THE MAGIC ART

AND THE EVOLUTION OF KINGS

BY

SIR JAMES GEORGE FRAZER

D.C.L., LL.D., LITT.D.

FELLOW OF TRINITY COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE

PROFESSOR OF SOCIAL ANTHROPOLOGY IN THE UNIVERSITY OF LIVERPOOL

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CHAPTER IV

MAGIC AND RELIGION

Magic like science postulates the order and uniformity of nature; hence the attraction both of magic and of science, which open up a boundless vista to those who can penetrate to the secret springs of nature.

THE examples collected in the last chapter may suffice to illustrate the general principles of sympathetic magic in its two branches, to which we have given the names of Homoeopathic and Contagious respectively. In some cases of magic which have come before us we have seen that the operation of spirits is assumed, and that an attempt is made to win their favour by prayer and sacrifice. But these cases are on the whole exceptional; they exhibit magic tinged and alloyed with religion.[1] Wherever sympathetic magic occurs in its pure unadulterated form, it assumes that in nature one event follows another necessarily and invariably without the intervention of any spiritual or personal agency. Thus its fundamental conception is identical with that of modern science; underlying the whole system is a faith, implicit but real and firm, in the order and uniformity of nature. The magician does not doubt that the same causes will always produce the same effects, that the performance of the proper ceremony, accompanied by the appropriate spell, will inevitably be attended by the desired results, unless, indeed, his incantations should chance to be thwarted and foiled by the more potent charms of another sorcerer. He supplicates no higher power: he sues the favour of no fickle and wayward

[1] Malay magic in particular is deeply tinctured with a belief in spirits, to whom the magician appeals by kindly words and small gifts of food, drink, and even money. See R. J. Wilkinson, *Malay Beliefs* (London and Leyden, 1906), pp. 67 *sqq*. Here, therefore, religion is encroaching on magic, as it might naturally be expected to do in a race so comparatively advanced as the Malays.

being: he abases himself before no awful deity. Yet his power, great as he believes it to be, is by no means arbitrary and unlimited. He can wield it only so long as he strictly conforms to the rules of his art, or to what may be called the laws of nature as conceived by him. To neglect these rules, to break these laws in the smallest particular is to incur failure, and may even expose the unskilful practitioner himself to the utmost peril. If he claims a sovereignty over nature, it is a constitutional sovereignty rigorously limited in its scope and exercised in exact conformity with ancient usage. Thus the analogy between the magical and the scientific conceptions of the world is close. In both of them the succession of events is perfectly regular and certain, being determined by immutable laws, the operation of which can be foreseen and calculated precisely; the elements of caprice, of chance, and of accident are banished from the course of nature. Both of them open up a seemingly boundless vista of possibilities to him who knows the causes of things and can touch the secret springs that set in motion the vast and intricate mechanism of the world. Hence the strong attraction which magic and science alike have exercised on the human mind; hence the powerful stimulus that both have given to the pursuit of knowledge. They lure the weary enquirer, the footsore seeker, on through the wilderness of disappointment in the present by their endless promises of the future: they take him up to the top of an exceeding high mountain and shew him, beyond the dark clouds and rolling mists at his feet, a vision of the celestial city, far off, it may be, but radiant with unearthly splendour, bathed in the light of dreams.

The fatal flaw of magic lies not in its general assumption of a sequence of events determined by law, but in its total misconception of the nature of the particular laws which govern that sequence. If we analyse the various cases of sympathetic magic which have been passed in review in the preceding pages, and which may be taken as fair samples of the bulk, we shall find, as I have already indicated, that they are all mistaken applications of one or other of two great fundamental laws of thought, namely, the association of ideas by similarity and the associa-

The fatal flaw of magic lies not in its general assumption of the uniformity of nature, but in its misapprehension of the particular laws which govern the

sequence of natural events.

