

192. Definitio of free spirit

312. H₂ + Anima mundi.

333. Fratres Liberos - Spiritus

336 - (vanda)

Fernando Pessoa

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A SHORT HISTORY
OF
FREETHOUGHT

ANCIENT AND MODERN

BY
JOHN M. ROBERTSON

THIRD EDITION, REVISED AND EXPANDED

IN TWO VOLUMES

VOL. I

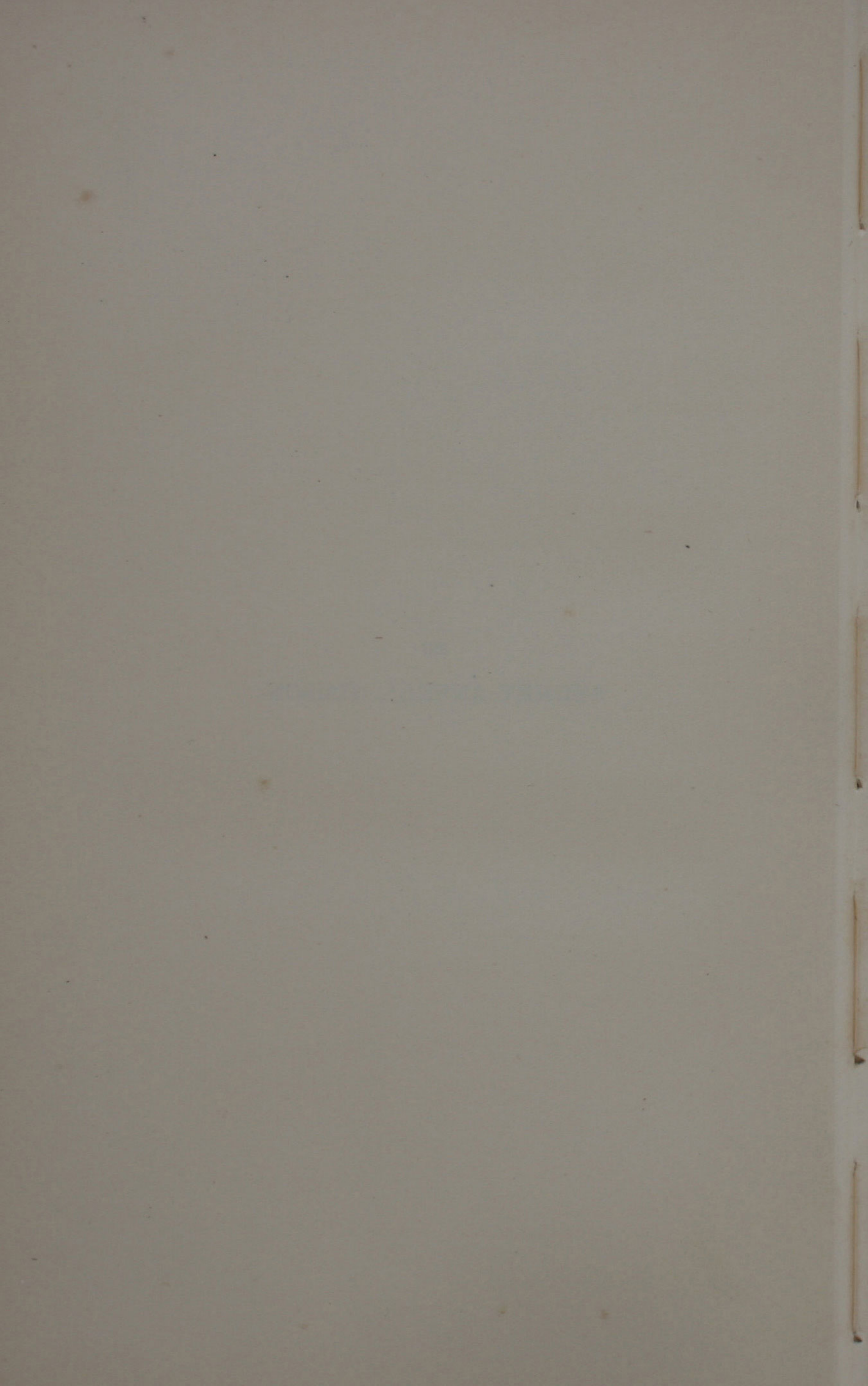
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TO

SYDNEY ANSELL GIMSON



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PREFACE

THIS, the third edition, represents a considerable expansion of the second (1906), which in its turn was a considerable expansion of the first (1899). The book now somewhat approximates, in point of fullness, to the modest ideal aimed at. Anything much fuller would cease to be a "Short History."

The process of revision, carried on since the last issue, has, I hope, meant some further advance towards correctness, and some improvement in arrangement—a particularly difficult matter in such a book. As before, the many critical *excursus* have been so printed that they may be recognized and skipped by those readers who care to follow only the narrative. The chapter on the nineteenth century, though much expanded, like those on the eighteenth, remains, I fear, open to objection on the score of scantiness. I can only plead that the ample and excellent work of Mr. A. W. Benn has now substantially met the need for a fuller survey of that period.

It is fitting that I should acknowledge the generous critical reception given by most reviewers to the previous editions of a book which, breaking as it did new ground, lacked the gain from previous example that accrues to most historical writing. My many debts to historians of culture are, I trust, indicated in the notes; but I have to repeat my former acknowledgments as to the *Biographical Dictionary of Freethinkers* of my dead friend, J. M. Wheeler, inasmuch as the aid I have had from his manifold research does not thus appear on the surface.

It remains to add my thanks to a number of friendly correspondents who have assisted me by pointing out shortcomings and errors. Further assistance of the same kind will be gratefully welcomed. It is still my hope that the book may help some more leisured student in the construction of a more massive record of the development of rational thought on the side of human life with which it deals.

An apology is perhaps due to the purchasers of the second edition, which is now superseded by a fuller record. I can but plead that I have been unable otherwise to serve their need; and express a hope that the low price of the present edition will be a compensation.

J. M. R.

September, 1914.

A SHORT HISTORY OF FREETHOUGHT

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTORY

§ 1. *Origin and Meaning of the Word*

THE words "freethinking" and "freethinker" first appear in English literature about the end of the seventeenth century, and seem to have originated there and then, as we do not find them earlier in French or in Italian,¹ the only other modern literatures wherein the phenomena for which the words stand had previously arisen.

The title of "atheist" had been from time immemorial applied to every shade of serious heresy by the orthodox, as when the early Christians were so described by the image-adoring polytheists around them; and in Latin Christendom the term *infidelis*, translating the *ἀπίστος* of the New Testament, which primarily applied to Jews and pagans,² was easily extensible, as in the writings of Augustine, to all who challenged or doubted articles of ordinary Christian belief, all alike being regarded as consigned to perdition.³ It is by this line of descent that the term "infidelity," applied to doubt on such doctrines as that of the future state, comes up in England in the fifteenth century.⁴ It implied no systematic or critical thinking. The label of "deist," presumably self-applied by the bearers, begins to come into use in French about the middle of the sixteenth century;⁵ and that of "naturalist," also presumably chosen by those who bore it, came into currency about the same time. Lechler traces the latter term in the Latin form as far back as the MS. of the *Heptaplomeres* of Bodin,

¹ Cp. Lechler, *Geschichte des englischen Deismus*, 1841, p. 458; A. S. Farrar, *Critical History of Freethought*, 1862, p. 588; Larousse's *Dictionnaire*, art. LIBRE PENSÉE; Sayous, *Les déistes anglais et le Christianisme*, 1882, p. 203.

² Jesus is made to apply it either to his disciples or to willing followers in Matt. xvii, 17, where the implication seems to be that lack of faith alone prevents miraculous cures. So with *ἀπιστία* in Matt. xiii, 58. In the Epistles, a pagan as such is *ἀπίστος*—e.g., 1 Cor. vi, 6. Here the Vulgate has *infideles*: in Matt. xiii, 58, the word is *incredulitatem*.

³ Cp. Luke xii, 46; Tit. i, 15; Rev. xxi, 8.

⁴ In the prologue to the first print of the old (1196) *Revelation of the Monk of Evesham* 1482.

⁵ Bayle, *Dictionnaire*, art. VIBET, Note D.

dated 1588; but it was common before that date, as De Mornay in the preface to his *De la Vérité de la religion chrétienne* (1581) declaims "against the false naturalists (that is to say, professors of the knowledge of nature and natural things)"; and Montaigne in one of his later essays (1588) has the phrase "*nous autres naturalistes.*"¹ Apart from these terms, those commonly used in French in the seventeenth century were *bel esprit* (sometimes, though not necessarily, connoting unbelief), *esprit fort* and *libertin*, the latter being used in the sense of a religious doubter by Corneille, Molière, and Bayle.²

It seems to have first come into use as one of the hostile names for the "Brethren of the Free Spirit," a pantheistic and generally heretical sect which became prominent in the thirteenth century, and flourished widely, despite destructive persecution, till the fifteenth. Their doctrine being antinomian, and their practice often extravagant, they were accused by Churchmen of licentiousness, so that in their case the name *Libertini* had its full latitude of application. In the sixteenth century the name of Libertines is found borne, voluntarily or otherwise, by a similar sect, probably springing from some remnant of the first, but calling themselves *Spirituales*, who came into notice in Flanders, were favoured in France by Marguerite of Navarre, sister of Francis I, and became to some extent associated with sections of the Reformed Church. They were attacked by Calvin in the treatise *Contre la secte fanatique et furieuse des Libertins* (1544 and 1545).³ The name of *Libertini* was not in the sixteenth century applied by any Genevese writer to any political party;⁴ but by later historians it was in time either fastened on or adopted by the main body of Calvin's opponents in Geneva, who probably included some members of the sect or movement in question. They were accused by him of general depravity, a judgment not at all to be acquiesced in, in view of the controversial habits of the age; though they probably included antinomian Christians and libertines in the modern sense, as well as orthodox lovers of freedom and orderly non-Christians. As the first Brethren of the Free Spirit, so-called, seem to have appeared in Italy (where they are supposed to have derived, like the Waldenses, from the immigrant Paulicians of the Eastern Church), the name *Libertini* presumably originated there. But in Renaissance

¹ *Essais*, liv. iii, ch. 12. Édit. Firmin-Didot, 1882, ii, 518.

² See F. T. Perrens, *Les Libertins en France au xvii^e Siècle*, 1896, Introd. § 11, for a good general view of the bearings of the word. It stood at times for simple independence of spirit, apart from religious freethinking. Thus Madame de Sevigné (Lettre à Mme. de Grignan, 28 juin, 1671) writes: "Je suis *libertine*, plus que vous."

³ Stähelin, *Johannes Calvin*, 1863, i, 383 sq.; Perrens as cited, pp. 5-6; Mosheim, *Eccles. Hist.*, 13 Cent., part ii, ch. v, §§ 9-12, and notes; 14 Cent., part ii, ch. v, §§ 3-5; 16 Cent., § 3, part ii, ch. ii, §§ 38-42.

⁴ A. Bossert, *Calvin*, 1906, p. 151.

Italy an unbeliever seems usually to have been called simply *ateo*, or *infedele*, or *pagano*. "The standing phrase was *non aver fede*."¹

In England, before and at the Reformation, both "infidel" and "faithless" usually had the theological force of "non-Christian." Thus Tyndale says of the Turks that though they "knowledge one God," yet they "have erred and been *faithless* these eight hundred years"; adding the same of the Jews.² Throughout Elizabeth's reign, "infidel" seems thus to have commonly signified only a "heathen" or Jew or Mohammedan. Bishop Jewel, for instance, writes that the Anglo-Saxon invaders of Britain "then were infidels";³ and the word appears to be normally used in that sense, or with a playful force derived from that, by the divines, poets, and dramatists, including Shakespeare, as by Milton in his verse.⁴ Ben Jonson has the phrase:

I did not expect
To meet an infidel, much less an atheist,
Here in Love's list.⁵

One or two earlier writers,⁶ indeed, use "infidel" in the modern sense; and it was at times so used by early Elizabethans.⁷ But Foxe brackets together "Jews, Turks, or infidels";⁸ and Hooper, writing in 1547, speaks, like Jewel, of the heathen as "the infidels."⁹ Hooker (1553-1600), in his Fifth Sermon, § 9,¹⁰ uses the word somewhat indefinitely, but in his margin makes "Pagans and Infidels" equivalent to "Pagans and Turks." So also, in the *Ecclesiastical Polity*,¹¹ "infidels" means men of another religion. On the title-page of Reginald Scot's *Discoverie of Witchcraft* (1574), on the other hand, we have "the infidelitie of atheists"; but so late as 1600 we find "J. H." [John Healy], the translator of Augustine's *City of God*, rendering *infideles* and *homines infideles* by "unbelievers."¹² "Infidelity," in the modern sense, occurs in Sir T. Browne.¹³

In England, as in the rest of Europe, however, the phenomenon of freethought had existed, in specific form, long before it could express itself in propagandist writings, or find any generic name save those of atheism and infidelity; and the process of naming was as fortuitous as it generally is in matters of intellectual evolution. Phrases approximating to "free thought" occur soon after the Restoration. Thus Glanvill repeatedly writes sympathetically of

¹ Burckhardt, *Renaissance in Italy*, Eng. tr. ed. 1892, p. 542, note.

² *Answer to Sir T. More*, Parker Soc. rep. 1850, pp. 53-54.

³ *Controversy with Harding*, Parker Soc. rep. of *Works*, 1845, i, 305.

⁴ *Paradise Lost*, i, 582; *Samson Agonistes*, 221. ⁵ *The New Inn*, 1628-9, Act iii. Sc. 2.

⁶ *The New English Dictionary* gives instances in 1526 and 1552.

⁷ If Mr. Froude's transcript of a manuscript can here be relied on. *History*, ed. 1870, x, 545. (Ed. 1872, xi, 199.) ⁸ *Four Questions Propounded* (pref. to *Acts and Monuments*).

⁹ *Answer to the Bishop of Winchester*, Parker Soc. rep., p. 129.

¹⁰ *Works*, ed. 1850, ii, 752. ¹¹ B. V, ch. i, § 3. *Works*, i, 429.

¹² *De civitate Dei*, xx, 30, end; xxi, 5, beginn., etc.

¹³ *Religio Medici*, 1642, pt. i, §§ 19, 20.

"free philosophers"¹ and "free philosophy."² In 1667 we find Sprat, the historian of the Royal Society, describing the activity of that body as having arisen or taken its special direction through the conviction that in science, as in warfare, better results had been obtained by a "free way" than by methods not so describable.³ As Sprat is careful to insist, the members of the Royal Society, though looked at askance by most of the clergy⁴ and other pietists, were not as such to be classed as unbelievers, the leading members being strictly orthodox; but a certain number seem to have shown scant concern for religion;⁵ and while it was one of the Society's first rules not to debate any theological question whatever,⁶ the intellectual atmosphere of the time was such that some among those who followed the "free way" in matters of natural science would be extremely likely to apply it to more familiar problems.⁷ At the same period we find Spinoza devoting his *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* (1670) to the advocacy of *libertas philosophandi*; and such a work was bound to have a general European influence. It was probably, then, a result of such express assertion of the need and value of freedom in the mental life that the name "freethinker" came into English use in the last quarter of the century.

Before "deism" came into English vogue, the names for unbelief, even deistic, were simply "infidelity" and "atheism"—e.g., Bishop Fotherby's *Atheomastix* (1622), Baxter's *Unreasonableness of Infidelity* (1655) and *Reasons of the Christian Religion* (1667), *passim*. Bishop Stillingfleet's *Letter to a Deist* (1677) appears to be the first published attack on deism by name. His *Origines Sacræ* (1662) deals chiefly with deistic views, but calls unbelievers in general "atheists." Cudworth, in his *True Intellectual System of the Universe* (written 1671, published 1678), does not speak of deism, attacking only atheism, and was himself suspected of Socinianism. W. Sherlock, in his *Practical Discourse of Religious Assemblies* (2nd ed., 1682), attacks "atheists and infidels," but says nothing of "deists." That term, first coined, as we have seen, in French, seems first to have found common currency in France—e.g., on the title-pages of the apologetic works of Marin Mersenne, 1623 and 1624. The term "atheist"

¹ Essay II, *Of Scepticism and Certainty* (rep. of reply to Thomas White, app. to *Scepsis Scientifica* in 1665) in Glanvill's collected *Essays on Several Important Subjects in Philosophy and Religion*, 1676, pp. 38, 44.

² PLUS ULTRA: or, *The Progress and Advancement of Knowledge since the Days of Aristotle*, 1668, p. 146.

³ *History of the Royal Society*, 1667, p. 73. Describing the beginnings of the Society, Sprat remarks that Oxford had at that time many members "who had begun a free way of reasoning" (p. 53).

⁴ Sprat, p. 375 (printed as 367). ⁵ *Id.*, p. 83. The French Academy had the same rule.

⁶ Some of Sprat's uses of the term have a very general sense, as when he writes (p. 87) that "Amsterdam is a place of Trade without the mixture of men of freer thoughts." The latter is an old application, as in "the free sciences" or "the liberal arts."

was often applied at random at this period; but atheism did exist.

When the orthodox Boyle pushed criticism in physical science under such a title as *The Sceptical Chemist*, the principle could not well be withheld from application to religion; and it lay in the nature of the case that the name "freethinker," like that of "skeptical," should come to attach itself specially to those who doubted where doubt was most resented and most resisted. At length the former term became specific.

In the meantime the word "rationalist," which in English has latterly tended to become the prevailing name for freethinkers, had made its appearance, without securing much currency. In a London news-letter dated October 14, 1646, it is stated, concerning the Presbyterians and Independents, that "there is a new sect sprung up among them, and these are the *rationalists*; and what their reason dictates to them in Church or State stands for good until they be convinced with better."¹ On the Continent, the equivalent Latin term (*rationalista*) had been applied about the beginning of the century to the Aristotelian humanists of the Helmstadt school by their opponents,² apparently in the same sense as that in which Bacon used the term *rationales* in his *Redargutio Philosophiarum*—"Rationales autem, aranearum more, telas ex se conficiunt." Under this title he contrasts (as spiders spinning webs out of themselves) the mere Aristotelean speculators, who framed à priori schemes of Nature, with empiricists, who, "like ants, collect something and use it," preferring to both the "bees" who should follow the ideal method prescribed by himself.³ There is here no allusion to heterodox opinion on religion. [Bishop Hurst, who (perhaps following the *Apophthegms*) puts a translation of Bacon's words, with "rationalists" for *rationales*, as one of the mottoes of his *History of Rationalism*, is thus misleading his readers as to Bacon's meaning.] In 1661 John Amos Comenius, in his *Theologia Naturalis*, applies the name *rationalista* to the Socinians and deists; without, however, leading to its general use in that sense. Later we shall meet with the term in English discussions between 1680 and 1715, applied usually to rationalizing Christians; but as a name for opponents of orthodox religion it was for the time superseded, in English, by "freethinker."

¹ Cited by Archbishop Trench, *The Study of Words*, 19th ed., p. 230, from the *Clarendon State Papers*, App. Vol. III, p. 40.

² Art. RATIONALISMUS AND SUPERNATURALISMUS in Herzog and Plitt's *Real-Encyk. für prot. Theol. und Kirche*, 1883, xii, 509.

³ *Philosophical Works of Bacon*, ed. Ellis and Spedding, iii, 583. See the same saying quoted among the *Apophthegms* given in Tenison's *Baconiana* (Routledge's ed. of *Works*, p. 895).

In the course of the eighteenth century the term was adopted in other languages. The first French translation (1714) of Collins's *Discourse of Freethinking* is entitled *Discours sur la liberté de penser*; and the term "freethinkers" is translated on the title-page by *esprit fort*, and in the text by a periphrasis of *liberté de penser*. Later in the century, however, we find Voltaire in his correspondence frequently using the substantive *franc-pensant*, a translation of the English term which subsequently gave way to *libre penseur*. The modern German term *Freigeist*, found as early as 1702 in the allusion to "Alten Quäcker und neuen Frey-Geister" on the title-page of the folio *Anabaptisticum et Enthusiasticum Pantheon*, probably derives from the old "Brethren of the Free Spirit"; while *Schönggeist* arose as a translation of *bel esprit*. In the middle of the eighteenth century *Freidenker* came into German use as a translation of the English term.

In a general sense "free thoughts" was a natural expression, and we have it in Ben Jonson: "Being free master of mine own free thoughts."¹ But not till about the year 1700 did the phrase begin to have a special application to religious matters. The first certain instance thus far noted of the use of the term "freethinker" is in a letter of Molyneux to Locke, dated April 6, 1697,² where Toland is spoken of as a "candid free-thinker." In an earlier letter, dated December 24, 1695, Molyneux speaks of a certain book on religion as somewhat lacking in "freedom of thought";³ and in Burnet's *Letters*⁴ occurs still earlier the expression "men.....of freer thoughts." In the *New English Dictionary* a citation is given from the title-page of S. Smith's brochure, *The Religious Impostor..... dedicated to Doctor S-l-m-n and the rest of the new Religious Fraternity of Freethinkers, near Leather-Sellers' Hall. Printedin the first year of Grace and Freethinking*, conjecturally dated 1692. It is thought to refer to the sect of "Freeseekers" mentioned in Luttrell's *Brief Historical Relation* (iii, 56) under date 1693. In that case it is not unbelievers that are in question. So in Shaftesbury's *Inquiry Concerning Virtue* (first ed. 1699) the expression "freethought" has a general and not a particular sense;⁵ and in Baker's *Reflections upon Learning*, also published in 1699, in the remark: "After the way of freethinking had been lai'd open by my Lord Bacon, it was soon after greedily followed";⁶ the reference is, of course, to scientific and not to religious thought.

