James George Frazer

THE BELIEF IN IMMORTALITY AND THE WORSHIP OF THE DEAD

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The Belief in Immortality and the Worship of the Dead

The Belief Among the Aborigines of Australia, New Guinea, Melanesia and Polynesians

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Table of Contents

Volume 1

Table of Contents

PREFACE

Table of Contents

The following lectures were delivered on Lord Gifford's Foundation before the University of St. Andrews in the early winters of 1911 and 1912. They are printed nearly as they were spoken, except that a few passages, omitted for the sake of brevity in the oral delivery, have been here restored and a few more added. Further, I have compressed the two introductory lectures into one, striking out some passages which on reflection I judged to be irrelevant or superfluous. The volume incorporates twelve lectures on "The Fear and Worship of the Dead" which I delivered in the Lent and Easter terms of 1911 at Trinity College, Cambridge, and repeated, with large additions, in my course at St. Andrews.

The theme here broached is a vast one, and I hope to pursue it hereafter by describing the belief in immortality and the worship of the dead, as these have been found among the other principal races of the world both in ancient and modern times. Of all the many forms which natural religion has assumed none probably has exerted so deep and far-reaching an influence on human life as the belief in immortality and the worship of the dead; hence an historical survey of this most momentous creed and of the practical consequences which have been deduced from it can hardly fail to be at once instructive and impressive, whether we regard the record with complacency as a noble testimony to the aspiring genius of man, who claims to outlive the sun and the stars, or whether we view it with pity as a

melancholy monument of fruitless labour and barren ingenuity expended in prying into that great mystery of which fools profess their knowledge and wise men confess their ignorance.

J. G. FRAZER.
Cambridge,
9th February 1913.

LECTURE I

INTRODUCTION

Table of Contents

Natural theology, and the three modes of handling it, the dogmatic, the philosophical, and the historical.

The subject of these lectures is a branch of natural theology. By natural theology I understand that reasoned knowledge of a God or gods which man may be supposed, whether rightly or wrongly, capable of attaining to by the exercise of his natural faculties alone. Thus defined, the subject may be treated in at least three different ways, namely, dogmatically, philosophically, and historically. We may simply state the dogmas of natural theology which appear to us to be true: that is the dogmatic method. Or, secondly, we may examine the validity of the grounds on which these dogmas have been or may be maintained: that is the philosophic method. Or, thirdly, we may content ourselves with describing the various views which have been held on the subject and tracing their origin and evolution in history: that is the historical method. The first of these three methods assumes the truth of natural theology, the second discusses it, and the third neither assumes nor discusses but simply ignores it: the historian as such is not concerned with the truth or falsehood of the beliefs he describes, his business is merely to record them and to track them as far as possible to their sources. Now that the subject of natural theology is ripe for a purely dogmatic treatment will hardly, I

think, be maintained by any one, to whatever school of thought he may belong; accordingly that method of treatment need not occupy us further. Far otherwise is it with the philosophic method which undertakes to enquire into the truth or falsehood of the belief in a God: no method could be more appropriate at a time like the present, when the opinions of educated and thoughtful men on that profound topic are so unsettled, diverse, and conflicting. A philosophical treatment of the subject might comprise a discussion of such questions as whether a natural knowledge of God is possible to man, and, if possible, by what means and through what faculties it is attainable; what are the grounds for believing in the existence of a God; and, if this belief is justified, what may be supposed to be his essential nature and attributes, and what his relations to the world in general and to man in particular. Now I desire to confess at once that an adequate discussion of these and kindred questions would far exceed both my capacity and my knowledge; for he who would do justice to so arduous an enquiry should not only be endowed with a comprehensive and penetrating genius, but should possess a wide and accurate acquaintance with the best accredited results of philosophic speculation and scientific research. To such qualifications I can lay no claim, and accordingly I must regard myself as unfitted for a purely philosophic treatment of natural theology. To speak plainly, the question of the existence of a God is too deep for me. I dare neither affirm nor deny it. I can only humbly confess my ignorance. Accordingly, if Lord Gifford had required of his lecturers either a dogmatic or a philosophical treatment of natural

theology, I could not have undertaken to deliver the lectures.