tion of ideas by contiguity in space or time. A mistaken association of similar ideas produces homoeopathic or imitative magic: a mistaken association of contiguous ideas produces contagious magic. The principles of association are excellent in themselves, and indeed absolutely essential to the working of the human mind. Legitimately applied they yield science; illegitimately applied they yield magic, the bastard sister of science. It is therefore a truism, almost a tautology, to say that all magic is necessarily false and barren; for were it ever to become true and fruitful, it would no longer be magic but science. From the earliest times man has been engaged in a search for general rules whereby to turn the order of natural phenomena to his own advantage, and in the long search he has scraped together a great hoard of such maxims, some of them golden and some of them mere dross. The true or golden rules constitute the body of applied science which we call the arts; the false are magic.

Relation of magic to religion.

If magic is thus next of kin to science, we have still to enquire how it stands related to religion. But the view we take of that relation will necessarily be coloured by the idea which we have formed of the nature of religion itself; hence a writer may reasonably be expected to define his conception of religion before he proceeds to investigate its relation to magic. There is probably no subject in the world about which opinions differ so much as the nature of religion, and to frame a definition of it which would satisfy every one must obviously be impossible. All that a writer can do is, first, to say clearly what he means by religion, and afterwards to employ the word consistently in that sense throughout his work. By religion, then, I understand a propitiation or conciliation of powers superior to man which are believed to direct and control the course of nature and of human life.[1] Thus defined, religion consists of two elements, a theoretical and a practical, namely, a belief in powers higher than man and an attempt to propitiate or please them. Of the two, belief clearly comes first, since we must believe in the existence of a divine being before we can attempt to please

Religion defined: it is a propitiation or conciliation of superhuman powers which are believed to control nature and man. Thus religion com-

[1] "*Religio est, quae superioris cujusdam naturae, quam divinam vocant, curam caerimoniamque adfert,*" Cicero, *De inventione*, ii. 161.

him. But unless the belief leads to a corresponding practice, it is not a religion but merely a theology; in the language of St. James, "faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone."[1] In other words, no man is religious who does not govern his conduct in some measure by the fear or love of God.[2] On the other hand, mere practice, divested of all religious belief, is also not religion. Two men may behave in exactly the same way, and yet one of them may be religious and the other not. If the one acts from the love or fear of God, he is religious; if the other acts from the love or fear of man, he is moral or immoral according as his behaviour comports or conflicts with the general good. Hence belief and practice or, in theological language, faith and works are equally essential to religion, which cannot exist without both of them. But it is not necessary that religious practice should always take the form of a ritual; that is, it need not consist in the offering of sacrifice, the recitation of prayers, and other outward ceremonies. Its aim is to please the deity, and if the deity is one who delights in charity and mercy and purity more than in oblations of blood, the chanting of hymns, and the fumes of incense, his worshippers will best please him, not by prostrating themselves before him, by intoning his praises, and by filling his temples with costly gifts, but by being pure and merciful and charitable towards men, for in so doing they will imitate, so far as human infirmity allows, the perfections of the divine nature. It was this ethical side of religion which the Hebrew prophets, inspired with a noble ideal of God's goodness and holiness, were never weary of inculcating. Thus Micah says:[3] "He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?" And at a later time much of the force by which

prises two elements, a theoretical and a practical, or faith and works, and it does not exist without both. But religious practice need not consist in ritual; it may consist in ethical conduct, if that is believed to be well-pleasing to the deity.

[1] James ii. 17.

[2] "Piety is not a religion, though it is the soul of all religions. A man has not a religion simply by having pious inclinations, any more than he has a country simply by having philanthropy. A man has not a country until he is a citizen in a state, until he undertakes to follow and uphold certain laws, to obey certain magistrates, and to adopt certain ways of living and acting. Religion is neither a theology nor a theosophy; it is more than all this; it is a discipline, a law, a yoke, an indissoluble engagement" (Joubert, quoted by Matthew Arnold, *Essays in Criticism*, First Series, London, 1898, p. 288).

[3] Micah vi. 8.