¹ *Every Man in his Humour* (1598), Act iii, sc. 3.

² *Some Familiar Letters between Mr. Locke and Several of his Friends*, 1708, p. 190.

³ *Id.* p. 133.

⁴ Ed. Rotterdam, 1686, p. 195.

⁵ B. II, pt. ii, § 1.

⁶ Ch. on Logic, cited by Professor Fowler in his ed. of the *Novum Organum*, 1878, introd. p. 118.

But in Shaftesbury's *Essay on the Freedom of Wit and Humour* (1709) the phrases "free-writers" and "a free-thought"¹ have reference to "advanced" opinions, though in his letters to Ainsworth (May 10, 1707) he had written, "I am glad to find your love of reason and *freethought*. Your piety and virtue I know you will always keep."² Compare the *Miscellaneous Reflections* (v, 3) in the *Characteristics*³ (1711), where the tendency to force the sense from the general to the special is incidentally illustrated. Shaftesbury, however, includes the term "free liver" among the "naturally honest appellations" that have become opprobrious.

In Swift's *Sentiments of a Church of England Man* (1708) the specialized word is found definitely and abusively connoting religious unbelief: "The atheists, libertines, despisers of religion—that is to say, all those who usually pass under the name of freethinkers"; Steele and Addison so use it in the *Tatler* in 1709;⁴ and Leslie so uses the term in his *Truth of Christianity Demonstrated* (1711). The anonymous essay, *Réflexions sur les grands hommes qui sont morts en plaisantant*, by Deslandes (Amsterdam, 1712), is translated in English (1713) as *Reflections on the Death of Free-thinkers*, and the translator uses the term in his prefatory Letter to the Author, beside putting it in the text (pp. 50, 85, 97, 102, 106, etc.), where the original had *esprit fort*.

It was not till 1713, however, that Anthony Collins's *Discourse of Freethinking, occasion'd by the Rise and Growth of a Sect called Freethinkers*, gave the word a universal notoriety, and brought it into established currency in controversy, with the normal significance of "deist," Collins having entirely repudiated atheism. Even after this date, and indeed in full conformity with the definition in Collins's opening sentence, Ambrose Philips took *The Freethinker* as the title of a weekly journal (begun in 1718) on the lines of the *Spectator*, with no heterodox leaning,⁵ the contributors including Boulter, afterwards Archbishop of Dublin, and the son of Bishop Burnet. But despite this attempt to keep the word "freethinking" as a name for simple freedom from prejudice in secular affairs, the tendency to specialize it as aforesaid was irresistible. As names go, it was on the whole a good one; and the bitterness with which it was generally handled on the orthodox side showed that its implicit claim was felt to be disturbing, though some antagonists of course claimed from the first that they were as "free" under the law of

¹ §§ 3 and 4.

² *Letters*, 1746, p. 5.

³ Orig. ed. iii, 305, 306, 311; ed. J. M. R., 1900, ii, 349, 353.

⁴ Nos. 12, 111, 135.

⁵ Cp. Johnson on A. Philips in *Lives of the Poets*. Swift, too, issued his *Free Thoughts upon the Present State of Affairs* in 1714.

right reason as any skeptic.¹ At this time of day the word may be allowed prescriptive standing, as having no more drawbacks than most other names for schools of thought or attitudes of mind, and as having been admitted into most European languages. The question-begging element is not greater in this than in many other terms of similar intention, such as "rationalism"; and it incurs no such charge of absurdity as lies against the invidious religious term, "infidelity." The term "infidel" invites "fidel."

A plausible objection may, indeed, arise on the score that such a term as "freethought" should not be set up by thinkers who almost invariably reject the term "freewill"—the rationalistic succession having for two hundred and fifty years been carried on mainly by determinists. But the issues raised by the two terms are on wholly different planes; and while in both cases the imperfection of the instrument of language is apparent, it is not in the present case a cause of psychological confusion, as it is in the discussion of the nature of will. The freewill fallacy consists in applying universally to the process of judgment and preference (which is a process of natural causation like another) a conception relevant only to human or animal *action*, as interfered with or unaffected by *extraneous* compulsion. To the processes of nature, organic or inorganic, the concepts "free" and "bond" are equally irrelevant: a tiger is no more "free" to crave for grass and recoil from flesh than is water to flow uphill; while, on the other hand, such "appetites" are not rationally to be described as forms of bondage. Only as a mode distinguishable from its contrary can "freedom" be predicated of any procedure, and it is so predicated of actions; whereas the whole category of volitions is alleged and denied by the verbal disputants to be "free." Some attempt to save the case by distinguishing between free and alleged "unfree" volitions; but the latter are found to be simply cases of choices dictated by intense need, as in the case of deadly thirst. The difference, therefore, is only one of degree of impulse, not in the fact of choice.

The term "freewill," therefore, is irrational, as being wholly irrelevant to the conception of volition. But "freethought," on

¹ Thus Bentley, writing as *Phileleutherus Lipsiensis* against Collins, claims to have been "train'd up and exercis'd in *Free Thought* from my youth." Dr. Samuel Clarke somewhere makes a similar statement; and the point is raised by Berkeley in his *Minute Philosopher*, Dial. i, § 10. One of the first replies to Collins, *A Letter to the Free-thinkers*, By a Layman, dated February 24, 1712-13, likewise insists on the right of believers to the title, declaring that "a free-thinker may be the best or worst of men." Shaftesbury on the other side protests that the passion of orthodoxy "holds up the intended chains and fetters and declares its resolution to enslave" (*Characteristics*, iii, 305; ed. 1900, ii, 345). Later, the claim of Bentley and Clarke became common; and one tract on Christian evidences, *A Layman's Faith*, 1732, whose author shows not a grain of the critical spirit, professes to be written "by a Freethinker and a Christian."

the other hand, points to an actual difference in *degree of employment of the faculty of criticism*. The proposition is that some men think more "freely" than others in that they are (a) not terrorized by any veto on criticism, and (b) not hampered, or less hampered, by ignorant pre-suppositions. In both cases there is a real discrimination. There is no allegation that, absolutely speaking, "thought is free" in the sense of the orthodox formula; on the contrary, it is asserted that the rationalist's critical course is specifically determined by his intellectual structure and his preparation, and that it is sometimes different structure, but more often different preparation, that determines the anti-critical or counter-critical attitude of the believer. Change in the preparation, it is contended, will put the latter in fuller use of his potential resources; his inculcated fear of doubt and docility of assent being simply acquiescences in vetoes on his *attention* to certain matters for reflection—that is to say, in arbitrary limitations of his action. It is further implied that the instructed man, other things being equal, is "freer" to think than the uninstructed, as being less obstructed; but for the purpose of our history it is sufficient to posit the discriminations above noted.

The essential thing to be realized is the fact that from its earliest stages humanity has suffered from conventional or traditional hindrances to the use of judgment. This holds good even as to the early play of the simple inventive faculty, all innovations in implements being met by the inertia of habit; and when men reached the stages of ritual practice, social construction, and religious doctrine, the forces of repression became powerful in proportion to the seriousness of the problem. It is only in modern times that freedom in these relations has come to be generally regarded as permissible; and it has always been over questions of religion that the strife has been keenest.

For practical purposes, then, freethought may be defined as a conscious reaction against some phase or phases of conventional or traditional doctrine in religion—on the one hand, a claim to think freely, in the sense not of disregard for logic, but of special loyalty to it, on problems to which the past course of things has given a great intellectual and practical importance; on the other hand, the actual practice of such thinking. This sense, which is substantially agreed on, will on one or other side sufficiently cover those phenomena of early or rudimentary freethinking which wear the guise of simple concrete opposition to given doctrines or systems, whether by way of special demur or of the obtrusion of a new cult or doctrine. In either case, the claim to think in a measure freely is

implicit in the criticism or the new affirmation ; and such primary movements of the mind cannot well be separated, in psychology or in history, from the fully conscious practice of criticism in the spirit of pure truth-seeking, or from the claim that such free examination is profoundly important to moral and intellectual health. Modern freethought, specially so-called, is only one of the developments of the slight primary capacity of man to doubt, to reason, to improve on past thinking, to assert his personality as against sacrosanct and menacing authority. Concretely considered, it has proceeded by the support and stimulus of successive accretions of actual knowledge ; and the modern consciousness of its own abstract importance emerged by way of an impression or inference from certain social phenomena, as well as in terms of self-asserting instinct. There is no break in its evolution from primitive mental states, any more than in the evolution of the natural sciences from primitive observation. What particularly accrues to the state of conscious and systematic discrimination, in the one case as in the other, is just the immense gain in security of possession.

§ 2. *Previous Histories*

It is somewhat remarkable that in England this phenomenon has thus far¹ had no general historic treatment save at the hands of ecclesiastical writers, who, in most cases, have regarded it solely as a form of more or less perverse hostility to their own creed. The modern scientific study of religions, which has yielded so many instructive surveys, almost of necessity excludes from view the specific play of freethought, which in the religion-making periods is to be traced rather by its religious results than by any record of its expression. All histories of philosophy, indeed, in some degree necessarily recognize it ; and such a work as Lange's *History of Materialism* may be regarded as part—whether or not sound in its historical treatment—of a complete history of freethought, dealing specially with general philosophic problems. But of freethought as a reasoned revision or rejection of current religious doctrines by more or less practical people, we have no regular history by a professed freethinker, though there are many monographs and surveys of periods.

The latest and freshest sketch of the kind is Professor J. B. Bury's brief *History of Freedom of Thought* (1913),

¹ Written in 1898.

notable for the force of its championship of the law of liberty. The useful compilation of the late Mr. Charles Watts, entitled *Freethought: Its Rise, Progress, and Triumph* (n. d.), deals with freethought in relation only to Christianity. Apart from treatises which broadly sketch the development of knowledge and of opinion, the nearest approaches to a general historic treatment are the *Dictionnaire des Athées* of Sylvain Maréchal (1800: 3e édit., par J. B. L. Germond, 1853) and the *Biographical Dictionary of Freethinkers* by the late Joseph Mazzini Wheeler. The quaint work of Maréchal, expanded by his friend Lalande, exhibits much learning, but is made partly fantastic by its sardonic plan of including a number of typical religionists (including Job, John, and Jesus Christ!), some of whose utterances are held to lead logically to atheism. Mr. Wheeler's book is in every respect the more trustworthy.

In excuse of Maréchal's method, it may be noted that the prevailing practice of Christian apologists had been to impute atheism to heterodox theistic thinkers of all ages. The *Historia universalis Atheismi et Atheorum falso et merito suspectorum* of J. F. Reimmann (Hildesæ, 1725) exhibits this habit both in its criticism and in its practice, as do the *Theses de Atheismo et Superstitione* of Buddeus (Trajecti ad Rhenum, 1716). These were the standard treatises of their kind for the eighteenth century, and seem to be the earliest systematic treatises in the nature of a history of freethought, excepting a *Historia Naturalismi* by A. Tribbechov (Jenæ, 1700) and a *Historia Atheismi breviter delineata* by Jenkinus Thomasius (Altdorf, 1692; Basileæ, 1709; London, 1716). In the same year with Reimmann's *Historia* appeared J. A. Fabricius's *Delectus Argumentorum et Syllabus scriptorum qui veritatem religionis Christianæ adversus Atheos, Epicureos, Deistas, seu Naturalistasasseruerunt* (Hamburghi), in which it is contended (cap. viii) that many philosophers have been falsely described as atheists; but in the *Freydenker Lexicon* of J. A. Trinius (Leipzig, 1759), planned as a supplement to the work of Fabricius, are included such writers as Sir Thomas Browne and Dryden.

The works of the late Rev. John Owen, *Evenings with the Sceptics*, *Sceptics of the Italian Renaissance*, and *Sceptics of the French Renaissance*, which, though not constituting a literary whole, collectively cover a great deal of historical ground, must be expressly excepted from the above characterization of clerical histories of freethought, in respect of their liberality of view. They deal largely, however, with general or philosophical skepticism, which is a special development of freethought, often by way of reasonings in which many freethinkers do not acquiesce. (All strict skeptics, that is to say—as distinguished from religionists who profess skepticism up to a certain point by way of making a surrender to orthodox

dogmatism¹—are freethinkers; but most freethinkers are not strictly skeptics.) The history of philosophic skepticism, again, is properly and methodically treated in the old work of Carl Friedrich Stäudlin, *Geschichte und Geist des Skepticismus* (2 Bde., Leipzig, 1794), the historic survey being divided into six periods: 1, Before Pyrrho; 2, from Pyrrho to Sextus; 3, from Sextus to Montaigne; 4, from Montaigne to La Mothe le Vayer; 5, from La Mothe le Vayer to Hume; 6, from Hume to Kant and Platner. The posthumous work of Émile Saisset, *Le Scepticisme: Ænésidème—Pascal—Kant* (1865), is a fragment of a projected complete history of philosophic skepticism.

Stäudlin's later work, the *Geschichte des Rationalismus und Supernaturalismus* (1826), is a shorter but more general history of the strife between general freethought and supernaturalism in the Christian world and era. It deals cursorily with the intellectual attitude of the early Fathers, the early heretics, and the Scholastics; proceeding to a fuller survey of the developments since the Reformation, and covering Unitarianism, Latitudinarianism, English and French Deism, and German Rationalism of different shades down to the date of writing. Stäudlin may be described as a rationalizing supernaturalist.

Like most works on religious and intellectual history written from a religious standpoint, those of Stäudlin treat the phenomena as it were *in vacuo*, with little regard to the conditioning circumstances, economic and political; critical thought being regarded purely as a force proceeding through its own proclivities. Saisset is at very much the same point of view. Needless to say, valuable work may be done up to a certain point on this method, which is seen in full play in Hegel; and high praise is due to the learned and thoughtful treatise of R. W. Mackay, *The Progress of the Intellect as Exemplified in the Religious Development of the Greeks and Hebrews* (2 vols. 1850), where it is partially but ably supplemented by the method of inductive science. That method, again, is freshly and forcibly applied to a restricted problem in W. A. Schmidt's *Geschichte der Denk- und Glaubensfreiheit im ersten Jahrhundert der Kaiserherrschaft und des Christenthums* (1847).

Later come the *Vorgeschichte des Rationalismus* (1853-62) and *Geschichte des Rationalismus* (1865) of the theologian Tholuck. Of these the latter is unfinished, coming down only to the middle of the eighteenth century; while the former does not exactly fulfil its title, being composed of a volume (2 Abth. 1853, 1854) on *Das akademische Leben des 17ten Jahrhunderts*, and of one on *Das kirchliche Leben des 17ten Jahrhunderts* (2 Abth. 1861, 1862), both being restricted to German developments. They thus give much matter extraneous to the subject, and are

¹ Cp. Hauréau, *Histoire de la philosophie scolastique*, ed. 1870-1872, i, 543-46.

not exhaustive as to rationalism even in Germany. Hagenbach's *Die Kirchengeschichte des 18. und 19. Jahrhunderts* (2 Th. 1848, 1849), a series of lectures, translated in English, abridged, under the title *German Rationalism in its Rise, Progress, and Decline* (1865), conforms fairly to the latter title, save as regards the last clause.

Of much greater scholarly merit is the *Geschichte der religiösen Aufklärung im Mittelalter, vom Ende des achten Jahrhunderts bis zum Anfange des vierzehnten*, by Hermann Reuter (1875, 1877). This is at once learned, judicious, and impartial. Its definition of "Aufklärung" is substantially in agreement with the working definition of Freethought given above.

Among other surveys of periods of innovating thought, as distinguished from histories of ecclesiastical heresy, or histories of "religious" or theological thought which only incidentally deal with heterodox opinion, should be noted the careful *Geschichte des englischen Deismus* of G. F. Lechler (1841); the slighter sketch of E. Sayous, *Les déistes anglais et le Christianisme* (1882); the somewhat diffuse work of Cesare Cantù, *Gli eretici d'Italia* (3 tom. 1865-67); the very intelligent study of Felice Tocco, *L'Eresia nel medio evo* (1884); Schmidt's *Histoire des Cathares* (2 tom. 1849); Chr. U. Hahn's learned *Geschichte der Ketzer im Mittelalter* (3 Bde. 1845-50); and the valuable research of F. T. Perrens, *Les Libertins en France au xviiie siècle* (1896). A similar scholarly research for the eighteenth century in France is still lacking, and the many monographs on the more famous freethinkers leave a good deal of literary history in obscurity. Such a research has been very painstakingly made for England in the late Sir Leslie Stephen's *History of English Thought in the Eighteenth Century* (2 vols., 2nd ed., 1881), which, however, ignores scientific thought. One of the best monographs of the kind is *La Critique des traditions religieuses chez les Grecs, des origines au temps de Plutarque*, by Professor Paul Decharme (1904), a survey at once scholarly and attractive. The brilliant treatise of Mr. F. M. Cornford, *From Religion to Philosophy* (1912), sketches on more speculative lines the beginnings of Greek rationalism in Ionia. The *Geschichte des Monismus im Altertum* of Prof. Dr. A. Drews (1913) is a wide survey, of great synthetic value.

Contributions to the general history of freethought, further, have been made in the works of J. W. Draper (*A History of the Intellectual Development of Europe*, 2 vols, 1861, many reprints; and *History of the Conflict between Religion and Science*, 1873, many reprints), both full of suggestion and stimulus, but requiring thorough revision as to detail; in the famous *Introduction to the History of Civilization in England* of H. T. Buckle (2 vols. 1857-61; new ed. in 1 vol. with annotations by the present writer, 1904); in the *History of the Rise and*

Influence of the Spirit of Rationalism in Europe of W. E. H. Lecky (2 vols. 1865; R. P. A. rep. 1910), who was of Buckle's school, but fell below him in point of coherence; in the comprehensive *History of the Warfare of Science with Theology* of Professor Andrew D. White (2 vols. 1896—a great expansion of his earlier essay, *The Warfare of Science*, 2nd ed. 1877); and in the essay of Mr. E. S. P. Haynes, *Religious Persecution: A Study in Political Psychology* (1904; R. P. A. rep. 1906), as well as in many histories of philosophy and of sciences.

The so-called *History of Rationalism* of the American Bishop J. F. Hurst, first published in 1865, and "revised" in 1901, is in the main a work of *odium theologicum*, dealing chiefly with the evolution of theology and criticism in Germany since the Reformation. Even to that purpose it is very inadequate. Its preface alleges that "happily the vital body of evangelical truth has received only comparatively weak and timorous attacks from the more modern representatives of the rank and rabid rationalism which reached its climax near the close of the eighteenth, and has had a continuous decline through the nineteenth, century." It urges, however, as a reason for defensive activity, the consideration that "the work of Satan is never planless"; and further pronounces that the work of rationalism "must determine its character. This work has been most injurious to the faith and life of the Church, and its deeds must therefore be its condemnation" (Introd. p. 3). Thus the latest approximation to a history of theological rationalism by a clerical writer is the most negligible.

In English, apart from studies of given periods and of the progress of science and culture, the only other approaches to a history of freethought are those of Bishop Van Mildert, the Rev. J. E. Riddle, and the Rev. Adam Storey Farrar. Van Mildert's *Historical View of the Rise and Progress of Infidelity*¹ constituted the Boyle Lectures for 1802-05; Mr. Riddle's *Natural History of Infidelity and Superstition in Contrast with Christian Faith* formed part of his Bampton Lectures for 1852; and Mr. Farrar produced his *Critical History of Freethought in reference to the Christian Religion* as the Bampton Lectures for 1862. All three were men of considerable reading, and their works give useful bibliographical clues; but the virulence of Van Mildert deprives his treatise of rational weight; Mr. Riddle, who in any case professes to give merely a "Natural History" or abstract argument, and not a history proper, is only somewhat more constrainedly hostile to "infidelity"; and even Mr. Farrar, the most judicial as well as the most comprehensive of the three, proceeds on the old assumption that "unbelief"

¹ Second ed. with enlarged Appendix (of authorities and references), 1808, 2 vols.

(from which he charitably distinguishes "doubt") generally arises from "antagonism of feeling, which wishes revelation untrue"—a thesis maintained with vehemence by the others.¹

Writers so placed, indeed, could not well be expected to contemplate freethought scientifically as an aspect of mental evolution common to all civilizations, any more than to look with sympathy on the freethought which is specifically anti-Christian. The annotations to all three works, certainly, show some consciousness of the need for another temper and method than that of their text,² which is too obviously, perhaps inevitably, composed for the satisfaction of the ordinary orthodox animus of their respective periods; but even the best remains not so much a history as an indictment. In the present sketch, framed though it be from the rationalistic standpoint, it is proposed to draw up not a counter indictment, but a more or less dispassionate account of the main historical phases of freethought, viewed on the one hand as expressions of the rational or critical spirit, playing on the subject-matter of religion, and on the other hand as sociological phenomena conditioned by social forces, in particular the economic and political. The lack of any previous general survey of a scientific character will, it is hoped, be taken into account in passing judgment on its schematic defects as well as its inevitable flaws of detail.