The method followed in these lectures is the historical.

But in his deed of foundation, as I understand it, Lord Gifford left his lecturers free to follow the historical rather than the dogmatic or the philosophical method of treatment. He says: "The lecturers shall be under no restraint whatever in their treatment of their theme: for example, they may freely discuss (and it may be well to do so) all questions about man's conceptions of God or the Infinite, their origin, nature, and truth." In making this provision the founder appears to have allowed and indeed encouraged the lecturers not only to discuss, if they chose to do so, the philosophical basis of a belief in God, but also to set forth the various conceptions of the divine nature which have been held by men in all ages and to trace them to their origin: in short, he permitted and encouraged the lecturers to compose a history of natural theology or of some part of it. Even when it is thus limited to its historical aspect the theme is too vast to be mastered completely by any one man: the most that a single enquirer can do is to take a general but necessarily superficial survey of the whole and to devote himself especially to the investigation of some particular branch or aspect of the subject. This I have done more or less for many years, and accordingly I think that without being presumptuous I may attempt, in compliance with Lord Gifford's wishes and directions, to lay before my hearers a portion of the history of religion to which I have paid

particular attention. That the historical study of religious beliefs, quite apart from the question of their truth or falsehood, is both interesting and instructive will hardly be disputed by any intelligent and thoughtful enquirer. Whether they have been well or ill founded, these beliefs have deeply influenced the conduct of human affairs; they have furnished some of the most powerful, persistent, and far-reaching motives of action; they have transformed nations and altered the face of the globe. No one who would understand the general history of mankind can afford to ignore the annals of religion. If he does so, he will inevitably fall into the most serious misconceptions even in studying branches of human activity which might seem, on a superficial view, to be quite unaffected by religious considerations.

An historical enquiry into the evolution of religion prejudices neither the question of the ethical value of religious practice nor the question of the truth or falsehood of religious belief.

Therefore to trace theological and in general religious ideas to their sources and to follow them through all the manifold influences which they have exerted on the destinies of our race must always be an object of prime importance to the historian, whatever view he may take of their speculative truth or ethical value. Clearly we cannot estimate their ethical value until we have learned the modes in which they have actually determined human conduct for good or evil: in other words, we cannot judge of the morality of religious beliefs until we have ascertained their history: the facts

must be known before judgment can be passed on them: the work of the historian must precede the work of the moralist. Even the question of the validity or truth of religious creeds cannot, perhaps, be wholly dissociated from the question of their origin. If, for example, we discover that doctrines which we had accepted with implicit faith from tradition have their close analogies in the barbarous superstitions of ignorant savages, we can hardly help suspecting that our own cherished doctrines may have originated in the similar superstitions of our rude forefathers; and the suspicion inevitably shakes the confidence with which we had hitherto regarded these articles of our faith. The doubt thus cast on our old creed is perhaps illogical, since even if we should discover that the creed did originate in mere superstition, in other words, that the grounds on which it was first adopted were false and absurd, this discovery would not really disprove the beliefs themselves, for it is perfectly possible that a belief may be true, though the reasons alleged in favour of it are false and absurd: indeed we may affirm with great probability that a multitude of human beliefs, true in themselves, have been accepted and defended by millions of people on grounds which cannot bear exact investigation for a moment. For example, if the facts of savage life which it will be my duty to submit to you should have the effect of making the belief in immortality look exceedingly foolish, those of my hearers who cherish the belief may console themselves by reflecting that, as I have just pointed out, a creed is not necessarily false because some of the reasons adduced in its favour are invalid, because it has sometimes been supported by the

despicable tricks of vulgar imposture, and because the practices to which it has given rise have often been in the highest degree not only absurd but pernicious.

Yet such an enquiry may shake the confidence with which traditional beliefs have been held.

