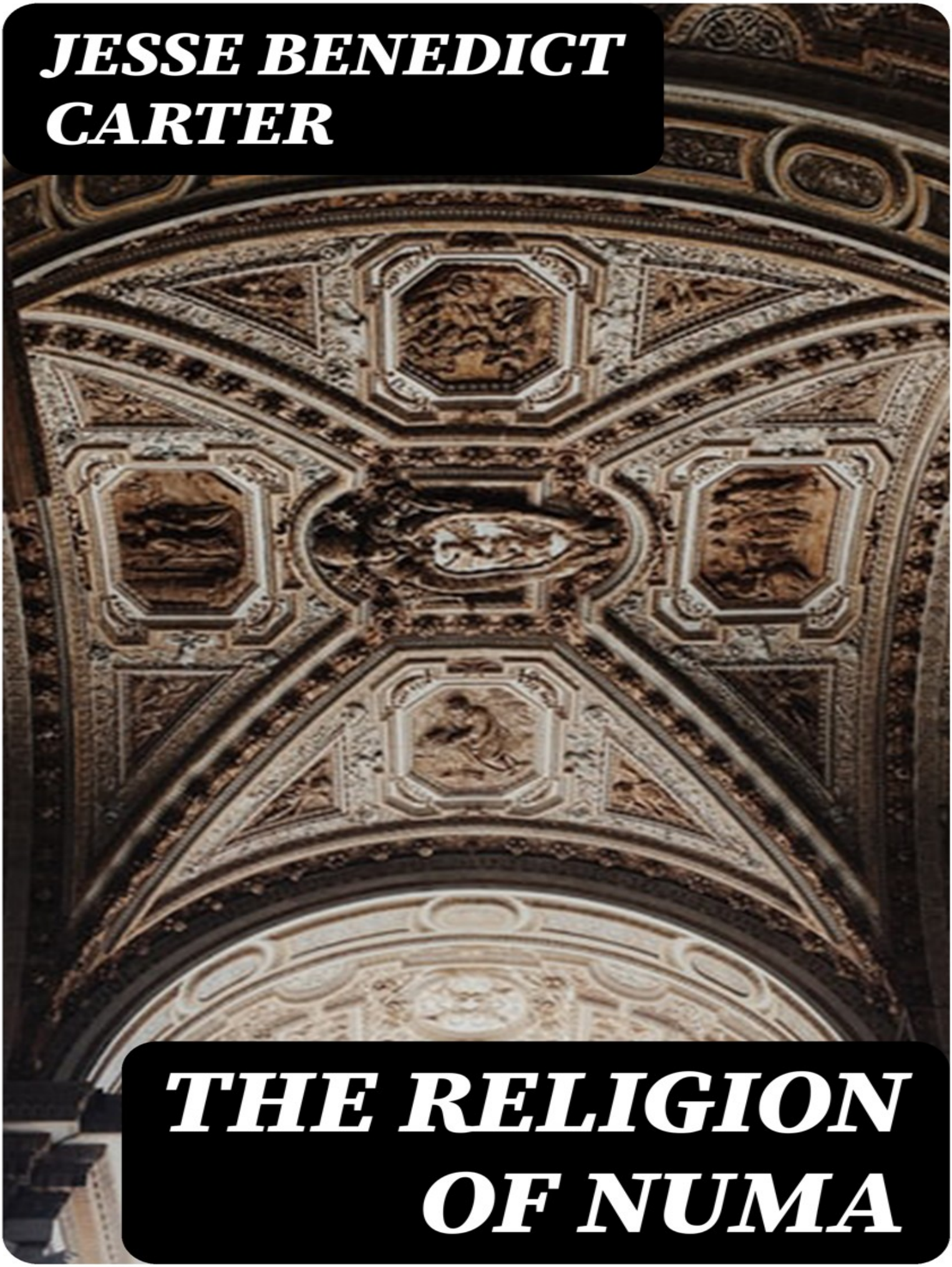
JESSE BENEDICT CARTER
THE RELIGION OF NUMA

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The Religion of Numa

And Other Essays on the Religion of Ancient Rome

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TO

K.F.C.