§ 3. *The Psychology of Freethinking*

Though it is no part of our business here to elaborate the psychology of doubt and belief, it may be well to anticipate a possible criticism on the lines of recent psychological speculation, and to indicate at the outset the practical conception on which the present survey broadly proceeds. To begin with, the conception of freethinking implies that of hindrance, resistance, coercion, difficulty; and as regards objective obstacles the type of all hindrance is restraint upon freedom of speech or publication. In other words, all such restraint is a check upon thinking. On reflection it soon becomes clear that where men dare not say or write what they think, the very power of thinking is at length impaired in the ablest, while the natural stimulus to new thought is withdrawn from the rest. No man can properly develop his mind without contact with other minds, suggestion and criticism being alike factors in every fruitful mental evolution; and though for some the

¹ Farrar, pref., p. x; Riddle, p. 99; Van Mildert, i, 105, etc.

² Van Mildert even recast his first manuscript. See the *Memoir of Joshua Watson*, 1863, p. 35.

atmosphere of personal intercourse is but slightly necessary to the process of mental construction, even for these the prospect of promulgation is probably essential to the undertaking of the task; and the study of other *writers* is a condition of useful ratiocination. In any case, it is certain that the exercise of argument is a condition of intellectual growth. Not one man in a million will or can argue closely with himself on issues on which he knows he can say nothing and can never overtly act; and for the average man all reasoning on great problems is a matter of prompting from without. The simple fact that the conversation of uneducated people runs so largely to citation of what "he says" makes clear this dependence. Each brings something to the common store, and progress is set up by "pooling" the mass of small intellectual variations or originalities. Thus in the long run freedom of speech is the measure of a generation's intellectual capacity;¹ and the promoters of such freedom are typically the truest servants of progress.

On the other hand, there is still a common disposition to ascribe to a species of intellectual malice the disturbance that criticism causes to the holders of established beliefs. Recent writers have pressed far the theorem that "will" enters as an element into every mental act, thus giving a momentary appearance of support to the old formula that unbelief is the result of an arbitrary or sinister perversity of individual choice. Needless to say, however, the new theorem—which inverts without refuting Spinoza's denial of the entity of volition—applies equally to acts of belief; and it is a matter of the simplest concrete observation that, in so far as will or wilfulness in the ordinary sense operates in the sphere of religion, it is at least as obvious and as active on the side of belief² as on the other. A moment's reflection on the historic phenomena of orthodox resistance to criticism will satisfy any student that, whatever may have been the stimulus on the side of heresy, the antagonism it arouses is largely the index of primary passion—the spontaneous resentment of the believer whose habits are disturbed. His will normally decides his action, without any process of judicial deliberation.

It is another way of stating the same fact to point out the fallacy of the familiar assumption that freethinking represents a bias to "negation." In the nature of the case, the believer has to do at

¹ Cp. W. A. Schmidt, *Geschichte der Denk- und Glaubensfreiheit im ersten Jahrhundert der Kaiserherrschaft und des Christenthums*, 1847, pp. 12-13.

² Its legitimacy on that side is expressly contended for by Professor William James in his volume *The Will to Believe* (1897), the positions of which were criticized by the present writer in the *University Magazine*, April and June, 1897.

least as much negation as his opponents; and if again we scan history in this connection, we shall see cause to conclude that the temperamental tendency to negation—which is a form of variation like another—is abundantly common on the side of religious conservatism. Nowhere is there more habitual opposition to new ideas as such. At best the believer, so-called, rejects a given proposition or suggestion because it clashes with something he already believes. The new proposition, however, has often been reached by way not of preliminary negation of the belief in question, but of constructive explanation, undertaken to bring observed facts into theoretic harmony. Thus the innovator has only contingently put aside the old belief because *it* clashes with something he believes in a more vital way; and he has done this with circumspection, whereas his opponent too often repels him without a second thought. The phenomena of the rise of the Copernican astronomy, modern geology, and modern biology, all bear out this generalization.

Nor is the charge of negativeness any more generally valid against such freethinking as directly assails current doctrines. There may be, of course, negative-minded people on that side as on the other; and such may fortuitously do something to promote freethought, or may damage it in their neighbourhood by their atmosphere. But everything goes to show that freethinking normally proceeds by way of intellectual construction—that is, by way of effort to harmonize one position with another; to modify a special dogma to the general run of one's thinking. Rationalism stands not for "skepticism" in the strict philosophic sense, but for a critical effort to reach certainties. The attitude of pure skepticism on a wide scale is really very rare—much rarer even than the philosophic effort. So far from freethinkers being given to "destroying without building up," they are, as a rule, unable to destroy a dogma either for themselves or for others without setting a constructive belief in its place—a form of explanation, that is; such being much more truly a process of construction than would be the imposition of a new scheme of dogma. In point of fact, they are often accused, and by the same critics, of an undue tendency to speculative construction; and the early atheists of Greece and of the modern period did so err. But that is only a proof the more that their freethinking was not a matter of arbitrary volition or an undue negativeness.

The only explanation which ostensibly countervails this is the old one above glanced at—that the unbeliever finds the given doctrine troublesome as a restraint, and so determines to reject it. It is to be feared that this view has survived Mr. A. S. Farrar. Yet it is

very clear that no man need throw aside any faith, and least of all Christianity, on the ground of its hampering his conduct. To say nothing of the fact that in every age, under every religion, at every stage of culture from that of the savage to that of the supersubtle decadent or mystic, men have practised every kind of misconduct without abandoning their supernatural credences—there is the special fact that the whole Christian system rests on the doctrine of forgiveness of sins to the believer. The theory of “wilful” disbelief on the part of the reprobate is thus entirely unpalatable. Such disbelief in the terms of the case would be uneasy, as involving an element of incertitude; and his fear of retribution could never be laid. On the other hand, he has but inwardly to avow himself a sinner and a believer, and he has the assurance that repentance at the last moment will outweigh all his sins.

It is not, of course, suggested that such is the normal or frequent course of believing Christians; but it has been so often enough to make the “libertine” theory of unbelief untenable. Indeed, the singular diversity between profession and practice among Christians has in all periods called out declarations by the more fervid believers that their average fellow-Christians are “practical atheists.” More judicial minds may be set asking instead how far men really “believe” who do not act on their opinions. As one high authority has put it, in the Middle Ages the normal opposition of theory and practice “was peculiarly abrupt. Men’s impulses were more violent, and their conduct more reckless, than is often witnessed in modern society; while the absence of a criticizing and measuring spirit made them surrender their minds more unreservedly than they would do now to a complete and imposing theory.....Resistance to God’s Vicar might be, and indeed was admitted to be, a deadly sin, but it was one which nobody hesitated to commit.”¹ And so with other sins, the sinner having somewhere in the rear of his consciousness the reflection that his sins could be absolved.

And, apart from such half-purposive forms of licence among Christians, there have been countless cases of purposive licence. In all ages there have been antinomian Christians,² whether of the sort that simply rest on the “seventy times seven” of the Gospel, or of the more articulately logical kind who dwell on the doctrine of faith *versus* works. For the rest, as the considerate theologian will

¹ Bryce, *The Holy Roman Empire*, 8th ed., p. 135.

² A religious basis for sexual licence is of course a common feature in non-Christian religions also. Classic instances are well known. As to sexual promiscuity in an “intensely religious” savage community, see Turner, *Samoa a Hundred Years Ago*, 1884, p. 290.

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readily see, insistence on the possibility of a sinister motive for the unbeliever brings up the equal possibility of a sinister motive on the part of the convert to Christianity, ancient or modern. At every turn, then, the charge of perversity of the will recoils on the advocate of belief; so that it would be the course of common prudence to abandon it, even were it not in itself, as a rule, so plainly an expression of irritated bias.

On the other hand, it need not be disputed that unbelief has been often enough associated with some species of libertinism to give a passing colour for the pretence of causal connection. The fact, however, leads us to a less superficial explanation, worth keeping in view here. Freethinking being taken to be normally a "variation" of intellectual type in the direction of a critical demand for consistency and credibility in beliefs, its social *assertion* will be a matter on the one side of force of character or degree of recklessness, and on the other hand of force of circumstances. The intellectual potentiality and the propagandist purpose will be variously developed in different men and in different surroundings. If we ask ourselves how, in general, the critical tendency is to arise or to come into play, we are almost compelled to suppose a special stimulus as well as a special faculty. Critical doubt is made possible, broadly speaking, by the accumulation of ideas or habits of certain kinds which insensibly undo a previous state of homogeneity of thought. For instance, a community subsiding into peace and order from a state of warfare and plunder will at length find the ethic of its daily life at variance with the conserved ethic of its early religion of human sacrifice and special family or tribal sanctions; or a community which has accumulated a certain amount of accurate knowledge of astronomy will gradually find such knowledge irreconcilable with its primitive cosmology. A specially gifted person will anticipate the general movement of thought; but even for him some standing-ground must be supposed; and for the majority the advance in moral practice or scientific knowledge is the condition of any effective freethinking.

Between top and bottom, however, there are all grades of vivacity, earnestness, and courage; and on the side of the normal resistance there are all varieties of political and economic circumstance. It follows, then, that the *avowed* freethinker may be so in virtue either of special courage or of antecedent circumstances which make the attitude on his part less courageous. And it may even be granted to the quietist that the courage is at times that of ill-balanced judgment or heady temperament; just as it may be

conceded to the conservative that it is at times that which goes with or follows on disregard of wise ways of life. It is well that the full force of this position be realized at the outset. When we find, as we shall, some historic freethinkers displaying either extreme imprudence or personal indiscipline, we shall be prepared, in terms of this preliminary questioning, to realize anew that humanity has owed a great deal to some of its "unbalanced" types; and that, though discipline is nearly the last word of wisdom, indiscipline may at times be the morbid accompaniment or excess of a certain openness of view and spontaneity of action which are more favourable to moral and intellectual advance than a cold prudence or a safe insusceptibility.

But cold or calm prudence in turn is not a vice; and it is hardly possible to doubt that there have been in all ages varying numbers of unbelievers who shrugged their shoulders over the follies of faith, and declined to tilt against the windmills of fanaticism. There is much reason for surmising that Shakespeare was a case in point. It is not to be supposed, then, because some freethinkers who came out into the open were unbalanced types, that their psychology is *the* psychology of freethought, any more than that of General Gordon or Francis of Assisi is to be reckoned typical on the side of belief. There must have been myriads of quiet unbelievers, rational all round, whose unbelief was a strictly intellectual process, undisturbed by temperament. In our own day such types abound, and it is rather in them than in the abnormal types of past freethought—the Brunos and the Voltaires—that the average psychology of freethought is to be looked for and understood.

As for the case of the man who, already at odds with his fellows in the matter of his conduct, may in some phases of society feel it the easier to brave them in the matter of his avowed creed, we have already seen that even this does not convict him of intellectual dishonesty. And were such cases relatively as numerous as they are scarce—were the debauched deists even commoner than the vinous Steeles and Fieldings—the use of the fact as an argument would still be an oblique course on the side of a religion which claims to have found its first and readiest hearing among publicans and sinners. For the rest, the harm done in the world's history by unbalanced freethinkers is as dust in the balance against the immeasurable evil deliberately wrought on serious religious motives, to say nothing of the constant deviation of the mass of believers from their own professed code.

It may, finally, help a religious reader to a judicial view of the

phenomenon of freethought if he is reminded that every step forward in the alleged historic evolution of his own creed would depend, in the case put, on the existence of persons capable of rejecting a current and prevailing code in favour of one either denounced as impious or marked off by circumstances as dangerous. The Israelites in Egypt, the prophets and their supporters, the Gospel Jesus and his adherents, all ostensibly stand in some degree for positions of "negation," of hardy innovation, of disregard to things and persons popularly venerated; wherefore Collins, in the *Discourse* above mentioned, smilingly claimed at least the prophets as great freethinkers. On that head it may suffice to say that some of the temperamental qualifications would probably be very much the same for those who of old brought about religious innovation in terms of supernatural beliefs, and for those who in later times innovate by way of minimizing or repudiating such beliefs, though the intellectual qualifications might be different. Bruno and Dolet and Vanini and Voltaire, faulty men all four, could at least be more readily conceived as prophets in early Jewry, or reformers under Herod, than as Pharisees, or even Sadducees, under either regimen.

Be that as it may, however, the issues between freethought and creed are ultimately to be settled only in respect of their argumentative bases, as appreciable by men in society at any given time. It is with the notion of making the process of judicial appreciation a little easier, by historically exhibiting the varying conditions under which it has been undertaken in the past, that these pages are written.

CHAPTER II

PRIMITIVE FREETHINKING

To consider the normal aspects of primitive life, as we see them in savage communities and trace them in early literature, is to realize the enormous hindrance offered to critical thinking in the primary stages of culture by the mere force of habit. "The savage," says our leading anthropologist, "by no means goes through life with the intention of gathering more knowledge and framing better laws than his fathers. On the contrary, his tendency is to consider his ancestors as having handed down to him the perfection of wisdom, which it would be impiety to make the least alteration in. Hence among the lower races there is obstinate resistance to the most desirable reforms, and progress can only force its way with a slowness and difficulty which we of this century can hardly imagine."¹ Among the Bantu of South Africa, before the spread of European rule, "any person in advance of his fellows was specially liable to suspicion [of sorcery], so that progress of any kind towards what we should term higher civilization was made exceedingly difficult by this belief."² The real or would-be sorcerer could thus secure the elimination of the honest inventor; fear of sorcery being most potent as against the supposed irregular practitioner. The relative obstinacy of conservatism in periods and places of narrow knowledge is again illustrated in Lane's account of the modern Egyptians in the first half of the nineteenth century: "Some Egyptians who had studied for a few years in France declared to me that they could not instil any of the notions which they had there acquired even into the minds of their most intimate friends."³ So in modern Japan there were many assassinations of reformers, and some civil war, before Western ideas could gain a footing.⁴ The less the knowledge, in short, the harder to add to it.

¹ E. B. Tylor, *Anthropology*, 1881, p. 439. Cp. Lang, *Custom and Myth*, ed. 1893, p. 72; J. G. Frazer, *Lectures on the Early History of the Kingship*, 1905, pp. 85-87.

² Theal, *The Beginning of South African History*, 1902, p. 57. See also the Rev. J. Macdonald, *Light in Africa*, 1890, p. 192.

³ *Account of the Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians*, 5th ed. 1871, i, 280, note.

⁴ *Life of Mr. Yukichi Fukuzawa*, Tokyo, 1902, pp. 48-53, 56-69.

It is hardly possible to estimate with any confidence the relative rates of progress; but, though all are extremely slow, it would seem that reason could sooner play correctively on errors of secular practice¹ than on any species of proposition in religion—taking that word to connote at once mythology, early cosmology, and ritual ethic. Mere disbelief in a particular medicine-man or rain-maker who failed would not lead to any reflective disbelief in all; any more than the beating or renunciation of his fetish by a savage or barbarian means rejection of his fetishism, or than the renunciation of a particular saint by a modern Catholic² means abandonment of prayer to saints for intercession.

The question as to whether savages *do* beat their idols is a matter in some dispute. Sir A. B. Ellis, a high authority, offers a notable denial to the current belief that negroes “beat their Gods if their prayers are unanswered.” “After an experience of the Gold Coast extending over thirteen years,” he writes, “I have never heard of, much less witnessed, anything of the kind, although I have made inquiries in every direction” (*The Tshi-speaking Peoples*, 1887, p. 194). Other anthropologists have collected many instances in other races—*e.g.*, Fr. Schultze, *Der Fetischismus*, 1871, p. 130. In one case, a priest beats a fetish in advance, to secure his careful attention. (*Id.* pp. 90–91, citing the personal narrative of Bastian.) It seems to be a matter of psychic stage. The more primitive negro is as it were too religious, too much afraid of his Gods, who are not for him “idols,” but spirits residing in images or objects. Where the state of fear is only chronic another temper may arise. Among the Bataks of Sumatra disappointed worshippers often scold a God; and their legends tell of men who declared war on a deity and shot at him from a mountain. (Warneck, *Die Religion des Batak*, 1909, p. 7. Cp. Gen. ii, 4–9.) A temper of defiance towards deity has been noted in an Aryan Kafir of the Hindu-Kush. (Sir G. S. Robertson, *The Kafirs of the Hindu-Kush*, 1899, p. 182.) Some peoples go much further. Among the Polynesians, when a God failed to cure a sick chief or notable, he “was regarded as inexorable, and was usually banished from the temple and his image destroyed” (W. Ellis, *Polynesian Researches*, 2nd ed. 1831, i, 350). So among the Chinese, “if the God does not give rain they will threaten and beat him; sometimes they publicly depose him from the rank

¹ See Tylor, *Primitive Culture*, 3rd ed. i, 71, as to savage conservatism in handicraft; but compare his *Researches into the Early History of Mankind*, 1865, p. 160, as to counter-vailing forces.

² *E.g.*, in the first chapter of Saint-Simon's *Mémoires*, the account of the French soldiers who at the siege of Namur burned and broke the images of Saint Médard for sending so much rain. Cp. Irvine, *Letters on Sicily*, 1813, p. 72; and Ramage, *Wanderings through Italy*, ed. 1868, p. 113. Constant, *De la religion*, 1824, vol. i, ptie. ii, p. 34, gives a number of Christian instances.

of deity" (Frazer, *Lectures on the Early History of Kingship*, 1905, pp. 98-101. Cp. Ross, *Pansebeia*, 4th ed., 1672, p. 80).

There are many analogous phenomena. In old Samoa, in the ritual of mourning for the dead, the family God was first implored to restore the deceased, and then fiercely abused and menaced.¹ See, too, the story of the people of Niuē or Savage Island in the South Pacific, who in the time of a great pestilence, thinking the sickness was caused by a certain idol, broke it in pieces and threw it away (Turner, *Samoa a Hundred Years Ago*, 1884, p. 306). See further the cases cited by Constant, *De la religion*, 1824, vol. i, ptie. ii, pp. 32-34; and by Peschel, *The Races of Man*, Eng. tr. 1876, pp. 247-8, in particular that of Rastus, the last pagan Lapp in Europe, who quarrelled with his fetish stone for killing his reindeer in revenge for the withholding of its customary offering of brandy, and "immediately embraced Christianity." (Compare E. Rae, *The White Sea Peninsula*, 1881, p. 276.) See again the testimony of Herman Melville in his *Typee*, ch. xxiv; and that of T. Williams, *Fiji and the Fijians*, ed. 1858, i, 236: "Sometimes the natives get angry with their deities, and abuse and even challenge them to fight." Herodotos has similar stories of barbarians who defy their own and other deities (iv, 172, 183, 184). Compare the case of King Rum Bahadur of Nepaul, who cannonaded his Gods. Spencer, *Study of Sociology*, pp. 301-2. Also the anecdote cited by Spencer (*Id.* p. 160) from Sir R. Burton's *Goa*, p. 167. Here there is no disbelief, no reflection, but simple resentment. Compare, too, the amusing story of a blasphemy by Rossini, told by Louis Viardot, *Libre Examen*, 6e éd. pp. 166-67, note. That threats against the Gods are possible at a semi-civilized stage is proved by various passages in medieval literature. Thus in Caxton's *Charles the Grete*, a translation from an older French original, Charles is made to say: "O lord God, if ye suffre that Olyver be overcome and that my ryght at thys tyme be loste and defyled, I make a vowe that al Crystyante shal be destroyed. I shal not leve in Fraunce chirche ne monasterye, ymage ne aulter," etc. (Early Eng. Text Soc. rep. 1881, pp. 70-71.) Such language was probably used by not a few medieval kings in moments of fury; and there is even record that at the battle of Dunbar certain of the Scots Presbyterian clergy intimated to their deity that he would not be their God if he failed them on that day.

If such flights be reckoned possible for Christian kings and clerics in the Christian era, there would seem to be no unlikelihood about the many stories of God-beating and God-defying among contemporary savages, though so good an observer as Sir A. B. Ellis may not have witnessed them in the part of

¹ Rev. J. B. Stair, *Old Samoa*, 1897, pp. 181-82.

Africa best known to him. The conclusion reached by Sir A. B. Ellis is that the negroes of the Gold Coast are not properly to be described as fetishists. Fetishism, on his view, is a worship of objects as in themselves endowed with magical power; whereas the Gold Coast negro ascribes no virtue to the object commonly called his fetish, regarding it simply as inhabited by a supernatural power. This writer sees "true fetishism" in the attitude of Italian peasants and fishermen who beat and ill-treat their images when prayers are not answered, and in that of Spaniards who cover the faces of their images or turn them to the wall when about to do anything which they think the saint or deity would disapprove of. On this view, fetishism is a later yet lower stage of religious evolution than that of the negro. On the other hand, Miss Kingsley takes fetishism to be the proper name of the attitude of the negro towards particular objects as divinely inhabited, and represents it as a kind of pantheism (*West African Studies*, 2nd ed. 1901, ch. v). And since, by her definition, "Gods of fetish" do not necessarily "require a material object to manifest themselves in" (p. 96), the term "fetish" is thus detached from all of its former meanings. It seems expedient, as a matter of terminology, to let fetishism mean both object- or image-worship and the belief in the special inhabiting of objects by deities, with a recognition that the beliefs may be different stages in an evolution, though, on the other hand, they are obviously likely to coalesce or concur. In the "Obeah" system of the negroes of the West Indies the former belief in the indwelling spirit has become, or has coalesced with, belief in the magical powers of the object (Keane, *Man, Past and Present*, 1900, p. 57).