Thus an historical enquiry into the origin of religious creeds cannot, strictly speaking, invalidate, still less refute, the creeds themselves, though it may, and doubtless often does weaken the confidence with which they are held. This weakening of religious faith as a consequence of a closer scrutiny of religious origins is unquestionably a matter of great importance to the community; for society has been built and cemented to a great extent on a foundation of religion, and it is impossible to loosen the cement and shake the foundation without endangering the superstructure. The candid historian of religion will not dissemble the danger incidental to his enquiries, but nevertheless it is his duty to prosecute them unflinchingly. Come what may, he must ascertain the facts so far as it is possible to do so; having done that, he may leave to others the onerous and delicate task of adjusting the new knowledge to the practical needs of mankind. The narrow way of truth may often look dark and threatening, and the wayfarer may often be weary; yet even at the darkest and the weariest he will go forward in the trust, if not in the knowledge, that the way will lead at last to light and to rest; in plain words, that there is no ultimate incompatibility between the good and the true.

To discover the origin of the idea of God we must study the beliefs of primitive man.

Now if we are indeed to discover the origin of man's conception of God, it is not sufficient to analyse the ideas which the educated and enlightened portion of mankind entertain on the subject at the present day; for in great measure these ideas are traditional, they have been handed down with little or no independent reflection or enquiry from generation to generation; hence in order to detect them in their inception it becomes necessary to push our analysis far back into the past. Large materials for such an historical enquiry are provided for us in the literature of ancient nations which, though often sadly mutilated and imperfect, has survived to modern times and throws much precious light on the religious beliefs and practices of the peoples who created it. But the ancients themselves inherited a great part of their religion from their prehistoric ancestors, and accordingly it becomes desirable to investigate the religious notions of these remote forefathers of mankind, since in them we may hope at last to arrive at the ultimate source, the historical origin, of the whole long development.

The beliefs of primitive man can only be understood through a comparative study of the various races in the lower stages of culture.

But how can this be done? how can we investigate the ideas of peoples who, ignorant of writing, had no means of permanently recording their beliefs? At first sight the thing seems impossible; the thread of enquiry is broken off short;

it has landed us on the brink of a gulf which looks impassable. But the case is not so hopeless as it appears. True, we cannot investigate the beliefs of prehistoric ages directly, but the comparative method of research may furnish us with the means of studying them indirectly; it may hold up to us a mirror in which, if we do not see the originals, we may perhaps contemplate their reflections. For a comparative study of the various races of mankind demonstrates, or at least renders it highly probable, that humanity has everywhere started at an exceedingly low level of culture, a level far beneath that of the lowest existing savages, and that from this humble beginning all the various races of men have gradually progressed upward at different rates, some faster and some slower, till they have attained the particular stage which each of them occupies at the present time.

Hence the need of studying the beliefs and customs of savages, if we are to understand the evolution of culture in general.

If this conclusion is correct, the various stages of savagery and barbarism on which many tribes and peoples now stand represent, broadly speaking, so many degrees of retarded social and intellectual development, they correspond to similar stages which the ancestors of the civilised races may be supposed to have passed through at more or less remote periods of their history. Thus when we arrange all the known peoples of the world according to the degree of their savagery or civilisation in a graduated scale of culture, we obtain not merely a comparative view of their relative

positions in the scale, but also in some measure an historical record of the genetic development of culture from a very early time down to the present day. Hence a study of the savage and barbarous races of mankind is of the greatest importance for a full understanding of the beliefs and practices, whether religious, social, moral, or political, of the most civilised races, including our own, since it is practically certain that a large part of these beliefs and practices originated with our savage ancestors, and has been inherited by us from them, with more or less of modification, through a long line of intermediate generations.

The need is all the more urgent because savages are rapidly disappearing or being transformed.