PREFACE

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This little book tries to tell the story of the religious life of the Romans from the time when their history begins for us until the close of the reign of Augustus. Each of its five essays deals with a distinct period and is in a sense complete in itself; but the dramatic development inherent in the whole forbids their separation save as acts or chapters. In spite of modern interest in the study of religion, Roman religion has been in general relegated to specialists in ancient history and classics. This is not surprising for Roman religion is not prepossessing in appearance, but though it is at first sight incomparably less attractive than Greek religion, it is, if properly understood, fully as interesting, nay, even more so. In Mr. W. Warde Fowler's *Roman Festivals* however the subject was presented in all its attractiveness,

and if the present book shall serve as a simple introduction to his larger work, its purpose will have been fulfilled.

No one can write of Roman religion without being almost inestimably indebted to Georg Wissowa whose *Religion und Cultus der Römer* is the best systematic presentation of the subject. It was the author's privilege to be Wissowa's pupil, and much that is in this book is directly owing to him, and even the ideas that are new, if there are any good ones, are only the bread which he cast upon the waters returning to him after many days.

The careful student of the history of the Romans cannot doubt the psychological reality of their religion, no matter what his personal metaphysics may be. It is the author's hope that these essays may have a human interest because he has tried to emphasise this reality and to present the Romans as men of like passions to ourselves, in spite of all differences of time and race.

Hearty thanks are due to Mr. W. Warde Fowler and to Mr. Albert W. Van Buren for their great kindness in reading the proofs; and the dedication of the book is at best a poor return for the help which my wife has given me.

J.B.C.

ROME, *November, 1905*.

THE RELIGION OF NUMA

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Rome forms no exception to the general rule that nations, like individuals, grow by contact with the outside world. In the middle of the five centuries of her republic

came the Punic wars and the intimate association with Greece which made the last half of her history as a republic so different from the first half; and in the kingdom, which preceded the republic, there was a similar coming of foreign influence, which made the later kingdom with its semi-historical names of the Tarquins and Servius Tullius so different from the earlier kingdom with its altogether legendary Romulus, Numa, Tullus Hostilius and Ancus Martius. We have thus four distinct phases in the history of Roman society, and a corresponding phase of religion in each period; and if we add to this that new social structure which came into being by the reforms of Augustus at the beginning of the empire, together with the religious changes which accompanied it, we shall have the five periods which these five essays try to describe: the period before the Tarquins, that is the "Religion of Numa"; the later kingdom, that is the "Reorganisation of Servius"; the first three centuries of the republic, that is the "Coming of the Sibyl"; the closing centuries of the republic, that is the "Decline of Faith"; and finally the early empire and the "Augustan Renaissance." Like all attempts to cut history into sections these divisions are more or less arbitrary, but their convenience sufficiently justifies their creation. They must be thought of however not as representing independent blocks, arbitrarily arranged in a certain consecutive order, not as five successive religious consciousnesses, but merely as marking the entrance of certain new ideas into the continuous religious consciousness of the Roman people. The history of each of these periods is simply the record of the change which new social conditions produced in that

great barometer of society, the religious consciousness of the community. It is in the period of the old kingdom that our story begins.

At first sight it may seem a foolish thing to try to draw a picture of the religious condition of a time about the political history of which we know so little, and it is only right therefore that we should inquire what sources of knowledge we possess.

There was a time, not so very long ago, when under the banner of the new-born science of "Comparative Philology" there gathered together a group of men who thought they held the key to prehistoric history, and that words themselves would tell the story where ancient monuments and literature were silent. It was a great and beautiful thought, and the science which encouraged it has taken its place as a useful and reputable member of the community of sciences, but its pretensions to the throne of the revealer of mysteries have been withdrawn by those who are its most ardent followers, and the "Indo-Germanic religion" which is brought into being is a pleasant thought for an idle hour rather than a foundation and starting-point for the study of ancient religion in general. Altogether aside from the fact that although primitive religion and nationality are in the main identical, language and nationality are by no means so—we have the great practical difficulty in the case of Greece and Rome that in the earliest period of which we have knowledge these two religions bear so little resemblance that we must either assert for the time of Indo-Germanic unity a religious development much more primitive than that which comparative philology has

sketched, or we must suppose the presence of a strong decadent influence in Rome's case after the separation, which is equally difficult. If we realise that in a primitive religion the name of the god is usually the same as the name of the thing which he represents, the existence of a Greek god and a Roman god with names which correspond to the same Indo-Germanic word proves linguistically that the *thing* existed and had a name before the separation, but not at all that the thing was deified or that the name was the name of a god at that time. We must therefore be content to begin our study of religion much more humbly and at a much later period.