As to defiance or contumely towards the Gods, finally, we have the testimony of the Swiss missionary Junod that the South African Thonga, whom he studied very closely, have in their ritual "a regular *insulting* of the Gods." (*Life of a South African Tribe*, ii, 1912, p. 384.) Why not? "Prayers to the ancestors.....are.....absolutely devoid of awe" (p. 385), though "the ancestor-Gods are certainly the most powerful spiritual agency acting on man's life" (p. 361); and "the spirits of the ancestors are the main objects of religious worship" (p. 344). The Thonga, again, use "neither idolatry nor fetishism," having no "idols" (p. 388), though they recognize "hidden virtues" in plants, animals, and stones (p. 345). They simply regard their ancestor-Gods very much as they do their aged people, whom they generally treat with little consideration. But the dead can do harm, and must therefore be propitiated—as savages propitiate, with fear or malice or derision in their hearts, as the case may be. (Cp. p. 379.) On the other hand, despite the denial of their "fetishism," they believe that ancestor-Gods may come in the shape of animals; and they so venerate

a kind of palladium (made up like a medicine-man's amulet) as to raise the question whether this kind of belief is not just that which Miss Kingsley called "fetish." (Junod, pp. 358, 373-74.)

Whatever may be the essence, or the varieties, of fetishism, it is clear that the beating of idols or threatening of Gods does not amount to rational doubt concerning the supernatural. Some general approach to that attitude may perhaps be inferred in the case of an economic revolt against the burdens of a highly specialized religious system, which may often have occurred in unwritten history. We shall note a recorded instance of the kind in connection with the question whether there are any savage tribes without religion. But it occurs in the somewhat highly evolved barbarism of pre-Christian Hawaii; and it can set up no inference as to any development of critical unbelief at lower levels. In the long stage of lower savagery, then, the only approach to freethinking that would seriously affect general belief would presumably be that very credulity which gave foothold to religious beliefs to begin with. That is to say, without anything in the nature of general criticism of any story or doctrine, one such might to some extent supersede another, in virtue of the relative gift of persuasion or personal weight of the propounders. Up to a certain point persons with a turn for myth or ritual-making would compete, and might even call in question each other's honesty, as well as each other's inspiration.

Since the rise of scientific hierology there has been a disposition among students to take for granted the good faith of all early religion-makers, and to dismiss entirely that assumption of fraud which was so long made by Christian writers concerning the greater part of every non-Christian system. The assumption had been passed on from the freethinkers of antiquity who formulated the view that all religious doctrine had been invented by politicians in order to control the people.¹ Christian polemicists, of course, applied it to all systems but their own. When, however, all systems are seen to be alike natural in origin, such charges are felt to recoil on the system which makes them; and latterly² Christian writers, seeing as much, have been fain to abandon the conception of "priest-

¹ Sextus Empiricus, *Adv. Mathematicos*, ix, 14, 29; Pseudo-Plutarch, *De placitis philosophorum*, i, 7; Lactantius, *De ira Dei*, x, 47; Cicero, *De natura Deorum*, i, 42; Augustine, *De civitate Dei*, iv, 32. It is noteworthy that the skeptic Sextus rejects the opinion as absurd, even as does the high-priest Cotta in Cicero.

² Vico was one of the first, after Sextus Empiricus and his modern commentator Fabricius, to insist (following the saying of Petronius, *Primus in orbe deos fecit timor*) that "False religions were founded not by the imposture of some, but by the credulity of all" (*Scienza Nuova* [1725], lib. i, prop. 40). Yet when denying (*id.*, *De Principiis*, ed. 1852, p. 114) the assertions of travellers as to tribes without religion, he insisted that they were mere fictions planned to sell the authors' books—here imputing fraud as lightly as others had done in the case of the supposed founders of religions.

craft," adroitly representing it as an extravagance of rationalism. It certainly served rationalistic purposes, and the title of the supposititious medieval work on "The Three Impostors" points to its currency among unbelievers long ago; but when we first find it popularly current in the seventeenth century, it is in a Christian atmosphere.¹ Some of the early deists and others have probably in turn exaggerated the amount of deliberate deceit involved in the formation of religious systems; but nevertheless "priestcraft" is a demonstrable factor in the process. What is called the psychology of religion has been much obscured in response to the demand of religious persons to have it so presented as to flatter them in that capacity.² Such a claim cannot be permitted to overrule the fair inductions of comparative science.

Anthropological evidence suggests that, while religion clearly begins in primordial fear and fancy, wilful fraud must to some extent have entered into all religious systems alike, even in the period of primeval credulity, were it only because the credulity was so great. One of the most judicial and sympathetic of the Christian scholars who have written the history of Greece treats as unquestionable the view that alike in pagan and Christian cults "priestcraft" has been "fertile in profitable devices, in the invention of legends, the fabrication of relics, and other modes of imposture";³ and the leading hierologist of the last generation pronounces decisively as to an element of intentional deceit in the Koran-making of Mohammed⁴—a judgment which, if upheld, can hardly fail to be extended to some portions of all other sacred books. However that may be, we have positive evidence that wilful and systematic fraud enters into the doctrine of contemporary savages, and that among some "primitives" known myths are deliberately propounded to the boys and women by the male adults.⁵ Indeed, the majority of modern travellers among primitives seem to have regarded their priests and sorcerers in the mass as conscious deceivers.⁶ If, then, we can point

¹ E.g., the Elizabethan play *Selimus* (Huth Lib. ed. of Greene, vol. xiv, ed. Grosart), dated 1594, vv. 258-262. (In "Temple Dramatists" ed., vv. 330-334.) See also below, vol. ii, ch. xiii.

² On the principle of self-expression in religion, cp. Feuerbach, *Das Wesen der Religion*, in *Werke*, ed. 1846-1849, i, 413, 445, 498, etc.

³ Bishop Thirlwall, *History of Greece*, ed. 1839, i, 186, 204. Cp. Curtius, *Griechische Geschichte*, 1858, i, 389.

⁴ Tiele, *Outlines of the Hist. of Religions*, Eng. tr., p. 96. Cp. Robertson Smith, *The Old Testament in the Jewish Church*, 2nd ed., p. 141, note.

⁵ Spencer and Gillen, *The Northern Tribes of Central Australia*, 1904, pp. 258, 347, 366, 373, 492.

⁶ See the article by E. J. Glave, of Stanley's force, on "Fetichism in Congoland," in the *Century Magazine*, April, 1891, p. 836. Compare F. Schultze, *Der Fetichismus*, 1871, pp. 137, 141, 142, 144, etc.; Theal, *The Beginning of South African History*, 1902, pp. 49, 52; Kranz, *Natur- und Kulturleben der Zulus*, 1880, pp. 110, 113-14; Moffat, *Missionary Labours*, 35th thous., pp. 69, 81-84; A. B. Ellis, *The Tshi-Speaking Peoples*, 1887, pp. 125-29, 137-39.

to deliberate imposture alike in the charm-mongering and myth-mongering of contemporary savages and in the sacred-book-making of the higher historical systems, it seems reasonable to hold that conscious deceit, as distinguished from childlike fabrication, would chronically enter into the tale-making of primitive men, as into their simpler relations with each other. It is indeed impossible to conceive how a copious mythology could ever arise without the play of a kind of imaginativeness that is hardly compatible with veracity; and it is probably only the exigencies of ecclesiastical life that cause modern critics still to treat the most deliberate fabrications and forgeries in the Hebrew sacred books as somehow produced in a spirit of the deepest concern for truth. An all-round concern for truth is, in fact, a late intellectual development, the product of much criticism and much doubt; hence, perhaps, the lenity of the verdicts under notice. Certain wild tribes here and there, living in a state of great simplicity, are in our own day described as remarkably truthful;¹ but they are not remarkable for range of supernatural belief; and their truthfulness is to be regarded as a product of their special stability and simplicity of life. The trickery of a primitive medicine-man, of course, is a much more childlike thing than the frauds of educated priesthoods; and it is compatible with so much of spontaneous pietism as is implied in the common passing of the operator into the state of convulsion and trance—a transition which comes easily to many savages.² But even at that stage of psychosis, and in a community where simple secular lying is very rare, the professional wizard-priest becomes an adept in playing upon credulity.³

It belongs, in short, to the very nature of the priestly function, in its earlier forms, to develop in a special degree the normal bias of the undisciplined mind to *intellectual* fraud. Granting that there are all degrees of self-consciousness in the process, we are bound to recognize that in all of us there is "the sophist within," who stands between us and candour in every problem either of self-criticism or of self-defence. And, if the instructed man recognizes this clearly and the uninstructed does not, none the less is the latter an exemplification of the fact. His mental obliquities are not any less real because of his indifference to them than are the

142; Sir G. S. Robertson, *The Kafirs of the Hindu-Kush*, ed. 1899, pp. 405, 417; E. Rae, *The White Sea Peninsula*, 1881, p. 149; Turner, *Samoa*, 1884, p. 272. It is certain that the wizards of contemporary savage races are frequently killed as impostors by their own people. See below, p. 35.

¹ Tylor, *Anthropology*, p. 406; *Primitive Culture*, 3rd ed., i, 38.

² The fact that this phenomenon occurs everywhere among primitives, from the South Seas to Lapland, should be noted in connection with the latterly revived claims of so-called "Mysticism."

³ Cp. E. Rae, *The White Sea Peninsula*, 1881, pp. 149, 263.

acts of the hereditary thief because he does them without shame. And if we consider how the fetish-priest is at every turn tempted to invent and prevaricate, simply because his pretensions are fundamentally preposterous; and how in turn the priest of a higher grade, even when he sincerely "believes" in his deity, is bound to put forward as matters of knowledge or revelation the hypotheses he frames to account for either the acts or the abstentions of the God, we shall see that the priestly office is really as incompatible with a high sincerity in the primitive stages as in those in which it is held by men who consciously propound falsities, whether for their mere gain or in the hope of doing good. It may be true that the priestly claim of supernatural sanction for an ethical command is at times motivated by an intense conviction of the rightness of the course of conduct prescribed; but none the less is such a habit of mind fatal to intellectual sincerity. Either there is sheer hallucination or there is pious fraud.

Given, however, the tendency to deceit among primitive folk, distrust and detection in a certain number of cases would presumably follow, constituting a measure of simple skepticism. By force partly of this and partly of sheer instability of thought, early belief would be apt to subsist for ages like that of contemporary African tribes,¹ in a state of flux.² Comparative fixity would presumably arise with the approach to stability of life, of industry, and of political institutions, whether with or without a special priesthood. The usages of early family worship would seem to have been no less rigid than those of the tribal and public cults. For primitive man as for the moderns definite organization and ritual custom must have been a great establishing force as regards every phase of religious belief;³ and it may well have been that there was thus less intellectual liberty of a kind in the long ages of what we regard as primitive civilization than in those of savagery and barbarism which preceded them. On that view, systems which are supposed to represent in the fullest degree the primeval spontaneity of religion may have been in part priestly reactions against habits of freedom accompanied by a certain amount of skepticism. A modern inquirer⁴ has in some such sense advanced the theory that in ancient India, in even the earlier period of collection of the Rig-Veda, which itself

¹ Glave, article cited, pp. 835-36.

² Cp. Max Müller, *Natural Religion*, 1889, p. 133; *Anthropological Religion*, 1892, p. 150; Lang, *Myth, Ritual, and Religion*, 2nd ed. ii, 358 sq.

³ Compare Bishop Butler's *Charge to the Clergy of Durham*, and Bishop Wordsworth *On Religious Restoration in England*, 1854, p. 75, etc.

⁴ P. von Bradke, *Dyûs Asura, Ahura Mazda, und die Asuras*, Halle, 1885, p. 115.

undermined the monarchic character of the pre-Vedic religion, there was a decay of belief, which the final redaction served to accelerate. Such a theory can hardly pass beyond the stage of hypothesis in view of the entire absence of history proper in early Indian literature; but we seem at least to have the evidence of the Veda itself that while it was being collected there were deniers of the existence of its Gods.¹

The latter testimony alone may serve as ground for raising afresh an old question which recent anthropology has somewhat inexactly decided—that, namely, as to whether there are any savages without religious beliefs.

[For old discussions on the subject see Cicero, *De natura deorum*, i, 23; Cumberland, *Disquisitio de legibus naturæ*, 1672, introd. (rejecting negative view as resting on inadequate testimony); Locke, *Essay on the Human Understanding*, Bk. I, ch. iii, § 9; ch. iv, § 8 (accepting negative view); protests against it by Vico (*Scienza Nuova*, 1725, as cited above, p. 26); by Shaftesbury (*Letters to a Student*, 1716, rep. in *Letters*, 1746, pp. 32–33); by Rev. John Milne, *An Account of Mr. Lock's Religion* (anon.), 1700, pp. 5–8; and by Sir W. Anstruther, *Essays Moral and Divine*, Edinburgh, 1701, p. 24; further protests by Lafitau (*Mœurs des sauvages américains comparées aux mœurs des premiers temps*, 1724, i, 5), following Boyle, to the effect that the very travellers and missionaries who denied all religion to savages avow facts which confute them; and general view by Fabricius, *Delectus argumentorum et Syllabus scriptorum*, Hamburgi, 1725, ch. viii. Cp. also Swift, *Discourse Concerning the Mechanical Operation of the Spirit*, § 2.

Büchner (*Force and Matter*, ch. on "The Idea of God"); Lord Avebury = Sir John Lubbock (*Prehistoric Times*, 5th ed., pp. 574–80; *Origin of Civilization*, 5th ed., pp. 213–17); and Mr. Spencer (*Principles of Sociology*, iii, § 583) have collected modern travellers' testimonies as to the absence of religious ideas in certain tribes. Cp. also J. A. St. John's (Bohn) ed. of Locke, notes on passages above cited, and on Bk. IV, ch. x, § 6. As Lord Avebury points out, the word "religion" is by some loosely or narrowly used to signify only a higher theology as distinct from lower supernaturalist beliefs.

¹ *Rig-Veda*, x, 121 (as translated by Muir, Müller, Dutt, and von Bradke); and x, 82 (Dutt's rendering). It is to be noted that the refrain "Who is the God whom we should worship?" is entirely different in Ludwig's rendering of x, 121. [Bertholet's *Religions-geschichtliches Lesebuch* (1908) compiled on the principle that "the best translations are good enough for us," follows the rendering of Muir, Müller, Dutt, and von Bradke (p. 165).] Cp. Max Müller, *Hibbert Lectures*, p. 302, and *Natural Religion*, pp. 227–229, citing *R. V.*, viii, 100, 3, etc., for an apparently undisputed case of skepticism. See again Langlois's version of vi, 7, iii, 3 (p. 459). He cannot diverge much more from the German and English translators than they do from each other.

He himself, however, excludes from the field of "religion" a belief in evil spirits and in magic—here coinciding with the later anthropologists who represented magic and religion as fundamentally "opposed"—a view rejected even by some religionists. Cp. Avebury, *Marriage, Totemism, and Religion* (1911), p. 116 sq.; Rev. E. Crawley, *The Mystic Rose*, 1902, p. 3; Prof. T. Witten Davies, *Magic, Divination, and Demonology*, 1898, pp. 18-24. The proved erroneousness of many of the negative testimonies has been insisted on by Benjamin Constant (*De la Religion*, 1824, i, 3-4); Theodore Parker (*Discourse of Matters Pertaining to Religion*, 1842 and 1855, ed. 1877, p. 16); G. Roskoff (*Das Religionswesen der rohesten Naturvölker*, 1880, Abschn. I and II); Dr. Tylor (*Primitive Culture*, 3rd ed., i, pp. 417-25); and Dr. Max Müller (*Introd. to the Science of Religion*, ed. 1882, p. 42 sq.; Hibbert Lectures, p. 91 sq.; *Natural Religion*, 1889, pp. 81-89; *Anthropological Religion*, 1892, pp. 428-35).

The Rev. H. A. Junod (*Life of a South African Tribe*, vol. ii, 1913, p. 346) shows how easily misconception on the subject may arise. Galton (*Narrative of an Explorer*, ch. viii, ed. 1891, p. 138) writes: "I have no conception to this day whether or no the Ovampo have any religion, for Click was frightened and angry if the subject of death was alluded to." The context shows that the native regarded all questions on religious matters with suspicion. Schweinfurth, again, contradicts himself twice within three pages as to the beliefs of the Bongo in a "Supreme Being" and in a future state; and thus leaves us doubting his statement that the neighbouring race, the Dyoor, "put no faith at all in any witchcraft" (*The Heart of Africa*, 3rd ed. i, 143-45). Much of the confusion turns on the fact that savages who practise no *worship* have religious beliefs (cp. Max Müller, Hibbert Lectures, ed. 1878, p. 17, citing Monsignor Salvado; and Carl Lumholtz, *Among Cannibals*, 1889, p. 284). The dispute, as it now stands, mainly turns on the definition of religion (cp. Chantepie de la Saussaye, *Manual of the Science of Religion*, Eng. tr. 1891, pp. 16-18, where Lubbock's position is partly misunderstood). Dr. Tylor, while deciding that no tribes known to us are religionless, leaves open the question of their existence in the past.

A notable example of the prolongation of error on this subject through orthodox assumptions is seen in Dr. A. W. Howitt's otherwise valuable work on *The Native Tribes of South Australia* (1904). Dr. Howitt produces (pp. 488-508) abundant evidence to show that a number of tribes believe in a "supernatural anthropomorphic being," variously named Nurrundere, Nurelli, Bunjil, Mungan-ngaua, Daramalun, and Baiame ("the same being under different names," writes Dr. Howitt, p. 499). This being he describes as "the tribal All-Father," "a venerable

kindly Headman of a tribe, full of knowledge and tribal wisdom, and all-powerful in magic, of which he is the source, with virtues, failings, and passions such as the aborigines regard them" (pp. 500-1). But he insists (p. 506) that "in this being, though supernatural, there is no trace of a divine nature," and, again, that "the Australian aborigines do not recognize any divinity, good or evil" (p. 756), though (p. 501) "it is most difficult for one of us to divest himself of the tendency to endow such a supernatural being [as the All-Father] with a nature quasi-divine, if not altogether so." Dr. Howitt does not name any European deity who satisfies him on the point of divinity! Obviously the Australian deities have evolved in exactly the same way as those of other peoples, Yahweh included. Dr. Howitt, indeed, admits (p. 507) that the Australian notions "may have been at the root of monotheistic beliefs." They certainly were; and when he adds that, "although it cannot be alleged that these aborigines have *consciously any form of religion*, it may be said that their beliefs are such that, under favourable conditions, they *might have* developed into an *actual religion*," he indicates afresh the confusion possible from unscientific definitions. The sole content of his thesis is, finally, that a "supernatural" being is not "divine" till the priests have somewhat trimmed him, and that a religion is not "actual" till it has been sacerdotally formulated. Dr. Howitt's negations are as untenable as Mr. Andrew Lang's magnification of the Australian All-Father into a perfect Supreme Being.

The really important part of Dr. Howitt's survey of the problem is his conclusion that the kind of belief he has described exists only in a specified area of Australia, and that this area is "the habitat of tribes.....where there has been the advance from group marriage to individual marriage, from descent in the female line to that in the male line" (p. 500). Messrs. Spencer and Gillen's denial of the existence of any belief in a personal deity among the tribes of Central Australia (*Northern Tribes*, 1904, p. 491) appears to stand for actual fact.

As to the "divinity" of the ancestor-gods of the primitives, see *Pagan Christs*, 2nd ed. p. 41 sq.]

The problem has been unduly narrowed to the question whether there are any whole tribes so developed. It is obviously pertinent to ask whether there may not be diversity of opinion within a given tribe. Such testimonies as those collected by Sir John Lubbock [Lord Avebury] and others, as to the existence of religionless savages, are held to be disposed of by further proof that tribes of savages who had been set down as religionless on the evidence of some of themselves had in reality a number of religious beliefs. Travellers' questions had been falsely answered, either on the

principle that non-initiates must not be told the mysteries, or from that sudden perception of the oddity of their beliefs which comes even to some civilized people when they try to state them to an unbelieving outsider. Questions, again, could easily be misunderstood, and answers likewise. We find, for instance, that savages who scout the idea that the dead can "rise again" do believe in the continued disembodied existence of all their dead, and even at times conceive of them as marrying and procreating! On the whole, they conceive of a continuity of spirit-life on earth in human shape. To speak of such people as having no idea of "a life beyond the grave" would obviously be misleading, though they have no notion of a judgment day or of future rewards or punishments.¹

Undoubtedly, then, the negative view of savage religion had in a number of cases been hastily taken; but there remains the question, as a rule surprisingly ignored, whether some of the savages who disavowed all belief in things supernatural may not have been telling the simple truth about themselves, or even about their families and their comrades. As one sympathetic traveller notes of the Samoyedes: "There can be no such thing as strict accuracy of grammar or expression among an illiterate people; nor can there be among these simple creatures any consistent or fixed appreciation even of their own forms of.....belief.....Having no object in arriving at a common view of such matters, each Samoyede, if questioned separately, will give more or less his own disconnected impression of his faith."² And this holds of unfaith. A savage asked by a traveller, "Do you believe" so-and-so, might very well give a true negative answer for himself;³ and the traveller's resulting misconception would be due to his own arbitrary assumption that all members of any tribe must think alike.

A good witness expressly testifies: "In the tribe [of Australians] with which I was best acquainted, while the blacks had a term for ghost and believed that there were departed spirits who were sometimes to be seen among the foliage, individual men would tell you upon inquiry that they believed that death was the last of them" (*Eaglehawk and Crow: A Study of the Australian Aborigines*, by John Mathew, M.A., B.D., 1899, p. 146). As to the risk of wrong negative inferences, on the other hand, see pp. 145, 147.