That is why the study of existing savages at the present day engrosses so much of the attention of civilised peoples. We see that if we are to comprehend not only our past history but our present condition, with all its many intricate and perplexing problems, we must begin at the beginning by attempting to discover the mental state of our savage forefathers, who bequeathed to us so much of the faiths, the laws, and the institutions which we still cherish; and more and more men are coming to perceive that the only way open to us of doing this effectually is to study the mental state of savages who to this day occupy a state of culture analogous to that of our rude progenitors. Through contact with civilisation these savages are now rapidly disappearing, or at least losing the old habits and ideas which render them a document of priceless historical value for us. Hence we

have every motive for prosecuting the study of savagery with ardour and diligence before it is too late, before the record is gone for ever. We are like an heir whose title-deeds must be scrutinised before he can take possession of the inheritance, but who finds the handwriting of the deeds so fading and evanescent that it threatens to disappear entirely before he can read the document to the end. With what keen attention, what eager haste, would he not scan the fast-vanishing characters? With the like attention and the like haste civilised men are now applying themselves to the investigation of the fast-vanishing savages.

Savage religion is to be the subject of these lectures.

Thus if we are to trace historically man's conception of God to its origin, it is desirable, or rather essential, that we should begin by studying the most primitive ideas on the subject which are accessible to us, and the most primitive ideas are unquestionably those of the lowest savages. Accordingly in these lectures I propose to deal with a particular side or aspect of savage religion. I shall not trench on the sphere of the higher religions, not only because my knowledge of them is for the most part very slight, but also because I believe that a searching study of the higher and more complex religions should be postponed till we have acquired an accurate knowledge of the lower and simpler. For a similar reason the study of inorganic chemistry naturally precedes the study of organic chemistry, because inorganic compounds are much simpler and therefore more easily analysed and investigated than organic compounds. So with the chemistry of the mind; we should analyse the

comparatively simple phenomena of savage thought into its constituent elements before we attempt to perform a similar operation on the vastly more complex phenomena of civilised beliefs.

But only a part of savage religion will be dealt with.

But while I shall confine myself rigidly to the field of savage religion, I shall not attempt to present you with a complete survey even of that restricted area, and that for more reasons than one. In the first place the theme, even with this great limitation, is far too large to be adequately set forth in the time at my disposal; the sketch—for it could be no more than a sketch—would be necessarily superficial and probably misleading. In the second place, even a sketch of primitive religion in general ought to presuppose in the sketcher a fairly complete knowledge of the whole subject, so that all the parts may appear, not indeed in detail, but in their proper relative proportions. Now though I have given altogether a good deal of time to the study of primitive religion, I am far from having studied it in all its branches, and I could not trust myself to give an accurate general account of it even in outline; were I to attempt such a thing I should almost certainly fall, through sheer ignorance or inadvertence, into the mistake of exaggerating some features, unduly diminishing others, and omitting certain essential features altogether. Hence it seems to me better not to commit myself to so ambitious an enterprise but to confine myself in my lectures, as I have always done in my writings, to a comparatively minute investigation of certain special aspects or forms of primitive religion rather than

attempt to embrace in a general view the whole of that large subject. Such a relatively detailed study of a single compartment may be less attractive and more tedious than a bird's-eye view of a wider area; but in the end it may perhaps prove a more solid contribution to knowledge.

Introductory observations. The question of a supernatural revelation excluded.

But before I come to details I wish to make a few general introductory remarks, and in particular to define some of the terms which I shall have occasion to use in the lectures. I have defined natural theology as that reasoned knowledge of a God or gods which man may be supposed, whether rightly or wrongly, capable of attaining to by the exercise of his natural faculties alone. Whether there ever has been or can be a special miraculous revelation of God to man through channels different from those through which all other human knowledge is derived, is a question which does not concern us in these lectures; indeed it is expressly excluded from their scope by the will of the founder, who directed the lecturers to treat the subject "as a strictly natural science," "without reference to or reliance upon any supposed special exceptional or so-called miraculous revelation." Accordingly, in compliance with these directions, I dismiss at the outset the question of a revelation, and shall limit myself strictly to natural theology in the sense in which I have defined it.

Theology and religion, how related to each other.