In fact we cannot go back appreciably before the dawn of political history, but there are certain considerations which enable us at least to understand the phenomena of the dawn itself, those survivals in culture which loom up in the twilight and the understanding of which gives us a fair start in our historical development. For this knowledge we are indebted to the so-called "anthropological" method, which is based on the assumption that mankind is essentially uniform, and that this essential uniformity justifies us in drawing inferences about very ancient thought from the very primitive thought of the barbarous and savage peoples of our own day. At first sight the weakness of this contention is more apparent than its strength, and it is easy to show that the prehistoric primitive culture of a people destined to civilisation is one thing, and the retarded primitive culture of modern tribes stunted in their growth is quite another thing, so that, as has so often been said, the two bear a relation to each other not unlike that of a healthy young child to a full-

grown idiot. And yet there is a decided resemblance between the child and the idiot, and whether prehistoric or retarded, primitive culture shows everywhere strong likeness, and the method is productive of good if we confine our reasoning backwards to those things in savage life which the two kinds of primitive culture, the prehistoric and the retarded, have in common. To do this however we must have some knowledge of the prehistoric, and our modern retarded savage must be used merely to illumine certain things which we see only in half-light; he must never be employed as a lay-figure in sketching in those features of prehistoric life of which we are totally in ignorance. It is peculiarly useful to the student of Roman religion because he stands on the borderland and looking backwards sees just enough dark shapes looming up behind him to crave more light. For in many phases of early Roman religion there are present characteristics which go back to old manners of thought, and these manners of thought are not peculiar to the Romans but are found in many primitive peoples of our own day. The greatest contribution which anthropology has made to the study of early Roman religion is "animism."

Not much more than a quarter of a century ago the word "animism" began to be used to describe that particular phase of the psychological condition of primitive peoples by which they believe that a spirit (*anima*) resides in everything, material and immaterial. This spirit is generally closely associated with the thing itself, sometimes actually identified with it. When it is thought of as distinct from the thing, it is supposed to have the form of the thing, to be in a word its "double." These doubles exercise an influence,

often for evil, over the thing, and it is expedient and necessary therefore that they should be propitiated so that their evil influence may be removed and the thing itself may prosper. These doubles are not as yet gods, they are merely powers, potentialities, but in the course of time they develop into gods. The first step in this direction is the obtaining of a *name*, a name the knowledge of which gives a certain control over the power to him who knows it. Finally these powers equipped with a name begin to take on personal characteristics, to be thought of as individuals, and finally represented under the form of men.

It cannot be shown that all the gods of Rome originated in this way, but certainly many of them did, and it is not impossible that they all did; and this theory of their origin explains better than any other theory certain habits of thought which the early Romans cherished in regard to their gods. At the time when our knowledge of Roman religion begins, Rome is in possession of a great many gods, but very few of them are much more than names for powers. They are none of them personal enough to be connected together in myths. And this is the very simple reason why there was no such thing as a native Roman mythology, a blank in Rome's early development which many modern writers have refused to admit, taking upon themselves the unnecessary trouble of positing an original mythology later lost. The gods of early Rome were neither married nor given in marriage; they had no children or grandchildren and there were no divine genealogies. Instead they were thought of occasionally as more or less individual powers, but usually as masses of potentialities, grouped together for

convenience as the "gods of the country," the "gods of the storeroom," the "gods of the dead," etc. Even when they were conceived of as somewhat individual, they were usually very closely associated with the corresponding object, for example Vesta was not so much the goddess of the hearth as the goddess "Hearth" itself, Janus not the god of doors so much as the god "Door."