¹ Junod, as above cited, pp. 341, 343, 350, 388. Cp. Dalton, as cited, p. 115.

² E. Rae, *The White Sea Peninsula*, 1881, pp. 146-7.

³ On the other hand, there might be genuine defect of knowledge of the religion of others of the tribe. This is said to occur in thousands of cases in Christian countries: why not also among savages? See the express testimony of Sir G. S. Robertson, *The Kafirs of the Hindu-Kush*, ed. 1899, pp. 377, 409.

One of the best of our missionary witnesses, H. A. Junod, in his valuable study of the South African Thonga, testifies both to the commonness of individual variation in the way of religious fancy and the occurrence of sporadic unbelief, usually ended by fear. Individuals freely indulge in concrete speculations—*e.g.*, as to the existence of animal souls—which do not win vogue (*Life of a South African Tribe*, vol. ii, 1913, p. 342 *sq.*), though the reporter seems to overlook the possibility that such ideas *may* be adopted by a tribe. Freethinking ideas have, of course, by far the least chance of currency. “The young folks of Libombo used to blaspheme in their hearts, saying, ‘There are no Gods.’ But,” added the witness, “we very soon saw that there were some, when they killed one of us,” who trod on a snake (work cited, pp. 354–55). That testimony illustrates well the difficulties of rational progress in a primitive community. But at times the process may be encouraged by the environment. The early missionary Ellis gives an instance of a community in Hawaii that had abandoned all religious practices: “We asked them who was their God. They said they had no God; formerly they had many: but now they had cast them all away. We asked them if they had done well in abolishing them. They said ‘Yes,’ for tabu had occasioned much labour and inconvenience, and drained off the best of their property. We asked them if it was a good thing to have no God.....They said perhaps it was; for they had nothing to provide for the great sacrifices, and were under no fear of punishment for breaking tabu; that now one fire cooked their food, and men and women ate together the same kind of provisions.” (W. Ellis, *Tour Through Hawaii or Owhyhee*, 1827, p. 100.) The community in question had in their own way reached the Lucretian verdict, *Tantum religio potuit suadere malorum*.

Unless, again, such witnesses as Moffat be unfaithful reporters as well as mistaken in their inferences, *some* of the natives with whom they dealt were all but devoid of the ordinary religious notions¹ which in the case of other natives have enabled the missionaries to plant their doctrines. Nor is there anything hard of belief in the idea that, just as special religious movements spread credence in certain periods, a lack of active teachers in certain tribes may for a time have let previously common beliefs pass almost out of knowledge. If it be true that the Black Death wrought a great decline in the ecclesiastical life of England in the fourteenth century,² a long period of life-destroying conditions might eliminate from the life of a savage tribe all lore save that of primary self-preservation.

¹ *E.g.*, Moffat, *Missionary Labours*, end of ch. xvi and beginning of ch. xix.

² See Dr. Gasquet, *The Great Pestilence*, 1893.

Moffat incidentally notes the significant fact that rain-makers in his time were usually foreigners to the tribes in which they operated.¹

The explanation is partly that given by him later, that "a rain-maker seldom dies a natural death,"² most being executed as impostors for their failures. To this effect there are many testimonies.³ Among the Bushmen, says Lichtenstein, when a magician "happens to have predicted falsely several times in succession, he is thrust out of the kraal, and very likely burned or put to death in some other way."⁴ "A celebrated magician," says Burton again, "rarely if ever dies a natural death."⁵ And it is told of the people of Niuē, or Savage Island, in the South Pacific, that "of old they had kings; but as they were the high priests as well, and were supposed to cause the food to grow, the people got angry with them in times of scarcity, and killed them; and as one after the other was killed, the end of it was that no one wished to be king."⁶ So, in Uganda, if a chief and his medicine-men cannot make rain, "his whole existence is at stake in times of distress." One chief was actually driven out; and the rain-doctors always live on sufferance.⁷ In such a state of things religion might well lose vogue.

Among some peoples of the Slave Coast, it appears, the regular priests, despite their power and prestige, are always under suspicion by reason of their frequent miscarriages; and they are—or were—not unfrequently put to death.⁸ Here there is disbelief in the priest without disbelief in the God. But a disbelief in the priest which tended to exterminate him might well diminish religion.

On the other hand, a relative indifference to religion in a given tribe might result from the influence of one or more leading men who spontaneously doubted the religious doctrine offered to them, as many in Israel, on the face of the priestly records, disbelieved in the whole theocratic polity. In modern times preachers are constantly found charging "unbelief" on their own flocks, in respect not of any criticism of religious narrative or dogma, but of simple lack of ostensible faith in doctrines of prayer and Providence nominally

¹ *Missionary Labours*, ch. xix: stereo. ed. pp. 81, 82. It is noteworthy that the women were the first to avow unbelief in an unsuccessful rainmaker (*Id.* p. 84).

² *Missionary Labours*, as cited, p. 85.

³ Cp. Schultze, *Der Fetischismus*, 1871, pp. 155-56; A. H. Keane, *Man, Past and Present*, 1900, p. 49; Thurston, *Castes and Tribes of Southern India*, 1909, i, 86.

⁴ *Travels in Southern Africa in the Years 1803-1806*, 1815, ii, 61. Cp. Rev. J. Macdonald, *Light in Africa*, 1890, p. 192, as to the compulsion on men of superior intelligence to play the wizard, by reason of the common connection of wizardry with any display of mental power. There is no more tragical aspect in the life-conditions of primitive peoples.

⁵ *The Lake Regions of Central Africa*, 1860, ii, 351.

⁶ Turner, *Samoa a Hundred Years Ago*, 1884, pp. 304-305. Cp. Herodotos, iv, 68, as to the slaying of "false prophets" among the Scythians; and i, 128, as to the impaling of the Magi by Astyages.

⁷ Paul Kollmann, *The Victoria Nyanza*, 1899, p. 168.

⁸ Sir A. B. Ellis, *The Tshi-Speaking Peoples of the Gold Coast*, 1887, p. 127.

accepted.¹ Among peasants who have never seen a freethinking book or heard a professed freethinker's arguments may be heard expressions of spontaneous unfaith in current doctrines of Providence.

This is but a type of variations possible in primitive societies. Despite the social potency of primitive custom, variation may be surmised to occur in the mental as in the physical life at all stages; and what normally happens in savagery and low civilization appears to be a cancelment of the skeptical variation by the total circumstances—the strength of the general lead to supernaturalism, the plausibility of such beliefs to the average intelligence, and the impossibility of setting up skeptical institutions to oppose the others. In civilized ages skeptical movements are repeatedly seen to dwindle for simple lack of institutions; which, however, are spontaneously set up by and serve as sustainers of religious systems. On the simpler level of savagery, skeptical personalities would in the long run fail to affirm themselves as against the institutions of ordinary savage religion—the seasonal feasts, the ceremonies attending birth and death, the use of rituals, images, charms, sorcery, all tending to stimulate and conserve supernatural beliefs in general. Only the abnormally courageous would dare outspokenly to doubt or deny at all; and their daring would put them in special jeopardy.² The ancient maxim, *Primus in orbe deos fecit timor*, is verified by all modern study of primitive life.³ It is a recent traveller who gives the definition: "Fetichism is the result of the efforts of the savage intelligence seeking after a theory which will account for the apparent hostility of nature to man."⁴ And this incalculable force of fear is constantly exploited by the religious bias from the earliest stages of sorcery.⁵

¹ *E.g.*, an aged female relative of the writer, quite orthodox in all her habits, and devout to the extent of calling the Book of Esther "Godless" because the word "God" does not occur in it, yet at a pinch declared that she had "never heard of Providence putting a boll of meal inside anybody's door." Her daughter-in-law, also of quite religious habits, quoted the saying with a certain sense of its audacity, but endorsed it, as she had cause to do. Yet both regularly practised prayer and asserted divine beneficence.

² See B. Seeman, "Fiji and the Fijians," in Galton's *Vacation Tourists*, 1862, pp. 275-76, as to the terrorism resorted to by Fijian priests against unbelievers. "Punishment was sure to overtake the skeptic, let his station in life be what it might"—*i.e.*, supernatural punishment was threatened, and the priests were not likely to let it fail. Cp. Basil Thomson, *The Fijians: A Study of the Decay of Custom*, 1909, introd., p. xi: "The reformers of primitive races never lived long: if they were low-born they were clubbed, and that was the end of them and their reforms; if they were chiefs, and something happened to them, either by disease or accident, men saw therein the figure of an offended deity; and obedience to the existing order of things became stronger than before." Cp. *Pagan Christs*, 2nd ed., pp. 60-62, as to kings who wished to put down human sacrifices.

³ See *Pagan Christs*, 2nd ed., pp. 1-2.

⁴ E. J. Glave, art. cited, p. 825. Cp. Lubbock, *Prehistoric Times*, pp. 582, 594.

⁵ Cp. the Rev. J. Macdonald, *Light in Africa*, 1890, pp. 222-23, as to the "universal suspicion" which falls upon tribesmen of rationalistic and anti-superstitious tendencies, making them "almost doubt their own sanity."

The check to intellectual evolution would here be on all fours with some of the checks inferribly at work in early moral evolution, where the types with the higher ideals would seem often to be positively endangered by their peculiarity, and would thus be the less likely to multiply. And what happened as between man and man would further tend to happen at times as between communities. Given the possible case of a tribe so well placed as to be unusually little affected by fear of enemies and the natural forces, the influence of rationalistic chiefs or of respected tribesmen might set up for a time a considerable anti-religious variation, involving at least a minimizing of religious doctrine and practices. Such a case is actually seen among the prosperous peoples of the Upper Congo, some of whom, like the poorer tribes known to Moffat, have no "medicine-men" of their own, and very vague notions of deity.¹ But when such a tribe did chance to come into conflict with others more religious, it would be peculiarly obnoxious to them; and, being in the terms of the case unwarlike, its chance of survival on the old lines would be small.

Such a possibility is suggested with some vividness by the familiar contrast between the modern communities of Fiji and Samoa—the former cruel, cannibalistic, and religious, the latter much less austerely religious and much more humane. The ferocious Fijians "looked upon the Samoans with horror, because they had no religion, no belief in any such deities [as the Fijians'], nor any of the sanguinary rites which prevailed in other islands" (Spencer, *Study of Sociology*, pp. 293-94, following J. Williams, *Narrative of Missionary Enterprise in the South Sea Islands*, ed. 1837, pp. 540-41; cp. the Rev. A. W. Murray, *Forty Years' Mission Work*, 1876, p. 171). The "no religion" is, of course, only relatively true. Mr. Lang has noticed the error of the phrase "the godless Samoans" (cp. Turner, *Samoa a Hundred Years Ago*, 1884, pp. 16-17); but, while suggesting that the facts are the other way, he admits that in their creed "the religious sentiment has already become more or less self-conscious, and has begun to reason on its own practices" (*Myth, Ritual, and Religion*, ii, 34; 2nd ed., ii, 58).

Taking the phenomena all along the line of evolution, we are led to the generalization that the rationalistic tendency, early or late, like the religious tendency, is a variation which prospers at different times in different degrees relatively to the favourableness of the environment. This view will be set forth in some detail in the course of our history.

¹ Sir H. H. Johnston, *The River Congo*, ed. 1895, p. 289. Cp. Moffat, as cited above.

It is not, finally, a mere surmise that individual savages and semi-savages in our own time vary towards disbelief in the supernaturalism of their fellows. To say nothing of the rational skepticism exhibited by the Zulu converts of Bishop Colenso, which was the means of opening his eyes to the incredibility of the Pentateuch,¹ or of the rationalism of the African chief who debated with Sir Samuel Baker the possibility of a future state,² we have the express missionary record that the forcible suppression of idolatry and tabu and the priesthood by King Rihoriho in the island of Hawaii, in 1819, was accomplished not only "before the arrival of any missionary," but on purely common-sense grounds, and with no thought of furthering Christianity, though he had heard of the substitution of Christianity for the native religion by Pomare in Tahiti. Rihoriho simply desired to save his wives and other women from the cruel pressure of the tabu system, and to divert the priests' revenues to secular purposes; and he actually had some strong priestly support.³ Had not the missionary system soon followed, however, the old worship, which had been desperately defended in battle at the instigation of the conservative priests, would in all probability have grown up afresh, though perhaps with modifications. The savage and semi-savage social conditions, taken as a whole, are fatally unpropitious to rationalism.

A parallel case to that of Rihoriho is that of King Finow of the Tonga Islands, described by Mariner, who was his intimate. Finow was noted for his want of religion. "He used to say that the Gods would always favour that party in war in which there were the greatest chiefs and warriors"—the European *mot* strictly adapted to Fiji conditions. "He did not believe that the Gods paid much attention in *other* respects to the affairs of mankind; nor did he think that they could have any reason for doing so—no more than men could have any reason or interest in attending to the affairs of the Gods." For the rest, "it is certain that he disbelieved most of the oracles delivered by the priests," though he carefully used them for political and military purposes; and he acquiesced in the usage of human sacrifices—particularly on his own account—while professing to deplore the taste of the Gods in these matters. His own death seems to have been the result of poisoning by a priest, whom the king had planned to strangle. The king's daughter was sick, and the priest, instead of bringing about her recovery by his

¹ Colenso, *The Pentateuch*, vol. i, pref. p. vii; introd. p. 9.

² Spencer, *Principles of Sociology*, iii, § 583.

³ W. Ellis, *Polynesian Researches*, 1831, iv, 30-31, 126-28.

prayers, hardily explained that the illness was the act of the Gods in punishment of the king's frequent disrespect to them. Daughter and father were alternately ill, till the former died; and then it was that the king, by disclosing his resolve to strangle the priest, brought on his own death (1810). A few warriors were disposed to take revenge on the priest; but the majority, on learning the facts, shuddered at the impious design of the late king, and regarded his death as the natural vengeance of the Gods. But, though such "impiety" as his was very rare, his son after him decided to abolish the priestly office of "divine chieftain," on the score that it was seen to avail for nothing, while it cost a good deal; and the chiefs and common people were soon brought to acquiesce in the policy.¹

Such cases appear to occur in many barbarous communities. It is recorded of the Kaffir chief Go that he was perfectly aware of the hollowness of the pretensions of the magicians and rain-makers of his tribe, though he held it impolitic to break with them, and called them in and followed their prescriptions, as did his subjects.² Of the Galeka chief Segidi it is similarly told that, while his medicine-men went into trances for occult knowledge preparatory to a military expedition, he carefully obtained real information through spies, and, while liberally rewarding his wizards, sent his sons to school at Blythswood.³ Yet again, in Bede's *Ecclesiastical History*, we have the story of King Edwin's priest, Coifi, naïvely avowing that he saw no virtue in his religion,⁴ inasmuch as many men received more royal favours than he, who had been most diligent in serving the Gods.⁵ Such a declaration might very well have been arranged for by the Christian Bishop Paulinus, who was converting the king, and would naturally provide for Coifi; but on any view a process of skepticism had taken place in the barbarian's mind.⁶

Other illustrations come from the history of ancient Scandinavia. Grimm notes in several Norse sagas and songs expressions of contempt for various Gods, which appear to be independent of

¹ *Account of the Natives of the Tonga Islands*, compiled from the communications of W. Mariner, by John Martin, M.D., 3rd ed. 1827, i, 289-300, 306-307, 338-39; ii, 27-28, 83-86, 134. Mariner, who saw much of the priests, found no reason to suspect them of any systematic deception. See ii, 129. But his narrative leaves small room for doubt as to the procedure of the priest of Toobo Totai.

² Dr. A. Kropf, *Das Volk der Xosa-Kaffern in östlichen Südafrika*, Berlin, 1899, pp. 203-204. Dr. Kropf, a missionary of forty years' experience, states that many of the Kaffirs latterly disbelieve in their sorcerers; but this may be partly a result of missionary teaching—not so much the religious as the scientific. See the testimony of the Rev. J. Macdonald, *Life in Africa*, 1890, pp. 47-48.

³ Rev. J. Macdonald, *Life in Africa*, pp. 225-26.

⁴ It is clear that in the Christianization of Europe much use was made of the argument that the best lands had fallen to the Christian peoples. See the epistle of Bishop Daniel of Winchester to St. Boniface (*Ep. lxxvii*) cited in Schlegel's note to Mosheim, Reid's ed. of Murdock's translation, p. 262.

⁵ Bede, *Eccles. Hist.*, ii, 13.

⁶ Cp. A. H. Mann in *Social England*, illustr. ed, i, 217.

Christian influence;¹ and many warriors continued alike the Christian and the Pagan deities. In the saga of King Olaf Tryggvason, who enforced Christianity on Norway, it is declared by one chief that he relied much more on his own arm than on Thor and Odin; while another announced that he was neither Christian nor Pagan, adding: "My companions and I have no other religion than the confidence of our own strength and in the good success which always attends us in war." Similar sentiments are recorded to have been uttered by Rolf Krake, a legendary king of Denmark (*circa* 500);² and we have in the *Æneid* the classic type—doubtless drawn from barbaric life—of Mezentius, *divum contemptor*, who calls his right arm his God, and in dying declares that he appeals to no deity.³ Such utterances, indeed, do not amount to rational freethinking; but, where some could be thus capable of anti-theism, it is reasonable to surmise that among the more reflective there were some capable of simple atheism or non-belief, and of the prudence of keeping the fact to themselves. Partial skepticism, of course, would be much more common, as among the Aryan Kafirs of the Hindu-Kush, with whom, before their conquest by the Ameer of Afghanistan, a British agent found among the younger men an inclination to be skeptical about some sacred ceremonies, while very sincere in their worship of their favourite deity, the God of war.⁴

It is thus seen to be inaccurate to say, as has been said by an accomplished antagonist of apriorism, that "under the yoke of tribal custom skepticism can hardly arise: there is no place for the half-hearted: as all men feel alike, so all think alike: skepticism arises when beliefs are put into formal propositions."⁵ It is broadly true that "there is no place for" the doubter as such in the tribal society; but doubters do exist. Skepticism—in the sense in which the term is here used, that of rational disbelief—may even be commoner in some stages of the life of tribal customs than in some stages of backward civilization loaded with formulated creeds. What is true is that in the primitive life the rationalism necessarily fails, for lack of culture and institutions, to diffuse and

¹ *Teutonic Mythology*, Eng. trans. 1882, i, 7.

² Crichton and Wheaton, *Scandinavia*, 1837, i, 198, *note*. Compare Dr. Ph. Schweitzer, *Geschichte der Skandinavischen Litteratur*, i, 25: "In the higher circles [in the pagan period] from an early date (*schon lange*) unbelief and even contempt of religion flourished probably never reaching the lower grades of the people." See also C. F. Allen, *Histoire de Danemark*, French trans., Copenhagen, 1878, i, 55.

³ *Æneid*, vii, 648; x, 773, 880. Mezentius does not deny that Gods exist: see x, 743.

⁴ Sir G. S. Robertson, *The Kafirs of the Hindu-Kush*, ed. 1899, p. 379.

⁵ Professor T. Clifford Allbutt, *Harveian Oration on Science and Medieval Thought*, 1901, p. 82.

establish itself, whereas superstition succeeds, being naturally institution-making. Under such conditions skepticism is but a recurrent variation.¹

It is significant, further, that in the foregoing cases of unbelief at the lower levels of civilization it is only the high rank of the doubter that secures publication for the fact of the doubt. In Hawaii, or Tonga, only a king's unbelief could make itself historically heard. So in the familiar story of the doubting Inca of Peru, who in public religious assembly is said to have avowed his conclusion that the deified Sun was not really a living thing, it is the status of the speaker that gives his words a record. The doubt had in all likelihood been long current among the wise men of Peru; it is indeed ascribed to two or three different Incas;² but, save for the Incas' promulgation of it, history would bear no trace of Peruvian skepticism. So again in the Acolhuan State of Tezcucó, the most civilized in the New World before the Spanish conquest, the great King Netzahualcoyotl is found opposing the cults of human sacrifice and worshipping an "unknown God," without an image and with only incense for offering.³ Only the king in such an environment could put on record such a conception. There is, in fact, reason to believe that all ancient ameliorations of bloody rites were the work of humane kings or chiefs,⁴ as they are known to have been among semi-savages in our own day.⁵ In bare justice we are bound to surmise that similar developments of rationalism have been fairly frequent in unwritten history, and that there must have been much of it among the common folk; though, on the other hand, the very position of a savage king, and the special energy of character which usually goes to secure it, may count for much in giving him the courage to think in defiance of custom. In modern as in early Christian times, it is always to the chief or king of a savage or barbarous tribe that the missionary looks for permission to proceed against the force of popular conservatism.⁶ Apart from kings and

¹ Mr. Basil Thomson, in the able introduction to his excellent work on *The Fijians*, speaks of primitive reformers (p. xi) as "rare souls born before their time." But there is no special "time" for reformers, who, as such, must be in advance of their average contemporaries.

² Garcilasso, l. viii, c. 8; l. ix, c. 10; Herrera, Dec. v, l. iv, c. 4. See the passages in Réville's Hibbert Lectures, pp. 162-65.

³ Prescott, *Conquest of Mexico*, Kirk's ed., pp. 81 sq., 91-93, 97; H. H. Bancroft, *Native Races of the Pacific States*, v, 427-29; Clavigero, *History of Mexico*, Eng. tr. ed. 1807, B. iv, §§ 4, 15; vii, § 42.