I have called natural theology a reasoned knowledge of a God or gods to distinguish it from that simple and comparatively, though I believe never absolutely, unreasoning faith in God which suffices for the practice of religion. For theology is at once more and less than religion: if on the one hand it includes a more complete acquaintance with the grounds of religious belief than is essential to religion, on the other hand it excludes the observance of those practical duties which are indispensable to any religion worthy of the name. In short, whereas theology is purely theoretical, religion is both theoretical and practical, though the theoretical part of it need not be so highly developed as in theology. But while the subject of the lectures is, strictly speaking, natural theology rather than natural religion, I think it would be not only difficult but undesirable to confine our attention to the purely theological or theoretical part of natural religion: in all religions, and not least in the undeveloped savage religions with which we shall deal, theory and practice fuse with and interact on each other too closely to be forcibly disjoined and handled apart. Hence throughout the lectures I shall not scruple to refer constantly to religious practice as well as to religious theory, without feeling that thereby I am transgressing the proper limits of my subject.

The term God defined.

As theology is not only by definition but by etymology a reasoned knowledge or theory of a God or gods, it becomes desirable, before we proceed further, to define the sense in which I understand and shall employ the word God. That

sense is neither novel nor abstruse; it is simply the sense which I believe the generality of mankind attach to the term. By a God I understand a superhuman and supernatural being, of a spiritual and personal nature, who controls the world or some part of it on the whole for good, and who is endowed with intellectual faculties, moral feelings, and active powers, which we can only conceive on the analogy of human faculties, feelings, and activities, though we are bound to suppose that in the divine nature they exist in higher degrees, perhaps in infinitely higher degrees, than the corresponding faculties, feelings, and activities of man. In short, by a God I mean a beneficent supernatural spirit, the ruler of the world or of some part of it, who resembles man in nature though he excels him in knowledge, goodness, and power. This is, I think, the sense in which the ordinary man speaks of a God, and I believe that he is right in so doing. I am aware that it has been not unusual, especially perhaps of late years, to apply the name of God to very different conceptions, to empty it of all implication of personality, and to reduce it to signifying something very large and very vague, such as the Infinite or the Absolute (whatever these hard words may signify), the great First Cause, the Universal Substance, "the stream of tendency by which all things seek to fulfil the law of their being,"[1] and so forth. Now without expressing any opinion as to the truth or falsehood of the views implied by such applications of the name of God, I cannot but regard them all as illegitimate extensions of the term, in short as an abuse of language, and I venture to protest against it in the interest not only of verbal accuracy but of clear thinking,

because it is apt to conceal from ourselves and others a real and very important change of thought: in particular it may lead many to imagine that the persons who use the name of God in one or other of these extended senses retain certain theological opinions which they may in fact have long abandoned. Thus the misuse of the name of God may resemble the stratagem in war of putting up dummies to make an enemy imagine that a fort is still held after it has been evacuated by the garrison. I am far from alleging or insinuating that the illegitimate extension of the divine name is deliberately employed by theologians or others for the purpose of masking a change of front; but that it may have that effect seems at least possible. And as we cannot use words in wrong senses without running a serious risk of deceiving ourselves as well as others, it appears better on all accounts to adhere strictly to the common meaning of the name of God as signifying a powerful supernatural and on the whole beneficent spirit, akin in nature to man; and if any of us have ceased to believe in such a being we should refrain from applying the old word to the new faith, and should find some other and more appropriate term to express our meaning. At all events, speaking for myself, I intend to use the name of God consistently in the familiar sense, and I would beg my hearers to bear this steadily in mind.

Monotheism and polytheism.

You will have observed that I have spoken of natural theology as a reasoned knowledge of a God or gods. There is indeed nothing in the definition of God which I have

adopted to imply that he is unique, in other words, that there is only one God rather than several or many gods. It is true that modern European thinkers, bred in a monotheistic religion, commonly overlook polytheism as a crude theory unworthy the serious attention of philosophers; in short, the champions and the assailants of religion in Europe alike for the most part tacitly assume that there is either one God or none. Yet some highly civilised nations of antiquity and of modern times, such as the ancient Egyptians, Greeks, and Romans, and the modern Chinese and Hindoos, have accepted the polytheistic explanation of the world, and as no reasonable man will deny the philosophical subtlety of the Greeks and the Hindoos, to say nothing of the rest, a theory of the universe which has commended itself to them deserves perhaps more consideration than it has commonly received from Western philosophers; certainly it cannot be ignored in an historical enquiry into the origin of religion.