But by just as much as the human element was absent from the concept of the deity, by just so much the element of formalism in the cult was greater. This formalism must not be interpreted according to our modern ideas; it was not a formalism which was the result and the successor of a decadent spirituality; it was not a secondary product in an age of the decline of faith; but it was itself the essence of religion in the period of the greatest religious purity. In the careful and conscientious fulfilment of the form consisted the whole duty of man toward his gods. Such a state of affairs would have been intolerable in any nation whose instincts were less purely legal. So identical were the laws concerning the gods and the laws concerning men that though in the earliest period of Roman jurisprudence the *ius divinum* and the *ius humanum* are already separated, they are separated merely formally as two separate fields or provinces in which the spirit of the law and often even the letter of its enactment are the same. Such a formalism implies a very firm belief in the existence of the gods. The dealings of a man with the gods are quite as really reciprocal as his dealings with his fellow citizens. But on the other hand though the existence of the gods is never doubted for a moment, the gods themselves are an

unknown quantity; hence out of the formal relationship an intimacy never developed, and while it is scarcely just to characterise the early cult as exclusively a religion of fear, certainly real affection is not present until a much later day. The potentiality of the gods always overshadowed their personality. But this was not all loss, for the absence of personality prevented the growth of those gross myths which are usually found among primitive peoples, for the purer more inspiring myths of gods are not the primitive product but result from the process of refining which accompanies a people's growth in culture. Thus the theory of animism illumines the religious condition of that borderland of history in which Romulus and Numa Pompilius have their dwelling-place.

According to that pleasant fiction of which the ancient world was so extremely fond—the belief that all institutions could be traced back to their establishment by some individual—the religion of Rome was supposed to have been founded by her second king Numa, and it was the custom to refer to all that was most antique in the cult as forming a part of the venerable "religion of Numa." For us this can be merely a name, and even as a name misleading, for a part of the beliefs with which we are dealing go back for centuries before Romulus and the traditional B.C. 753 as the foundation of Rome. But it is a convenient term if we mean by it merely the old kingdom before foreign influences began to work. The Romans of a later time coined an excellent name not so much for the period as for the kind of religion which existed then, contrasting the original deities of Rome with the new foreign gods, calling the former the

"old indigenous gods" (*Di Indigetes*) and the latter the "newly settled gods" (*Di Novensides*). For our knowledge of the religion of this period we are not dependent upon a mere theory, no matter how good it may be in itself, but we have the best sort of contemporary evidence in addition, and it is to the discovery of this evidence that the modern study of Roman religion virtually owes its existence. The records of early political history were largely destroyed in B.C. 390 when the Gauls sacked Rome, but the religious status, with the conservativeness characteristic of religion generally, suffered very few changes during all these years, and left a record of itself in the annually recurring festivals of the Roman year, festivals which grew into an instinctive function of the life of the common people. Many centuries later when the calendar was engraved on stone, these revered old festivals were inscribed on these stone calendars in peculiarly large letters as distinguished from all the other items. Thus from the fragments of these stone calendars, which have been found, and which are themselves nineteen centuries old, we can read back another eight or ten centuries further. By the aid of this "calendar of Numa" we are able to assert the presence of certain deities in the Rome of this time, and the equally important absence of others. And from the character of the deities present and of the festivals themselves a correct and more or less detailed picture of the religious condition of the time may be drawn. This calendar and the list of *Indigetes* extracted from it form the foundation for all our study of the history of Roman religion.

The religious forms of a community are always so bound up with its social organisation that a satisfactory knowledge of the one is practically impossible without some knowledge of the other. Unfortunately there is no field in Roman history where theories are so abundant and facts so rare as in regard to the question of the early social organisation. But without coming into conflict with any of the rival theories we may make at least the following statements. In the main the community was fairly uniform and homogeneous, there were no great social extremes and no conspicuous foreign element, so that each individual, had he stopped to analyse his social position, would have found himself in four distinct relationships: a relationship to himself as an individual; to his family; to the group of families which formed his clan (*gens*); and finally to the state. We may go a step further on safe ground and assert that the least important of these relations was that to himself, and the most important that to his family. The unit of early Roman social life was not the individual but the family, and in the most primitive ideas of life after death it is the family which has immortality, not the individual. The state is not a union of individuals but of families. The very psychological idea of the individual seems to have taken centuries to develop, and to have reached its real significance only under the empire. Of the four elements therefore we have established the pre-eminence of the family and the importance of the state as based on the family idea; the individual may be disregarded in this early period, and there is left only the clan, which however offers a difficult problem. The family and the state were destined to hold their own, merely exchanging places in the