⁴ See the author's *Pagan Christs*, 2nd ed. pp. 60-62, 361. Cp. Lafcadio Hearn, *Japan*, 1904, pp. 313-14.

⁵ Cp. T. Williams, *Fiji and the Fijians*, ed. 1870, i, 231; Turner, *Samoa a Hundred Years Ago*, 1884, p. 202.

⁶ "A long time elapses between each step that their [missionaries'] stations advance: and when they do it invariably is under the influence of some chief that they are even then led on." Dalton, *Narrative of an Explorer in Tropical South Africa*, ed. 1891, p. 102.

chiefs, the priesthood itself would be the likeliest soil for skepticism, though, of course, not for the open avowal of it.

There are to be noted, finally, the facts collected as to marked skeptical variation among children;¹ and the express evidence that "it has not been found in a single instance that an uneducated deaf-mute has had any conception of the existence of a Supreme Being as the Creator and Ruler of the Universe."² These latter phenomena do not, of course, entitle us to accept Professor Gruppe's sweeping theorem that it is the religious variation that is abnormal, and that religion can have spread only by way of the hereditary imposition of the original insanity of one or two on the imagination of the many.³ Deaf-mutes are not normal organisms. But all the facts together entitle us to decide that religion, broadly speaking, is but the variation that has chiefly flourished, by reason of its adaptation to the prevailing environment thus far; and to reject as unscientific the formulas which, even in the face of the rapidly-spreading rationalism of the more civilized nations, still affirm supernaturalist beliefs to be a universal necessity of the human mind.

On the same grounds, we must reject the claim—arbitrarily set up by one historian in the very act of showing how religion historically oppugns science—that all sacred books as such "are true because they have been developed in accordance with the laws governing the evolution of truth in human history; and because in poem, chronicle, code, legend, myth, apologue, or parable, they reflect this development of what is best in the onward march of humanity."⁴ In this proposition the opening words, "are true because," are strictly meaningless. All literature whatever has been developed under the same general laws. But if it be meant that sacred books were specially likely to garner truth as such, the claim must be negated. In terms of the whole demonstration of the bias of theology against new truth in modern times, the irresistible presumption is that in earlier times also the theological and theocratic spirit was in general hostile to every process by which truth is

¹ See Professor Sully's *Studies of Childhood*, 1895.

² Rev. S. Smith, *Church Work among the Deaf and Dumb*, 1875, cited by Spencer, *Principles of Sociology*, iii, § 583. Cp. the testimony cited there from Dr. Kitto, *Lost Senses*, p. 200.

³ *Die griechischen Culte und Mythen*, 1887, pp. 263, 276, 277, etc. What is true as regards the thesis is that some of the central insanities of religion, such as the cult of human sacrifice, seem to have been propagated in all directions from an Asiatic centre. See the author's *Pagan Christs*, 2nd ed. pp. 273, 292, 343, 354, 362, etc. Cp. the Rev. D. Macdonald's *Asiatic Origin of the Oceanic Languages*, Luzac & Co., 1894; the *Nubische Grammatik* of Lepsius, 1880; and Terrien de Lacouperie, *Western Origin of the Early Chinese Civilization*, 1894, pp. 134, 362-63.

⁴ Dr. Andrew White, *A History of the Warfare of Science with Theology in Christendom*, 1896, i, 23.

normally attained. And if the thesis be limited to moral truth, it is still less credible. It is, in fact, inconceivable that literature so near the popular level as to suit whole priesthoods should be morally the best of which even the age producing it is capable; and nothing is more certain than that enlightened ethic has always had to impeach or explain away the barbarisms of some sacred books. The true summary is that in all cases the accepted sacred books have of necessity fallen short not only of scientific truth and of pure ethic, but even of the best speculation and the best ethic of the time of their acceptance, inasmuch as they excluded the criticism of the freethinking few on the sacred books themselves. There is sociological as well as physical science, and the former is flouted when the whole freethinking of the human race in the period of Bible-making is either ignored or treated as worthless.

It is probable, for instance, that in all stages of primitive religion there have been disbelievers in the value of sacrifice, who might or might not dare to denounce the practice. The demurrers to it in the Hebrew prophetic literature are probably late; but they were in all likelihood anticipated in early times. Among the Fijians, for whom cannibalism was an essentially religious act, and the privilege of the males of the aristocracy, there were a number of the latter who, before and apart from the entrance of Christianity, abominated and denounced the practice, reasoning against it also on utilitarian grounds, while the orthodox made it out to be a social duty. There were even whole towns which revolted against it and made it *tabu*; and it was by force mainly of this rationalistic reaction that the missionaries succeeded so readily in putting down the usage.¹ It is impossible to estimate how often in the past such a revolt of reason against religious insanity has been overborne by the forces of pious habit.

¹ Dr. B. Seeman, *Viti*, 1862, pp. 179-82.

CHAPTER III

PROGRESS UNDER ANCIENT RELIGIONS

§ 1. *Early Association and Competition of Cults*

WHEN religion has entered on the stage of quasi-civilized organization, with fixed legends or documents, temples, and the rudiments of hierarchies, the increased forces of terrorism and conservatism are in nearly all cases seen to be in part countervailed by the simple interaction of the systems of different communities. There is no more ubiquitous force in the whole history of the subject, operating as it does in ancient Assyria, in the life of Vedic India and Confucian China, and in the diverse histories of progressive Greece and relatively stationary Egypt, down through the Christian Middle Ages to our own period of comparative studies.

In ages when any dispassionate comparative study was impossible, religious systems appear to have been considerably modified by the influence of those of conquered peoples on those of their conquerors, and *vice versa*. Peoples who while at arm's length would insult and affect to despise each other's Gods, and would deride each other's myths,¹ appear frequently to have altered their attitude when one had conquered the other; and this not because of any special growth of sympathy, but by force of the old motive of fear. In the stage of natural polytheism no nation really doubted the existence of the Gods of another; at most, like the Hebrews of the early historic period, it would set its own God above the others, calling him "Lord of Lords." But, every community having its own God, he remained a local power even when his own worshippers were conquered, and his cult and lore were respected accordingly. This procedure, which has been sometimes attributed to the Romans in particular as a stroke of political sagacity, was the normal and natural course of polytheism. Thus in the Hebrew books the Assyrian conqueror is represented as admitting that it is

¹ Cp. Lang (*Myth, Ritual, and Religion*, i. 91) as to the contemptuous disbelief of savages in Christian myths. Mr. Lang observes that this shows savages and civilized men to have "different standards of credulity." That, however, does not seem to be the true inference. Each order of believer accepts the myths of his own creed, and derides others.

necessary to leave a priest who knows "the manner of the God of the land" among the new inhabitants he has planted there.

See 2 Kings xvii, 26. Cp. Ruth i, 16, and Judges xvii, 13. The account by Herodotos (ii, 171) of the preservation of the Pelasgic rites of Dêmêtêr by the women of Arcadia points to the same principle. See also hereinafter, ch. vi, § 1; K. O. Müller, *Introd. to a Sci. Study of Mythol.*, Eng. trans., p. 193; Adolf Bastian, *Der Mensch in der Geschichte*, 1860, i, 189; Rhys, *Celtic Britain*, 2nd ed., p. 69; Max Müller, *Anthropological Religion*, p. 164; Gibbon, ch. xxxiv—Bohn ed., iii, 554, note; Tylor, *Primitive Culture*, i, 113-15; and Dr. F. B. Jevons's *Introd. to the Hist. of Relig.*, 1896, pp. 36-40, where the fear felt by conquering races for the occult powers of the conquered is limited to the sphere of "magic." But when Dr. Jevons so defines magic as to admit of his proposition (p. 38) that "the hostility from the beginning between religion and magic is universally admitted," he throws into confusion the whole phenomena of the early official-religious practice of magic, of which sacrifice and prayer are the type-forms that have best survived. And in the end he upsets his definition by noting (p. 40) how magic, "even where its relation to religion is one of avowed hostility," will imitate religion. Obviously magic is a function or aspect or element of primitive religion (cp. Roskoff, *Das Religionswesen der rohesten Naturvölker*, 1880, p. 144; Sayce, pp. 315, 319, 327, and *passim*; and Tiele, *Egyptian Rel.*, pp. 22, 32); and any "hostility," far from being universal, is either a social or a philosophical differentiation. On the whole question compare the author's *Pagan Christs*, 2nd ed., pp. 11-38. In the opinion of Weber (*Hist. of Ind. Lit.*, p. 264) the magic arts "found a more and more fruitful soil as the religious development of the Hindus progressed"; "so that they now, in fact, reign almost supreme." See again Dr. Jevons's own later admission, p. 395, where the exception of Christianity is somewhat arbitrary. On this compare Kant, *Religion innerhalb der Grenzen der blossen Vernunft*, B. iv, Th. ii, § 3.

Similar cases have been noted in primitive cults still surviving. Fear of the magic powers of "lower" or conquered races is in fact normal wherever belief in wizardry survives; and to the general tendency may be conjecturally ascribed such phenomena as that of the Saturnalia, in which masters and slaves changed places, and the institution of the Levites among the Hebrews, otherwise only mythically explained. But if conquerors and conquered thus tended to amalgamate or associate their cults, equally would allied tribes tend to do so; and, when particular Gods of different groups were seen to correspond in respect of special attributes, a further analysis

would be encouraged. Hence, with every extension of every State, every advance in intercourse made in peace or through war, there would be a further comparison of credences, a further challenge to the reasoning powers of thoughtful men.

On the normal tendency to defer to local deities, compare Tylor, *Primitive Culture*, as last cited; B. Thomson, *The Fijians*, 1908, p. 112; A. B. Ellis, *The Tshi-Speaking Peoples of the Gold Coast*, 1887, p. 147, and *The Ewe-Speaking Peoples*, 1890, p. 55; P. Wurm, *Handbuch der Religionsgeschichte*, 2te Aufl., p. 43 (as to Madagascar); Sir H. Johnston, *The Uganda Protectorate*, 1902, ii, 589; Waitz, *Anthropologie der Naturvölker*, iii, 186; P. Kropotkin, *Memoirs of a Revolutionist*, ed. 1908, p. 191; W. W. Skeat, *Malay Magic*, 1900, pp. 56, 84; Thurston, *Castes and Tribes of Southern India*, 1909, i, 86-87, 94, 100; iii, 188; iv, 170; v, 467-68; W. H. R. Rivers, *The Todas*, 1906, p. 263; Rae, *The White Sea Peninsula*, 1881, p. 262; Élie Reclus, *Primitive Folk*, pp. 254-56; Grant Allen, *Evolution of the Idea of God*, 1897, pp. 289, 301-302; Castrén, *Vorlesungen über die Finnische Mythologie*, 1853, p. 281; Gummere, *Germanic Origins*, 1892, p. 140, citing Weinhold, *Deutsche Frauen*, i, 105; Gobineau, *Les religions et les philosophies dans l'Asie centrale*, 2e éd. p. 67; E. Higgins, *Hebrew Idolatry and Superstition*, 1893, pp. 20, 24; Robertson Smith, *Religion of the Semites*, 1889, p. 77; Wellhausen, *Heidenthum*, pp. 129, 183, cited by Smith, p. 79; Lang, *Making of Religion*, p. 65; Frazer, *Golden Bough*, 2nd ed. ii, 72. Above all, see the record in *Old New Zealand*, "by a Pakeha Maori" (2nd ed. Auckland, 1863, p. 154), of the believing resort of some white men to native wizards in New Zealand.

Stevenson, again, is evidently proceeding upon observation when he makes his trader in *The Beach of Falesà* say: "We laugh at the natives and their superstitions; but see how many traders take them up, splendidly educated white men that have been bookkeepers (some of them) and clerks in the old country" (*Island Nights' Entertainments*, 1893, pp. 104-105). In Abyssinia, "Galla sorceresses are frequently called in by the Christians of Shoa to transfer sickness or to rid the house of evil spirits" (Major W. Cornwallis Harris, *The Highlands of Aethiopia*, 1844, iii, 50). On the other hand, some Sudanese tribes "believe in the virtue both of Christian and Moslem amulets, but have hitherto lent a deaf ear to the preachers of both these religions" (A. H. Keane, *Man, Past and Present*, 1900, p. 50).

This tendency did not exclude, but would in certain cases conflict with, the strong primitive tendency to associate every God permanently with his supposed original locality. Tiele writes (*Hist. of the Egypt. Relig.*, Eng. trans. introd. p. xvii)

that in no case was a place given to the Gods of one nation in another's pantheon "if they did not wholly alter their form, character, appearance, and not seldom their very name." This seems an over-statement, and is inconsistent with Tiele's own statement (*Hist. comparée des anc. relig. égyptiennes et sémitiques*, French trans., 1882, pp. 174-80) as to the adoption of Sumerian and Akkadian Gods and creeds by the Semites. What is clear is that local cults resisted the removal of their Gods' images; and the attempt to deport such images to Babylon, thus affecting the monopoly of the God of Babylon himself, was a main cause of the fall of Nabonidos, who was driven out by Cyrus. (E. Meyer, *Geschichte des Alterthums*, i (1884), 599.) But the Assyrians invoked Bel Merodach of Babylon, after they had conquered Babylon, in terms of his own ritual; even as Israelites often invoked the Gods of Canaan (cp. Sayce, Hibbert Lectures, *Relig. of the Anc. Babylonians*, p. 123). And King Mardouk-nadinakhe of Babylon, in the twelfth century B.C., carried off statues of the Assyrian Gods from the town of Hekali to Babylon, where they were kept captive for 418 years (Maspero, *Hist. anc. des peuples de l'orient*, 4e éd. p. 300). A God could migrate with his worshippers from city to city (Meyer, iii, 169; Sayce, p. 124); and the Assyrian scribe class maintained the worship of their special God Nebo wherever they went, though he was a local God to start with (Sayce, pp. 117, 119, 121). And as to the recognition of the Gods of different Egyptian cities by politic kings, see Tiele's own statement, p. 36. Cp. his *Outlines*, pp. 73, 84, 207.

A concrete knowledge of the multiplicity of cults, then, was obtruded on the leisured and travelled men of the early empires and of such a civilization as that of Hellas;¹ and when to such knowledge there was added a scientific astronomy (the earliest to be constituted of the concrete sciences), a revision of beliefs by such men was inevitable.² It might take the form either of a guarded skepticism or of a monarchic theology, answering to the organization of the actual earthly empire; and the latter view, in the nature of the case, would much the more easily gain ground. The freethought of early civilization, then, would be practically limited for a long time to movements in the direction of co-ordinating polytheism, to the end of setting up a supreme though not a sole deity; the chief

¹ Cp. Decharme, *La Critique des trad. relig. chez les Grecs*, 1904, p. 121.

² The same process will be recorded later in the case of the intercourse of Crusaders and Saracens; and in the seventeenth century it is noted by La Bruyère (*Caractères*, ch. xvi, *Des esprits forts*, par. 3) as occurring in his day. The anonymous English author of an essay on *The Agreement of the Customs of the East Indians with those of the Jews* (1705, pp. 152-53) naïvely endorses La Bruyère. Macaulay's remark to the Edinburgh electors, on the view taken of sectarian strifes by a man who in India had seen the worship of the cow, is well known.

God in any given case being apt to be the God specially affected by the reigning monarch. Allocation of spheres of influence to the principal deities would be the working minimum of plausible adjustment, since only in some such way could the established principle of the regularity of the heavens be formally accommodated to the current worship; and wherever there was monarchy, even if the monarch were polytheistic, there was a lead to gradation among the Gods.¹ A pantheistic conception would be the highest stretch of rationalism that could have any vogue even among the educated class. All the while every advance was liable to the ill-fortune of overthrow or arrest at the hands of an invading barbarism, which even in adopting the system of an established priesthood would be more likely to stiffen than to develop it. Early rationalism, in short, would share in the fluctuations of early civilization; and achievements of thought would repeatedly be swept away, even as were the achievements of the constructive arts.

§ 2. *The Process in India*

The process thus deducible from the main conditions is found actually happening in more than one of the ancient cultures, as their history is now sketched. In the Rig-Veda, which if not the oldest is the least altered of the Eastern Sacred Books, the main line of change is obvious enough. It remains so far matter of conjecture to what extent the early Vedic cults contain matter adopted from non-Aryan Asiatic peoples; but no other hypothesis seems to account for the special development of the cult of Agni in India as compared with the content and development of the other early Aryan systems, in which, though there are developments of fire worship, the God Agni does not appear.² The specially priestly character of the Agni worship, and the precedence it takes in the Vedas over the solar cult of Mitra, which among the kindred Aryans of Iran receives in turn a special development, suggest some such grafting, though the relations between Aryans and the Hindu aborigines, as indicated in the Veda, seem to exclude the possibility of their adopting the fire-cult from the conquered

¹ Cp. Sayce, *Hibbert Lectures*, pp. 96, 121-22; Robertson Smith, *Religion of the Semites*, p. 74; Tiele, *Egyptian Religion*, p. 36; and *Outlines*, p. 52.

² Cp. Tiele, *Outlines*, pp. 109-110, and Fischer, *Heidenthum und Offenbarung*, p. 59. Professor Max Müller's insistence that the lines of Vedic religion could not have been "crossed by trains of thought which started from China, from Babylon, or from Egypt" (*Physical Religion*, p. 251), does not affect the hypothesis put above. The Professor admits (p. 250) the exact likeness of the Babylonian fire-cult to that of Agni.

inhabitants,¹ who, besides, are often spoken of in the Vedas as "non-sacrificers,"² and at times as "without Gods."³ But this is sometimes asserted even of hostile Aryans.⁴ In any case the carrying on of the two main cults of Agni and Indra side by side points to an original and marked heterogeneity of racial elements; while the varying combination with them of the worship of other deities, the old Aryan Varuna, the three forms of the Sun-God Aditya, the Goddess Aditi and the eight Adityas, the solar Mitra, Vishnu, Rudra, and the Maruts, imply the adaptation of further varieties of hereditary creed. The outcome is a sufficiently chaotic medley, in which the attributes and status of the various Gods are reducible to no code,⁵ the same feats being assigned to several, and the attributes of all claimed for almost any one. Here, then, were the conditions provocative of doubt among the critical; and while it is only in the later books of the Rig-Veda that such doubt finds priestly expression, it must be inferred that it was current in some degree among laymen before the hymn-makers avowed that they shared it. The God Soma, the personification of wine, identified with the Moon-God Chandra,⁶ "hurls the irreligious into the abyss."⁷ This may mean that his cult, like that of his congener Dionysos in Greece, was at first forcibly resisted, and forcibly triumphed. At an earlier period doubt is directed against the most popular God, Indra, perhaps on behalf of a rival cult.⁸ Later it seems to take the shape of a half-skeptical, half-mystical questioning as to which, if any, God is real.

From the Catholic standpoint, Dr. E. L. Fischer has argued that "Varuna is in the ontological, physical, and ethical relation the highest, indeed the unique, God of ancient India"; and that the Nature-Gods of the Veda can belong only to a later period in the religious consciousness (*Heidenthum und Offenbarung*, 1878, pp. 36-37). Such a development, had it really occurred, might be said to represent a movement of primitive freethought from an unsatisfying monotheism to a polytheism that seemed better to explain natural facts. A more plausible view of the process, however, is that of von Bradke, to the effect that "the

¹ But cp. Müller, *Anthropolog. Relig.*, p. 164, as to possible later developments; and see above, pp. 45-47, as to the many cases in which conquering races have actually adopted the Gods of the conquered.

² Muir, *Original Sanskrit Texts*, ii (2nd ed.), 372, 379, 384.

³ *Id.* p. 395.

⁴ Max Müller, *Selected Essays*, 1881, ii, 207-208.

⁵ Cp. Oldenberg, *Die Religion des Veda*, 1894, pp. 94, 98-99; Ghosha, *Hist. of Hindu Civ. as illust. in the Vedas*, Calcutta, 1889, pp. 190-91; Max Müller, *Phys. Relig.*, 1891, pp. 197-98.

⁶ Max Müller, *Selected Essays*, ii, 237.

⁷ Muir, *Original Sanskrit Texts*, v, 268.

⁸ Max Müller, Hibbert Lectures, p. 302, citing R. V., viii, 100, 3; and ii, 12, 5. The first passage runs: "If you wish for strength, offer to Indra a hymn of praise: a true hymn, if Indra truly exist; for some one says, Indra does not exist! Who has seen him? Whom shall we praise." The hymn of course asseverates his existence.

old Indo-Germanic polytheism, with its pronounced monarchic apex, which.....constituted the religion of the pre-Vedic [Aryan] Hindus, lost its monarchic apex shortly before and during the Rig-Veda period, and set up for itself the so-called Henotheism [worship of deities severally as if each were the only one], which thus represented in India a time of religious decline; a decline that, at the end of the period to which the Rig-Veda hymns belong, led to an almost complete dissolution of the old beliefs. The earlier collection of the hymns must have promoted the decline; and the final redaction must have completed it. The collected hymns show only too plainly how the very deity before whom in one song all the remaining Gods bow themselves, in the next sinks almost in the dust before another. Then there sounds from the Rig-Veda (x, 121) the wistful question: "Who is the God whom we should worship?" (*Dyâus Asura, Ahuramazda, und die Asuras*, Halle, 1885, p. 115; cp. note, *supra*, p. 30). On this view the growth of monotheism went on alongside of a growth of critical unbelief, but, instead of expressing that, provoked it by way of reaction. Dr. Muir more specifically argues (*Sanskrit Texts*, v, 116) that in the Vedic hymns Varuna is a God in a state of decadence; and, despite the dissent of M. Barth (*Religions of India*, p. 18), this seems true. But the recession of Varuna is only in the normal way of the eclipse of the old Supreme God by a nearer deity, and does not suffice to prove a growth of agnosticism. M. Fontane (*Inde Védique*, 1881, p. 305) asserts on other grounds a popular movement of negation in the Vedic period, but offers rather slender evidence. There is better ground for his account of the system as one in which different cults had the upper hand at different times, the devotees of Indra rejecting Agni, and so on (pp. 310-11).