A natural knowledge of God can only be acquired by experience.

If there is such a thing as natural theology, that is, a knowledge of a God or gods acquired by our natural faculties alone without the aid of a special revelation, it follows that it must be obtained by one or other of the methods by which all our natural knowledge is conveyed to us. Roughly speaking, these methods are two in number, namely, intuition and experience. Now if we ask ourselves, Do we know God intuitively in the same sense in which we know intuitively our own sensations and the simplest truths of mathematics, I think most men will acknowledge that

they do not. It is true that according to Berkeley the world exists only as it is perceived, and that our perceptions of it are produced by the immediate action of God on our minds, so that everything we perceive might be described, if not as an idea in the mind of the deity, at least as a direct emanation from him. On this theory we might in a sense be said to have an immediate knowledge of God. But Berkeley's theory has found little acceptance, so far as I know, even among philosophers; and even if we regarded it as true, we should still have to admit that the knowledge of God implied by it is inferential rather than intuitive in the strict sense of the word: we infer God to be the cause of our perceptions rather than identify him with the perceptions themselves. On the whole, then, I conclude that man, or at all events the ordinary man, has, properly speaking, no immediate or intuitive knowledge of God, and that, if he obtains, without the aid of revelation, any knowledge of him at all, it can only be through the other natural channel of knowledge, that is, through experience.

The nature of experience.

In experience, as distinct from intuition, we reach our conclusions not directly through simple contemplation of the particular sensations, emotions, or ideas of which we are at the moment conscious, but indirectly by calling up before the imagination and comparing with each other our memories of a variety of sensations, emotions, or ideas of which we have been conscious in the past, and by selecting or abstracting from the mental images so compared the points in which they resemble each other. The points of

resemblance thus selected or abstracted from a number of particulars compose what we call an abstract or general idea, and from a comparison of such abstract or general ideas with each other we arrive at general conclusions, which define the relations of the ideas to each other. Experience in general consists in the whole body of conclusions thus deduced from a comparison of all the particular sensations, emotions, and ideas which make up the conscious life of the individual. Hence in order to constitute experience the mind has to perform a more or less complex series of operations, which are commonly referred to certain mental faculties, such as memory, imagination, and judgment. This analysis of experience does not pretend to be philosophically complete or exact; but perhaps it is sufficiently accurate for the purpose of these lectures, the scope of which is not philosophical but historical.

Two kinds of experience, the experience of our own mind and the experience of an external world.

Now experience in the widest sense of the word may be conveniently distinguished into two sorts, the experience of our own mind and the experience of an external world. The distinction is indeed, like the others with which I am dealing at present, rather practically useful than theoretically sound; certainly it would not be granted by all philosophers, for many of them have held that we neither have nor with our present faculties can possibly attain to any immediate knowledge or perception of an external world, we merely infer its existence from our own sensations, which are as

strictly a part of our mind as the ideas and emotions of our waking life or the visions of sleep. According to them, the existence of matter or of an external world is, so far as we are concerned, merely an hypothesis devised to explain the order of our sensations; it never has been perceived by any man, woman, or child who ever lived on earth; we have and can have no immediate knowledge or perception of anything but the states and operations of our own mind. On this theory what we call the world, with all its supposed infinitudes of space and time, its systems of suns and planets, its seemingly endless forms of inorganic matter and organic life, shrivels up, on a close inspection, into a fleeting, a momentary figment of thought. It is like one of those glass baubles, iridescent with a thousand varied and delicate hues, which a single touch suffices to shatter into dust. The philosopher, like the sorcerer, has but to wave his magic wand,

> "And, like the baseless fabric of this vision,
> The cloud-capped towers, the gorgeous palaces,
> The solemn temples, the great globe itself,
> Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve
> And, like this insubstantial pageant faded,
> Leave not a rack behind. We are such stuff
> As dreams are made on, and our little life
> Is rounded with a sleep."