course of time, so that the state came first and the family second; the individual was to grow into ever increasing importance, but the clan is already dying when history begins. It is a pleasant theory and one that has a high degree of probability that there may have been a time when the clan was to the family what the state is when history begins, and that when the state arose out of a union of various clans, the immediate allegiance of each family was gradually alienated from its clan and transferred to the state, so that the clan gave up its life in order that the state, the child of its own creation, might live. If this be so, we can see why the social importance of the clan ceases so early in Roman history.

The centre therefore of early religious life is the family, and the state as a macrocosm of the family; and the father of each family is its chief priest, and the king as the father of the state is the chief priest of the state. As for the individual the only god which he has for worship is his "double," called in the case of a man his *Genius* and in that of a woman her *Juno*, her individualisation of the goddess Juno, quite a distinct deity, peculiar to herself. But even here the family instinct shows itself, and though later the Genius and the Juno represent all that is intellectual in the individual, they seem originally to have symbolised the procreative power of the individual in relation to the continuance of the family. The family and the state, however, side by side worshipped a number of deities.

In the primitive hut, the model of which has come down to us in so many little burial urns of early time (for example those that have recently been dug up in the wonderful

cemetery under the Roman Forum), with its one door and no window, there were several elements which needed propitiation; the door itself as the keeper away of evil, the hearth, and the niche for the storage of food. The door-god was the god-door Janus, the *ianua* itself; the hearth was in the care of the womenfolk, the wife and daughters, so it was a goddess, Vesta, whom they served; and the storage-niche, the *penus*, was in the keeping of the "store-closet gods" (*Di Penates*). The state itself was modelled after the house. It had its Janus, its sacred door, down in the Forum, and the king himself, the father of the state, was his special priest; it had its hearth, where the sacred fire burned, and its own Vesta, tended by the vestal virgins, the daughters of the state; and it had its store-niche with its Penates. At a later date but still very early there was added to the household worship the idea of the general protector of the house, the Lar, which gave rise to the familiar expression "Lares and Penates." The origin of this *Lar Familiaris*, as he is called, is interesting, because it shows the intimate connection between the farming life of the community and its religion. The Lares were originally the group of gods who looked after the various farms; they were in the plural because they were worshipped where the boundary lines of several farms met, but though several of them were worshipped together, each farm had its one individual Lar. But the care of the farm included also the protection of the house on the farm, so that the Lar of the farm became also the Lar of the house, first of course of houses on farms, and then of every house everywhere even when no farm was connected with it.

Aside from Vesta, the Genius, the Lar, and the Penates, possibly the most important element in family worship was the cult of the dead ancestors. This cult is, of course, common to almost all religions, and its presence in Roman religion is in so far not surprising, but the form in which it occurs there is curious and relatively rare. Just as the living man has a "double," the Genius, so the dead man also must have a double, but this double is originally not the Genius, who seems to have been thought of at first as ceasing with the individual. On the contrary as death is the great leveller and the remover of individuality, so the double of the dead was not thought of at first as an individual double but merely as forming a part of an indefinite mass of spirits, the "good gods" (*Di Manes*) as they were called because they were feared as being anything but good. These *Di Manes* had therefore no specific relation to the individual, and the individual really ceased at death; the only human relation which the *Di Manes* seem to have preserved was a connection with the living members of the family to which they had originally belonged. It is therefore very misleading to assert that the Romans had from the beginning a belief in immortality, when we instinctively think of the immortality of the individual. The thing that was immortal was not the individual but the family. It is thoroughly in keeping with the practical character of the Roman mind that they did not concern themselves with the place in which these spirits of the dead were supposed to reside, but merely with the door through which they could and did return to earth. We have no accounts of the Lower World until Greece lent her mythology to Rome, and imagination never built anything