Hopkins in his Religions of India, " that all interpretations of religion which start from the assumption that fetishism, animal-worship, nature-worship, or ancestor-worship was a primitive form from which all other forms were derived, are destined to be overthrown. The earliest beliefs were a jumble of ideas, and it was long before the elements of the different kinds of religions were discriminated."

2. Brain In Animal And Man

The inquiry will take us along the lines of continuous organic development, bringing into view the unbroken connection between animal and human psychology The descent of man and his fellow-mammals, as of all living

things below these, from a common ancestry, is demonstrated to the satisfaction of every competent authority. But in many minds there lingers the old Adam of bias which would limit that descent to man's bodily structure, and which refuses to admit that the mental differences between him and other animals are differences only of degree, and not of kind. This reluctance will vanish only when preconceived notions of the soul or spirit as a special human endowment are dispelled. And this will follow when knowledge of the fundamentally identical nature of the apparatus of the mind in man and brute is acquired. Let us summarize the facts about that apparatus, with which alone we are here concerned. For we know nothing of mind apart from matter, or of matter apart from mind; and how the passage is effected from the nerve-cells to consciousness in animals and in man remains a mystery. But we know that advance in intelligence proceeds *pari passu* with increasing complexity of brain-structure. This is traceable along the whole series of animals. In the Invertebrates the brain is a mass of nerve ganglia near the head end of the body (" the brain of an ant is one of the most marvellous atoms of matter in the world, perhaps more so than the brain of a man "); in the lowest Vertebrate, the fish, it is very small compared with the spinal cord; in reptiles its mass increases, and in birds it is still more marked. In all the lower and smaller forms the surface of the brain is either smooth or evenly rounded, or exhibits a few grooves known as " *sulci*," which separate the ridges or convolutions of the substance of the brain. " But in the larger mammals these grooves become extremely numerous, and the intermediate convolutions proportionately more complicated, until in the elephant, the porpoise, the higher apes, and man, the cerebral surface appears a perfect labyrinth of tortuous foldings. . . . The surface of the brain of a monkey exhibits a sort of skeleton map of man's, and in the man-like apes the details