To meet such a doubt, a pantheistic view of things would naturally arise, and in the Vedas it often emerges.¹ Thus "Agni is all the Gods"; and "the Gods are only a single being under different names."² For ancient as for more civilized peoples such a doctrine had the attraction of nominally reconciling the popular cult with the skepticism it had aroused. Rising thus as freethought, the pantheistic doctrine in itself ultimately became in India a dogmatic system, the monopoly of a priestly caste, whose training

¹ Cp. *Rig-Veda*, i, 164, 46; x, 90 (cited by Ghosa, pp. 191, 198); viii, 10 (cited by Müller, *Natural Religion*, pp. 227-29); and x, 82, 121, 129 (cited by Romesh Chunder Dutt, *Hist. of Civ. in Anc. India*, ed. 1893, i, 95-97); Muir, *Sanskrit Texts*, v, 353 sq.; Tiele, *Outlines*, p. 125; Weber, *Hist. of Ind. Lit.*, Eng. trans., p. 5; Max Müller, *Hibbert Lectures*, ed. 1880, pp. 298-304, 310, 315; *Phys. Relig.*, p. 187; Barth, *Religions of India*, Eng. trans., p. 8; Tylor, *Primitive Culture*, ii, 354.

² Barth, *Religions of India*, pp. 26, 31, citing *Rig-Veda*, v, 3, 1; i, 164, 46; viii, 58, 2. The phrase as to Agni is common in the Brâhmanas, but is not yet so in the Vedas. The second text cited is rendered by Müller: "That which is one the sages speak of in many ways—they call it Agni, Yama, Mâtarisvan" (*Selected Essays*, 1881, ii, 240).

in mystical dialectic made them able to repel or baffle amateur criticism. Such fortifying of a sophisticated creed by institutions—of which the Brahmanic caste system is perhaps the strongest type—is one of the main conditions of relative permanence for any set of opinions; yet even within the Brahmanic system, by reason, presumably, of the principle that the higher truth was for the adept and need not interfere with the popular cult, there were again successive critical revisions of the pantheistic idea.

Prof. Garbe (*Philosophy of Anc. India*, sect. on *Hindu Monism*) argues that all monistic, and indeed all progressive, thinking in ancient India arose not among the Brahmans, who were conscienceless oppressors, but among the warrior caste; citing stories in the Upanishads in which Brahmans are represented as receiving such ideas from warriors. The thesis is much weakened by the Professor's acceptance of Krishna as primarily a historic character, of the warrior class. But there is ground for his general thesis, which recognizes (p. 78) that the Brahmans at length assimilated the higher thought of laymen. Max Müller puts it that "No nation was ever so completely priestridden as the Hindus were under the sway of the Brahmanic law. Yet, on the other side, the same people were allowed to indulge in the most unrestrained freedom of thought, and in the schools of their philosophy the very names of their Gods were never mentioned. Their existence was neither denied nor asserted....." (*Selected Essays*, 1881, ii, 244). "Sankhya philosophy" [on which Buddhism is supposed to be based], "in its original form, claims the name of *an-Isvara*, 'lordless' or 'atheistic,' as its distinctive title" (*ibid.* p. 283).

Of the nature of a freethinking departure, among the early Brahmanists as in other societies, was the substitution of non-human for human sacrifices—a development of peaceful life-conditions which, though not primitive, must have ante-dated Buddhism. See Tiele, *Outlines*, pp. 126-27 and refs.; Barth, *Religions of India*, pp. 57-59; and Müller, *Physical Religion*, p. 101. Prof. Robertson Smith (*Religion of the Semites*, p. 346) appears to hold that animal sacrifice was never a substitute for human; but his ingenious argument, on analysis, is found to prove only that in certain cases the idea of such a substitution having taken place may have been unhistorical. If it be granted that human sacrifices ever occurred—and all the evidence goes to show that they were once universal—substitution would be an obvious way of abolishing them. Historical analogy is in favour of the view that the change was forced on the priesthood from the outside, and only after a time accepted by the Brahmans. Thus we find the Khârvâkas, a

school of freethinkers, rising in the Alexandrian period, making it part of their business to denounce the Brahmanic doctrine and practice of sacrifice, and to argue against all blood sacrifices; but they had no practical success (Tiele, p. 126) until Buddhism triumphed (Mitchell, *Hinduism*, 1885, p. 106; Rhys Davids, tr. of *Dialogues of the Buddha*, 1899, p. 165).

In the earliest Upanishads the World-Being seems to have been figured as the totality of matter,¹ an atheistic view associated in particular with the teaching of Kapila,² who himself, however, was at length raised to divine status,³ though his system continues to pass as substantially atheistic.⁴ This view being open to all manner of anti-religious criticism, which it incurred even within the Brahmanic pale,⁵ there was evolved an ideal formula in which the source of all things is "the invisible, intangible, unrelated, colourless one, who has neither eyes nor ears, neither hands nor feet, eternal, all-pervading, subtile, and undecaying."⁶ At the same time, the Upanishads exhibit a stringent reaction against the whole content of the Vedas. Their ostensible object is "to show the utter uselessness—nay, the mischievousness—of all ritual performances; to condemn every sacrificial act which has for its motive a desire or hope of reward; to deny, if not the existence, at least the exceptional and exalted character of the Devas; and to teach that there is no hope of salvation and deliverance except by the individual self recognizing the true and universal self and finding rest there, where alone rest can be found."⁷

And the critical development does not end there. "In the old Upanishads, in which the hymns and sacrifices of the Veda are looked upon as useless, and as superseded by the higher knowledge taught by the forest-sages, they are not yet attacked as mere impositions. That opposition, however, sets in very decidedly in the Sutra period. In the *Nirukta* (i, 15) Yâska quotes the opinion of Kautsa, that the hymns of the Veda have no meaning at all."⁸ In short, every form of critical revolt against incredible doctrine that has arisen in later

¹ Colebrooke's *Miscellaneous Essays*, ed. 1873, i, 375-76. Weber (*Ind. Lit.*, pp. 27, 137, 236, 284-85) has advanced the view that the adherents of this doctrine, who gradually became stigmatized as heretics, were the founders or beginners of Buddhism. But the view that the universe is a self-existent totality appears to enter into the Brahmans' Sankhya teaching, which is midway between the popular Nyaya system and the esoteric Vedânta (Ballantyne, *Christianity Contrasted with Hindu Philosophy*, 1859, pp. xviii, 59, 61). As to the connection between the Sankhya system and Buddhism, see Oldenberg, *Der Buddha, sein Leben, seine Lehre, seine Gemeinde*, 3te Aufl., *Excurs*, pp. 443.

² H. H. Wilson, *Works*, 1862-71, ii, 346.

³ Weber, *Hist. Ind. Lit.*, p. 236.

⁴ Ballantyne, pp. 58, 61; Major Jacob, *Manual of Hindu Pantheism*, 1881, p. 13.

⁵ Cp. Max Müller, *Chips from a German Workshop*, ed. 1880, i, 228-232, and Banerjea's *Dialogues on the Hindu Philosophy*, p. 73, cited by Major Jacob, *Hindu Pantheism*, p. 13.

⁶ Jacob, as cited, p. 3.

⁷ Max Müller, *Hibbert Lectures*, pp. 340-41. Cp. Barth, *Religions of India*, p. 81.

⁸ Müller, *Hibbert Lectures*, p. 139.

Europe had taken place in ancient India long before the Alexandrian conquest.¹ And the same attitude continued to be common within the post-Alexandrian period; for Panini, who must apparently be dated then,² "was acquainted with infidels and nihilists";³ and the teaching of Brihaspati,⁴ on which was founded the system of the Khârvâkas—apparently one of several sections of a freethinking school called the Lokâyatas⁵ or Lokâyatikas—is extremely destructive of Vedic pretensions. "The Veda is tainted by the three faults of untruth, self-contradiction, and tautology.....The impostors who call themselves Vedic pandits are mutually destructive.....The three authors of the Vedas were buffoons, knaves, and demons: All the well-known formulas of the pandits, and all the horrid rites for the queen commanded in the Asvamedha—these were invented by buffoons, and so all the various kinds of presents to the priests; while the eating of flesh was similarly commanded by night-prowling demons."⁶

To what extent such aggressive rationalism ever spread it is now quite impossible to ascertain. It seems probable that the word Lokâyata, defined by Sanskrit scholars as signifying "directed to the world of sense,"⁷ originally, or about 500 B.C., signified "Nature-lore," and that this passed as a branch of Brahman learning.⁸ Significantly enough, while the lore was not extensive, it came to be regarded as disposing men to unbelief, though it does not seem to have suggested any thorough training. At length, in the eighth century of our era, it is found applied as a term of abuse, in the sense of "infidel," by Kumârila in controversy with opponents as orthodox as himself; and about the same period Sankara connects with it a denial of the existence of a separate and immortal soul;⁹ though that opinion had been debated, and not called Lokâyata, long before, when the word was current in the broader sense.¹⁰ Latterly, in the fourteenth century, on the strength of some doggerel verses which cannot have belonged to the early Brahmanic Lokâyata, it stands for extreme atheism and a materialism not professed by any known school speaking for itself.¹¹ The evidence, such as it is, is preserved only in *Sarva-darsana-samgraha*, a com-

¹ Cp. Weber, *Hist. Ind. Lit.*, p. 28.

² *Id.* pp. 28, 220-22. ³ Max Müller, *Hibbert Lectures*, p. 139, *note*, citing Panini, iv, 4, 60.

⁴ Apparently belonging to the later or middle Buddhist period. Müller, *Hibbert Lectures*, p. 141.

⁵ On these cp. Müller, p. 139, *note*; Garbe, *Philos. of Anc. India*, Eng. tr. 2nd ed. Chicago, 1896, p. 25; and Weber, *Ind. Lit.* p. 246, *note*, with the very full research of Professor Rhys Davids, *Dialogues of the Buddha*, 1899, pp. 166-72.

⁶ Müller, *Hibbert Lectures*, pp. 140-41. Cp. Garbe, p. 28.

⁷ Garbe, as cited

⁸ *Id.* pp. 169-71.

⁹ Rhys Davids, *Dialogues of the Buddha*, p. 171.

¹⁰ *Id.* p. 172.

¹¹ *Id.* *ib.*

pendium of all philosophical systems, compiled in the fourteenth century by the Vedântic teacher Mâdhavâchâra.¹ One source speaks of an early text-book of materialism, the Sûtras of Brihaspati;² but this has not been preserved. Thus in Hindu as in later European freethought for a long period we have had to rely for our knowledge of freethinkers' ideas upon the replies made by their opponents. It is reasonable to conclude that, save insofar as the arguments of Brihaspati were common to the Khârvâkas and the Buddhists,³ such doctrine as his or that of the later Lokâyâtikas cannot conceivably have been more than the revolt of a thoughtful minority against official as well as popular religion; and to speak of a time when "the Aryan settlers in India had arrived at the conviction that all their Devas or Gods were mere names"⁴ is to suggest a general evolution of rational thought which can no more have taken place in ancient India than it has done to-day in Europe. The old creeds would always have defenders; and every revolt was sure to incur a reaction. In the *Hitopadesa* or "Book of Good Counsel" (an undated recension of the earlier *Panchatantra*, "The Five Books," which in its first form may be placed about the fifth century of our era) there occur both passages disparaging mere study of the Sacred Books⁵ and passages insisting upon it as a virtue in itself⁶ and otherwise insisting on ritual observances.⁷ They seem to come from different hands.

The phenomenon of the schism represented by the two divisions of the *Yazur Veda*, the "White" and the "Black," is plausibly accounted for as the outcome of the tendencies of a new and an old school, who selected from their *Brahmanas*, or treatises of ritual and theology, the portions which respectively suited them. The implied critical movement would tend to affect official thought in general. This schism is held by Weber to have arisen only in the period of ferment set up by Buddhism; but other disputes seem to have taken place in abundance in the Brahmanical schools before that time. (Cp. Tiele, *Outlines*, p. 123; Weber, *Hist. Ind. Lit.*, pp. 10, 27, 232; Max Müller, *Anthropol. Relig.*, 1892, pp. 36-37; and Rhys Davids, *Buddhism*, p. 34.) Again, the ascetic and penance-bearing hermits, who were encouraged by the veneration paid them to exalt themselves above all save the highest Gods, would by their utterances of necessity affect the course of doctrine. Compare the same tendency as seen in Buddhism and Jainism (Tiele, pp. 135, 140).

¹ Trans. in English by Cowell and Gough, 1882.

² Garbe, as cited, p. 25.

³ See Müller, *Hibbert Lectures*, pp. 141-42, citing Burnouf.

⁴ Müller, *Hibbert Lectures*, p. 310.

⁵ Bk. I, *Stories* ii, 7, 8, 16; vii, 180.

⁶ Bk. I, 11, 40; St. ii, 32.

⁷ St. vi, 162.

But in the later form of the Vedânta, "the end of the Veda," a monistic and pantheistic teaching holds its ground in our own day, after all the ups and downs of Brahmanism, alongside of the aboriginal cults which Brahmanism adopted in its battle with Buddhism; alongside, too, of the worship of the Veda itself as an eternal and miraculous document. "The leading tenets [of the Vedânta] are known to some extent in every village."¹ Yet the Vedântists, again, treat the Upanishads in turn as a miraculous and inspired system,² and repeat in their case the process of the Vedas: so sure is the law of fixation in religious thought, while the habit of worship subsists.

The highest activity of rationalistic speculation within the Brahmanic fold is seen to have followed intelligibly on the most powerful reaction against the Brahmans' authority. This took place when their sphere had been extended from the region of the Punjaub, of which alone the Rig-Veda shows knowledge, to the great kingdoms of Southern India, pointed to in the Sutras,³ or short digests of ritual and law designed for general official use. In the new environment "there was a well-marked lay-feeling, a widespread antagonism to the priests, a real sense of humour, a strong fund of common sense. Above all there was the most complete and unquestioned freedom of thought and expression in religious matters that the world had yet witnessed."⁴

The most popular basis for rejection of a given system—belief in another—made ultimately possible there the rise of a practically atheistic system capable, wherever embraced, of annulling the burdensome and exclusive system of the Brahmans, which had been obtruded in its worst form,⁵ though not dominantly, in the new environment. Buddhism, though it cannot have arisen on one man's initiative in the manner claimed in the legends, even as stripped of their supernaturalist element,⁶ was in its origin essentially a movement of freethought, such as could have arisen only

¹ Major Jacob, as cited, *preface*.

² Müller, *Psychol. Relig.*, pp. 95, 97, 126; *Lect. on the Vedânta Philos.*, 1894, p. 32.

³ Chunder Dutt, *Hist. of Civ. in Anc. India*, as cited, i, 112-13.

⁴ Rhys Davids, trans. of *Dialogues of the Buddha*, p. 166. Cp. his *Buddhism*, p. 143, as to Buddhist censures of an extravagant skepticism which denied every religious theory. In one of the *Dialogues* (ii, 25, p. 74) a contemporary sophist is cited as flatly denying a future state. Mr. Lillie, however (*Buddhism in Christendom*, 1887, p. 187), contends as against Professor Rhys Davids that the Upanishads were only "whispered to pupils who had gone through a severe probation."

⁵ Prof. Weber (*Hist. Ind. Lit.*, p. 4) says the peoples of the Punjaub never at all submitted to the Brahmanical rule and caste system. But the subject natives there must at the outset have been treated as an inferior order. Cp. Tiele, *Outlines*, p. 120 and refs.; and Rhys Davids, *Buddhism*, p. 23.

⁶ Cp. Weber, *Hist. Ind. Lit.*, pp. 236, 284-85; Max Müller, *Chips*, i, 228-32; Kuenen, *Hibbert Lectures*, pp. 258-64; and the general discussion of the problem in the author's *Pagan Christs*, 2nd ed. pp. 239-63.

in the atmosphere of a much mixed society¹ where the extreme Brahmanical claims were on various grounds discredited, perhaps even within their own newly-adjusted body. It was stigmatized as "the science of reason," a term equivalent to "heresy" in the Christian sphere;² and its definite rejection of the Vedas made it anti-sacerdotal even while it retained the modes of speech of polytheism. The tradition which makes the Buddha³ a prince suggests an upper-class origin for the reaction; and there are traces of a chronic resistance to the Brahmans' rule among their fellow-Aryans before the Buddhist period.

"The royal families, the warriors, who, it may be supposed, strenuously supported the priesthood so long as it was a question of robbing the people of their rights, now that this was effected turned against their former allies, and sought to throw off the yoke that was likewise laid upon them. These efforts were, however, unavailing: the colossus was too firmly established. Obscure legends and isolated allusions are the only records left to us in the later writings of the sacrilegious hands which ventured to attack the sacred and divinely consecrated majesty of the Brahmans; and these are careful to note at the same time the terrible punishments which befel those impious offenders" (Weber, *Hist. Ind. Lit.*, p. 19).

The circumstances, however, that the Buddhist writings were from the first in vernacular dialects, not in Sanskrit,⁴ and that the mythical matter which accumulated round the story of the Buddha is in the main aboriginal, and largely common to the myth of Krishna,⁵ go to prove that Buddhism spread specially in the non-Aryan sphere.⁶ Its practical (not theoretic)⁷ atheism seems to have rested fundamentally on the conception of Karma, the transition of the soul, or rather of the personality, through many stages up to that in which, by self-discipline, it attains the impersonal peace of Nirvana; and of this conception there is no trace in the Vedas,⁸ though it became a leading tenet of Brahmanism.

To the dissolvent influence of Greek culture may possibly be due some part of the success of Buddhism before our era, and even later. Hindu astronomy in the Vedic period was but

¹ Brahmanism had itself been by this time influenced by aboriginal elements, even to the extent of affecting its language. Weber, as cited, p. 177. Cp. Müller, *Anthrop. Relig.*, p. 164.

² Major Jacob, as cited, p. 12.

³ I.e., "the enlightened," a title given to sages in general. Weber, p. 284.

⁴ Weber, *Hist. Ind. Lit.*, pp. 179, 299; Müller, *Natural Religion*, p. 299.

⁵ See Senart, *Essai sur la légende de Buddha*, 2e édit., p. 297 ff.

⁶ Cp. Weber, pp. 286-87, 303.

⁷ See Weber, pp. 301, 307; also Rhys Davids, *Buddhism*, pp. 43, 83, etc.

⁸ Tiele, *Outlines*, p. 117.

slightly developed (Weber, *Hist. Ind. Lit.*, pp. 246, 249, 250); and "it was Greek influence that first infused a real life into Indian astronomy" (*Id.* p. 251; cp. Letronne, *Mélanges d'Érudition*, 1860 (?), p. 40; Narrien, *Histor. Acc. of Orig. and Prog. of Astron.*, p. 33, and Lib. Use. Kn. *Hist. of Astron.*, c. ii). This implies other interactions. It is presumably to Greek stimulus that we must trace the knowledge by Aryabhata (Colebrooke's *Essays*, ed. 1873, ii, 404; cp. Weber, p. 257) of the doctrine of the earth's diurnal revolution on its axis; and the fact that in India as in the Mediterranean world the truth was later lost from men's hands may be taken as one of the proofs that the two civilizations alike retrograded owing to evil political conditions. In the progressive period (from about 320 B.C. onwards for perhaps some centuries) Greek ideas might well help to discredit traditionalism; and their acceptance at royal courts would be favourable to toleration of the new teaching. At the same time, Buddhism must have been favoured by the native mental climate in which it arose.

The main differentiation of Buddhism from Brahmanism, again, is its ethical spirit, which sets aside formalism and seeks salvation in an inward reverie and discipline; and this element in turn can hardly be conceived as arising save in an old society, far removed from the warlike stage represented by the Vedas. Whatever may have been its early association with Brahmanism¹ then, it must be regarded as essentially a reaction against Brahmanical doctrine and ideals; a circumstance which would account for its early acceptance in the Punjaub, where Brahmanism had never attained absolute power and was jealously resisted by the free population.² And the fact that Jainism, so closely akin to Buddhism, has its sacred books in a dialect belonging to the region in which Buddhism arose, further supports the view that the reaction grew out of the thought of a type of society differing widely from that in which Brahmanism arose. Jainism, like Buddhism, is substantially atheistic,³ and like it has an ancient monkish organization to which women were early admitted. The original crypto-atheism or agnosticism of the Buddhist movement thus appears as a product of a relatively high, because complex, moral and intellectual evolution. It certainly never impugned the belief in the Gods; on the contrary, the Buddha is often represented as speaking of their existence,⁴ and at times as approving of their customary worship;⁵ but he is never

¹ Cp. Weber, *Hist. Ind. Lit.*, pp. 27, 284-87; Max Müller, *Natural Religion*, p. 555; Jacobi, as there cited; Tiele, *Outlines*, pp. 135-36; Rhys Davids, *American Lectures on Buddhism*, pp. 115-16; *Buddhism*, p. 84; and the author's *Pagan Christs*, pt. ii, ch. ii, §§ 8-13.