The distinction rather popular and convenient than philosophically strict.

It would be beyond my province, even if it were within my power, to discuss these airy speculations, and thereby to descend into the arena where for ages subtle dialecticians have battled with each other over the reality or unreality of an external world. For my purpose it suffices to adopt the popular and convenient distinction of mind and matter and hence to divide experience into two sorts, an inward experience of the acts and states of our own minds, and an outward experience of the acts and states of that physical universe by which we seem to be surrounded.

The knowledge or conception of God has been attained both by inward and by outward experience.

Now if a natural knowledge of God is only possible by means of experience, in other words, by a process of reasoning based on observation, it will follow that such a knowledge may conceivably be acquired either by the way of inward or of outward experience; in other words, it may be attained either by reflecting on the processes of our own minds or by observing the processes of external nature. In point of fact, if we survey the history of thought, mankind appears to have arrived at a knowledge, or at all events at a conception, of deity by both these roads. Let me say a few words as to the two roads which lead, or seem to lead, man to God.

The conception of God is attained by inward experience, that is, by the observation of certain remarkable thoughts and feelings which are

attributed to the inspiration of a deity. Practical dangers of the theory of inspiration.

In the first place, then, men in many lands and many ages have experienced certain extraordinary emotions and entertained certain extraordinary ideas, which, unable to account for them by reference to the ordinary forms of experience, they have set down to the direct action of a powerful spirit or deity working on their minds and even entering into and taking possession of their bodies; and in this excited state—for violent excitement is characteristic of these manifestations—the patient believes himself to be possessed of supernatural knowledge and supernatural power. This real or supposed mode of apprehending a divine spirit and entering into communion with it, is commonly and appropriately called inspiration. The phenomenon is familiar to us from the example of the Hebrew nation, who believed that their prophets were thus inspired by the deity, and that their sacred books were regularly composed under the divine afflatus. The belief is by no means singular, indeed it appears to be world-wide; for it would be hard to point to any race of men among whom instances of such inspiration have not been reported; and the more ignorant and savage the race the more numerous, to judge by the reports, are the cases of inspiration. Volumes might be filled with examples, but through the spread of information as to the lower races in recent years the topic has become so familiar that I need not stop to illustrate it by instances. I will merely say that among savages the theory of inspiration or possession is commonly invoked to explain all abnormal mental states, particularly insanity or conditions of mind

bordering on it, so that persons more or less crazed in their wits, and particularly hysterical or epileptic patients, are for that very reason thought to be peculiarly favoured by the spirits and are therefore consulted as oracles, their wild and whirling words passing for the revelations of a higher power, whether a god or a ghost, who considerately screens his too dazzling light under a thick veil of dark sayings and mysterious ejaculations.[2] I need hardly point out the very serious dangers which menace any society where such theories are commonly held and acted upon. If the decisions of a whole community in matters of the gravest importance are left to turn on the wayward fancies, the whims and vagaries of the insane or the semi-insane, what are likely to be the consequences to the commonwealth? What, for example, can be expected to result from a war entered upon at such dictation and waged under such auspices? Are cattle-breeding, agriculture, commerce, all the arts of life on which a people depend for their subsistence, likely to thrive when they are directed by the ravings of epilepsy or the drivellings of hysteria? Defeat in battle, conquest by enemies, death by famine and widespread disease, these and a thousand other lesser evils threaten the blind people who commit themselves to such blind guides. The history of savage and barbarous tribes, could we follow it throughout, might furnish us with a thousand warning instances of the fatal effects of carrying out this crude theory of inspiration to its logical conclusions; and if we hear less than might be expected of such instances, it is probably because the tribes who consistently acted up to their beliefs have thereby wiped themselves out of existence: they have perished the