² Weber, *Hist. Ind. Lit.*, pp. 4, 39.

⁴ Rhys Davids, *Buddhism*, pp. 35, 79, 99.

³ Barth, *Religions of India*, p. 146

⁵ Cp. *Pagan Christs*, pp. 248-50.

said to counsel his own order to pray to them; he makes light of sacrifice; and above all he is made quite negative as to a future life, preaching the doctrine of Karma in a sense which excludes individual immortality.¹ "It cannot be denied that if we call the old Gods of the Veda—Indra and Agni and Yama—Gods, Buddha was an atheist. He does not believe in the divinity of these deities. What is noteworthy is that he does not by any means deny their bare existence.....The founder of Buddhism treats the old Gods as superhuman beings."² Thus it is permissible to say both that Buddhism recognizes Gods and that it is practically atheistic.

"The fact cannot be disputed away that the religion of Buddha was from the beginning purely atheistic. The idea of the Godhead.....was for a time at least expelled from the sanctuary of the human mind,³ and the highest morality that was ever taught before the rise of Christianity was taught by men with whom the Gods had become mere phantoms, without any altars, not even an altar to the unknown God" (Max Müller, *Introd. to the Science of Religion*, ed. 1882, p. 81. Cp. the same author's *Selected Essays*, 1881, ii, 300.)

"He [Buddha] ignores God in so complete a way that he does not even seek to deny him; he does not suppress him, but he does not speak of him either to explain the origin and anterior existence of man or to explain the present life, or to conjecture his future life and definitive deliverance. The Buddha knows God in no fashion whatever" (Barthélemy Saint-Hilaire, *Le Bouddha et sa Religion*, 1866, p. v).

"Buddhism and Christianity are indeed the two opposite poles with regard to the most essential points of religion: Buddhism ignoring all feeling of dependence on a higher power, and therefore denying the very existence of a supreme deity" (Müller, *Introd. to Sc. of Rel.*, p. 171).

"Lastly, the Buddha declared that he had arrived at [his] conclusions, not by study of the Vedas, nor from the teachings of others, but by the light of reason and intuition alone" (Rhys Davids, *Buddhism*, p. 48). "The most ancient Buddhism despises dreams and visions" (*Id.*, p. 177). "Agnostic atheism.....is the characteristic of his [Buddha's] system of philosophy" (*Id.*, p. 207).

"Belief in a Supreme Being, the Creator and Ruler of the Universe, is unquestionably a modern graft upon the unqualified atheism of Sákya Muni: it is still of very limited recognition. In none of the standard authorities.....is there the slightest

¹ Rhys Davids, trans. of *Dialogues*, pp. 188-89; *Amer. Lec. on Buddhism*, 1896, pp. 127-34; Hibbert Lectures, 1881, p. 109; *Buddhism*, pp. 95, 98-99.

² Max Müller, *Selected Essays*, 1881, ii, 295.

³ As the context in Professor Müller's work shows, these phrases are inaccurate.

allusion to such a First Cause, the existence of which is incompatible with the fundamental Buddhist dogma of the eternity of all existence" (H. H. Wilson, *Buddha and Buddhism*, in *Essays and Lectures*, ed. by Dr. R. Rost, 1862, ii, 361. Cp. p. 363).

On the other hand, the gradual colouring of Buddhism with popular mythology, the reversion (if, indeed, this were not early) to adoration and worship of the Buddha himself, and the final collapse of the system in India before the pressure of Brahmanized Hinduism, all prove the potency of the sociological conditions of success and failure for creeds and criticisms. Buddhism took the monastic form for its institutions, thus incurring ultimate petrification alike morally and intellectually; and in any case the normal Indian social conditions of abundant population, cheap food, and general ignorance involved an overwhelming vitality for the popular cults. These the orthodox Brahmans naturally took under their protection as a means of maintaining their hold over the multitude;¹ and though their own highest philosophy has been poetically grafted on that basis, as in the epic of the Mahâbhârata and in the Bhagavat Gita,² the ordinary worship of the deities of these poems is perforce utterly unphilosophical, varying between a primitive sensualism and an emotionalism closely akin to that of popular forms of Christianity. Buddhism itself, where it still prevails, exhibits similar tendencies.³

It is disputed whether the Brahman influence drove Buddhism out of India by physical force, or whether the latter decayed because of maladaptation to its environment. Its vogue for some seven hundred years, from about 300 B.C. to about 400 A.C., seems to have been largely due to its protection and final acceptance as a State religion by the dynasty of Chandragupta (the Sandracottos of the Greek historians), whose grandson Asoka showed it special favour. His rock-inscribed edicts (for which see Max Müller, *Introd. to Science of Rel.*, pp. 5-6, 23; *Anthrop. Relig.*, pp. 40-43; Rhys Davids, *Buddhism*, pp. 220-28; Wheeler's *Hist. of India*, vol. iii, app. 1; Asiatic Society's *Journals*, vols. viii and xii; *Indian Antiquary*, 1877, vol. vi) show a general concern for natural ethics, and especially for tolerance; but his mention of "The Terrors of the Future" among the religious works he specially honours shows (if genuine) that normal superstition, if ever widely repudiated (which is doubtful), had interpenetrated the system. The king,

¹ Cp. Weber, *Ind. Lit.* p. 289, note; and Banerjea, *Dialogues on the Hindu Philosophy*, p. 520, cited by Major Jacob, pp. 29-30.

² See Muir, *Sanskrit Texts*, iv, 50 (cited by Jacob, pp. 30-31), as to the Brahman view of the licence ascribed to Krishna. And see iii, 32 (cited by Jacob, p. 14), as to a remarkable disparagement of Vedism in the Bhagavat Gita.

³ Müller, *Selected Essays*, ii, 363; H. H. Wilson, as last cited, ii, 368 sq.

too, called himself "the delight of the Gods," as did his contemporary the Buddhist king of Ceylon (Davids, *Buddhism*, p. 84). Under Asoka, however, Buddhism was powerful enough to react somewhat on the West, then in contact with India as a result of the Alexandrian conquest (cp. Mahaffy, *Greek World under Roman Sway*, ch. ii; Weber's lecture on Ancient India, Eng. tr., pp. 25-26; *Indische Skizzen*, p. 28 [cited in the present writer's *Christianity and Mythology*, p. 165]; and Weber's *Hist. of Ind. Lit.*, p. 255 and p. 309, note); and the fact that after his time it entered on a long conflict with Brahmanism proves that it remained practically dangerous to that system. In the fifth and sixth centuries of our era Buddhism in India "rapidly declined"—a circumstance hardly intelligible save as a result of violence. Tiele, after expressly asserting the "rapid decline" (*Outlines*, p. 139), in the next breath asserts that there are no satisfactory proofs of such violence, and that, "on the contrary, Buddhism appears to have pined away slowly" (p. 140: contrast his *Egypt. Rel.*, p. xxi). Rhys Davids, in his *Buddhism*, p. 246 (so also Max Müller, *Anthrop. Rel.*, p. 43), argues for a process of violent extinction; but in his later work, *Buddhist India*, he retracts this view and decides for a gradual decline in the face of a Brahmanic revival. The evidences for violence and persecution are, however, pretty strong. (See H. H. Wilson, *Essays*, as cited, ii, 365-67.) Internal decay certainly appears to have occurred. Already in Gautama's own life, according to the legends, there were doctrinal disputes within his party (Müller, *Anthrop. Rel.*, p. 38); and soon heresies and censures abounded (*Introd. to Sc. of Rel.*, p. 23), till schisms arose and no fewer than eighteen sects took shape (Davids, *Buddhism*, pp. 213-18).

Thus early in our inquiry we may gather, from a fairly complete historical case, the primary laws of causation as regards alike the progress and the decadence of movements of rationalistic thought. The fundamental economic dilemma, seen already in the life of the savage, presses at all stages of civilization. The credent multitude, save in the very lowest stages of savage destitution, always feeds and houses those who furnish it with its appropriate mental food; and so long as there remains the individual struggle for existence, there will always be teachers ready. If the higher minds in any priesthood, awaking to the character of their traditional teaching, withdraw from it, lower minds, howbeit "sincere," will always take their place. The innovating teacher, in turn, is only at the beginning of his troubles when he contrives, on whatever bases, to set up a new organized movement. The very process of organization, on the one hand, sets up the call for special economic sustenance—a constant

motive to compromise with popular ignorance—and, on the other hand, tends to establish merely a new traditionalism, devoid of the critical impulse in which it arose.¹ And without organization the innovating thought cannot communicate itself, cannot hold its own against the huge social pressures of tradition.

In ancient society, in short, there could be no continuous progress in freethinking: at best, there could but be periods or lines of relative progress, the result of special conjunctures of social and political circumstance. So much will appear, further, from the varying instances of still more ancient civilizations, the evolution of which may be the better understood from our survey of that of India.

§ 3. *Mesopotamia*

The nature of the remains we possess of the ancient Babylonian and Assyrian religions is not such as to yield a direct record of their development; but they suffice to show that there, as elsewhere, a measure of rationalistic evolution occurred. Were there no other ground for the inference, it might not unreasonably be drawn from the post-exilic monotheism of the Hebrews, who, drawing so much of their cosmology and temple ritual from Babylon, may be presumed to have been influenced by the higher Semitic civilizations in other ways also.² But there is concrete evidence. What appears to have happened in Babylonia and Assyria, whose religious systems were grafted on that of the more ancient Sumer-Akkadian civilization, is a gradual subordination of the numerous local Gods (at least in the thought of the more philosophic, including some of the priests) to the conception of one all-pervading power. This process would be assisted by that of imperialism; and in the recently-recovered code of Hammurabi we actually find references to *Ilu* "God" (as in the European legal phrase, "the act of God") without any further God-name.³ On the other hand, the unifying tendency would be resisted by the strength of the traditions of the Babylonian cities, all of which had ancient cults before the later empires were built up.⁴ Yet, again, peoples who failed in war would be in some measure led to renounce their God as weak; while those who clung to their faith

¹ See this brought out in a strikingly dramatic way in Mr. Dennis Hird's novel, *The Believing Bishop*.

² Cp. Dr. A. Jeremias, *Monotheistische Strömungen innerhalb der Babylonischen Religion*, 1904, p. 44—a very candid research.

³ *The Hammurabi Code*, by Chilperic Edwards, 1904, pp. 67, 68, 70 (§§ 240, 249, 266). The invocations of named Gods by Hammurabi at the close of the code, however, suggest that the force of the word was "a God." Cp. p. 76 with what follows; and see note on p. 93. On this question compare Jeremias, as cited, pp. 39, 43.

⁴ Maspero, *Hist. anc. des peup. de l'orient*, 4e éd. p. 139; Sayce, *Hib. Lect.*, pp. 121, 213, 215; E. Meyer, *Gesch. des Alt.*, i (1884), 161 (§ 133); iii (1901), 167 sq. (§ 103).

would be led, as in Jewry, to recast its ethic. The result was a set of compromises in which the provincial and foreign deities were either treated genealogically or grouped in family or other relations with the chief God or Gods of the time being.¹ Certain cults, again, were either kept always at a higher ethical level than the popular one, or were treated by the more refined and more critical worshippers in an elevated spirit;² and this tendency seems to have led to conceptions of purified deities who underlay or transcended the popular types, the names of the latter being held to point to one who was misconceived under their grosser aspects.³ Astronomical knowledge, again, gave rise to cosmological theories which pointed to a ruling and creating God,⁴ who as such would have a specially ethical character. In some such way was reached a conception of a Creator-God as the unity represented by the fifty names of the Great Gods, who lost their personality when their names were liturgically given to him⁵—a conception which in some statements even had a pantheistic aspect⁶ among a “group of priestly thinkers,” and in others took the form of an ideal theocracy.⁷ There is record that the Babylonian schools were divided into different sects,⁸ and their science was likely to make some of these rationalistic.⁹ Professor Sayce even goes so far as to say that in the later cosmogony, “under a thin disguise of theological nomenclature, the Babylonian theory of the universe has become a philosophical materialism.”¹⁰

It might be taken for granted, further, that disbelief would be set up by such a primitive fraud as the alleged pretence of the priests of Bel Merodach that the God cohabited nightly with the concubine set apart for him (Herodotos, i, 181–82), as was similarly pretended by the priests of Amun at Thebes. Herodotos could not believe the story, which, indeed, is probably a late Greek fable; but there must have been some skeptics within the sphere of the Semitic cult of sacred prostitution.

As regards freethinking in general, much would depend on the development of the Chaldæan astronomy. That science,

¹ Sayce, pp. 219, 344; Lenormant, *Chaldean Magic*, Eng. ed. p. 127.

² Jastrow, *Religions of Babylonia and Assyria*, 1898, p. 318.

³ Jastrow, p. 187; Sayce, pp. 128, 267–68. Cp. Kuenen, *Religion of Israel*, Eng. tr., i, 91; Menzies, *History of Religion*, 1895, p. 171; Gunkel, *Israel und Babylonien*, 1903, p. 30; Jeremias, as cited, pp. 5–6.

⁴ Meyer, iii, 168; Jastrow, p. 79; Sayce, p. 331 sq., 367 sq.; Lenormant, *Chaldean Magic*, p. 112; Jeremias, pp. 7–23.

⁵ Sayce, p. 305. Cp. Robertson Smith, *Religion of the Semites*, p. 452.

⁶ Jastrow, p. 190, note, p. 319; Sayce, pp. 191–92, 367; Lenormant, pp. 112, 113, 119, 133; Jeremias, p. 26.

⁷ Tiele, *Outlines*, p. 78; Sayce, *Ancient Empires of the East*, pp. 152–53; Rawlinson, *Five Great Monarchies*, 2nd ed. iii, 13; Maspero, p. 139.

⁸ Strabo, xvi, c. 1, § 6.

⁹ Cp. Rawlinson, *Five Great Monarchies*, i, 110; iii, 12–13.

¹⁰ Hibbert Lectures, p. 385.

growing out of primitive astrology (cp. Whewell, *Hist. of the Induct. Sciences*, 3rd ed. i, 108), would tend to discredit, among its experts, much of the prevailing religious thought; and they seem to have carried it so far as to frame a scientific theory of comets (Seneca, citing Apollonius Myndius, *Quaest. Nat.*, vii, 3; cp. Lib. Use. Kn. *Hist. of Astron.*, c. 3; E. Meyer, *Gesch. des Alterthums*, i, 186; and Weber, *Ind. Lit.*, p. 248). Such knowledge would greatly favour skepticism, as well as monotheism and pantheism. It was sought to be astrologically applied; but, as the horoscopes varied, this was again a source of unbelief (Meyer, p. 179). Medicine, again, made little progress (Herod., i, 197).

It can hardly be doubted, finally, that in Babylonia and Assyria there were idealists who, like the Hebrew prophets, repudiated alike image-worship and the religion of sacrifices. The latter repudiation occurs frequently in later Greece and Rome. There, as in Jerusalem, it could make itself heard in virtue of the restrictedness of the power of the priests, who in imperial Babylonia and Assyria, on the other hand, might be trusted to suppress or override any such propaganda, as we have seen was done in Brahmanical India.

Concerning image-worship, apart from the proved fact of pantheistic doctrine, and the parallels in Egypt and India, it is to be noted that Isaiah actually puts in the mouth of the Assyrian king a tirade against the "kingdoms of the idols" or "false gods," including in these Jerusalem and Samaria (Isa. x, 10, 11). The passage is dramatic, but it points to the possibility that in Assyria just as in Israel a disbelief in idols could arise from reflection on the spectacle of their multitude.

The chequered political history of Babylon and Assyria, however, made impossible any long-continued development of critical and philosophical thought. Their amalgamations of creeds and races had in a measure favoured such development;¹ and it was probably the setting up of a single rule over large populations formerly at chronic war that reduced to a minimum, if it did not wholly abolish, human sacrifice in the later pre-Persian empires;² but the inevitably subject state of the mass of the people, and the chronic military upset of the government, were conditions fatally favourable to ordinary superstition. The new universalist conceptions, instead of dissolving the special cults in pantheism, led only to a fresh competition of cults on cosmopolitan lines, all making the same pretensions, and stressing their most artificial peculiarities as all-

¹ Meyer, iii, § 103; Sayce, pp. 192, 345.

² Cp. Jastrow, p. 662; Sayce, p. 78; and Tiele, *Hist. Comparée*, p. 209. It seems probable that human sacrifice was latterly restricted to the case of criminals.

important. Thus, when old tribal or local religions went proselytizing in the enlarged imperial field, they made their most worthless stipulations—as Jewish circumcision and abstinence from pork, and the self-mutilation of the followers of Cybelê—the very grounds of salvation.¹ Culture remained wholly in the hands of the priestly and official class,² who, like the priesthoods of Egypt, were held to conservatism by their vast wealth.³ Accordingly we find the early religion of sorcery maintaining itself in the literature of the advanced empires.⁴ The attitude of the Semitic priests and scribes towards the old Akkadic as a sacred language was in itself, like the use of sacred books in general, long a check upon new thought;⁵ and though the Assyrian life seems to have set this check aside, by reason of the lack of a culture class in Assyria, the later Babylonian kingdom which rose on the fall of Assyria was too short-lived to profit much by the gain, being in turn overthrown in the second generation by Cyrus. It is significant that the conqueror was welcomed by the Babylonian priests as against their last king, the inquiring and innovating Nabonidos⁶ (Nabu-nahid), who had aimed at a monarchic polytheism or quasi-monotheism. He is described as having turned away from Mardouk (Merodach), the great Babylonian God, who accordingly accepted Cyrus in his stead. It is thus clear that Cyrus, who restored the old state of things, was no strict monotheist of the later Persian type, but a schemer who relied everywhere on popular religious interests, and conciliated the polytheists and henotheists of Babylon as he did the Yahweh-worshipping Jews.⁷ The Persian quasi-monotheism and anti-idolatry, however, already existed, and it is conceivable that they may have been intensified among the more cultured through the peculiar juxtaposition of cults set up by the Persian conquest.

Mr. Sayce's dictum (Hib. Lect., p. 314), that the later ethical element in the Akkado-Babylonian system is "necessarily" due to Semitic race elements, is seen to be fallacious in the light of his own subsequent admission (p. 353) as to the lateness of the development among the Semites. The difference between early Akkadian and later Babylonian was simply one of culture-stage. See Mr. Sayce's own remarks on p. 300; and compare E. Meyer (*Gesch. des Alt.*, i, 178, 182, 183), who

¹ Cp. Meyer, iii, 173.

² Meyer, i, 187, and note.

³ Cp. T. G. Pinches, *The Old Testament in the Light of the Hist. Records of Assyria and Babylonia*, 1902, pp. 161-63.

⁴ Jastrow, pp. 187, 256; Sayce, pp. 316, 320, 322, 327; Meyer, i, 183; Lenormant, p. 110; Jeremias, p. 5.

⁵ Sayce, pp. 326, 341; cp. Jastrow, p. 317.

⁶ Meyer, i, 599; Sayce, Hib. Lect., pp. 85-91; *Anc. Emp. of the East*, p. 245.

⁷ Meyer, iii, § 57.

entirely rejects the claim made for Semitic ethics. See, again, Tiele, *Outlines*, p. 78, and Mr. Sayce's own account (*Anc. Em. of the East*, p. 202) of the *Phœnician* religion as "impure and cruel." Other writers take the line of arguing that the Phœnicians were "not Semites," and that they differed in all things from the true Semites (cp. Dr. Marcus Dods, *Israel's Iron Age*, 1874, p. 10, and Farrar, as there cited). The explanation of such arbitrary judgments seems to be that the Semites are assumed to have had a primordial religious gift as compared with "Turanians," and that the Hebrews in turn are assumed to have been so gifted above other Semites. We shall best guard against à priori injustice to the Semites themselves, in the conjunctures in which they really advanced civilization, by entirely discarding the unscientific method of explaining the history of races in terms of hereditary character (see below, § 6, *end*).

§ 4. *Ancient Persia*

The Mazdean system, or worship of Ahura Mazda (Ormazd), of which we find in Herodotos positive historical record as an anti-idolatrous and nominally monotheistic creed¹ in the fifth century B.C., is the first to which these aspects can be ascribed with certainty. As the Jews are found represented in the Book of Jeremiah² (assumed to have been written in the sixth century B.C.) worshipping numerous Gods with images: and as polytheistic and idolatrous practices are still described in the Book of Ezekiel³ (assumed to have been written during or after the Babylonian Captivity), it is inadmissible to accept the unauthenticated writings of ostensibly earlier prophets as proving even a propaganda of monotheism on their part, the so-called Mosaic law being known to be in large part of late invention and of Babylonian derivation.⁴ In any case, the mass of the people were clearly image-worshippers. The Persians, on the other hand, can be taken with certainty to have had in the sixth century an imageless worship (though images existed for other purposes), with a supreme God set above all others. The Magian or Mazdean creed, as we have seen, was not very devoutly held by Cyrus; but Dareios a generation later is found holding it with zeal; and it cannot have grown in a generation to the form it then bore. It must therefore be regarded as a development of the religion of some section of the "Iranian" race, centring as it does round some deities common to the Vedic Aryans.

The Mazdean system, as we first trace it in history, was the

¹ Herod. i, 131.

² Jer, xi, 13, etc.

³ Ezek. chs. vi, viii.

⁴ Cp. the recent literature on the recovered Code of Hammurabi.