Christianity conquered the world was drawn from the same high conception of God's moral nature and the duty laid on men of conforming themselves to it. "Pure religion and undefiled," says St. James, "before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world."[1]

By assuming the order of nature to be elastic or variable religion is opposed in principle alike to magic and to science, both of which assume the order of nature to be rigid and invariable.

But if religion involves, first, a belief in superhuman beings who rule the world, and, second, an attempt to win their favour, it clearly assumes that the course of nature is to some extent elastic or variable, and that we can persuade or induce the mighty beings who control it to deflect, for our benefit, the current of events from the channel in which they would otherwise flow. Now this implied elasticity or variability of nature is directly opposed to the principles of magic as well as of science, both of which assume that the processes of nature are rigid and invariable in their operation, and that they can as little be turned from their course by persuasion and entreaty as by threats and intimidation. The distinction between the two conflicting views of the universe turns on their answer to the crucial question, Are the forces which govern the world conscious and personal, or unconscious and impersonal? Religion, as a conciliation of the superhuman powers, assumes the former member of the alternative. For all conciliation implies that the being conciliated is a conscious or personal agent, that his conduct is in some measure uncertain, and that he can be prevailed upon to vary it in the desired direction by a judicious appeal to his interests, his appetites, or his emotions. Conciliation is never employed towards things which are regarded as inanimate, nor towards persons whose behaviour in the particular circumstances is known to be determined with absolute certainty. Thus in so far as religion assumes the world to be directed by conscious agents who may be turned from their purpose by persuasion, it stands in fundamental antagonism to magic as well as to science, both of which take for granted that the course of nature is determined, not by the passions or caprice of personal beings, but by the operation of immutable laws acting mechanically.[2] In

[1] James i. 27.

[2] The opposition of principle between magic and religion is well brought out by Sir A. C. Lyall in his

magic, indeed, the assumption is only implicit, but in science it is explicit. It is true that magic often deals with spirits, which are personal agents of the kind assumed by religion; but whenever it does so in its proper form, it treats them exactly in the same fashion as it treats inanimate agents, that is, it constrains or coerces instead of conciliating or propitiating them as religion would do. Thus it assumes that all personal beings, whether human or divine, are in the last resort subject to those impersonal forces which control all things, but which nevertheless can be turned to account by any one who knows how to manipulate them by the appropriate ceremonies and spells. In ancient Egypt, for example, the magicians claimed the power of compelling even the highest gods to do their bidding, and actually threatened them with destruction in case of disobedience.[1] Sometimes, without going quite so far as that, the wizard declared that he would scatter the bones of Osiris or reveal his sacred legend, if the god proved contumacious.[2] Similarly in India at the present day the great Hindoo trinity itself of Brahma, Vishnu, and Siva is subject to the sorcerers, who, by means of their spells, exercise such an ascendency over the mightiest deities, that these are bound submissively to execute on earth below, or in heaven above, whatever commands their masters the magicians may please to issue.[3] There is a saying everywhere current in

Claim of Egyptian and Indian magicians to control the gods.

Asiatic Studies, First Series (London, 1899), i. 99 *sqq.* It is also insisted on by Mr. F. B. Jevons in his *Introduction to the History of Religion* (London, 1896). The distinction is clearly apprehended and sharply maintained by Professor H. Oldenberg in his notable book *Die Religion des Veda* (Berlin, 1894); see especially pp. 58 *sq.*, 311 *sqq.*, 476 *sqq.* Lord Avebury has courteously pointed out to me that the fundamental difference between magic and religion was dwelt on by him many years ago. See his *Origin of Civilisation* (London, 1870), pp. 116, 164 *sq.*, and the Preface to the sixth edition of that work (London, 1902), p. vi. I am glad to find myself in agreement with Lord Avebury on this subject, and only regret that in preparing my second edition I was unaware that the view here taken has the support of his high authority. When I wrote this book originally I failed to realise the extent of the opposition between magic and religion, because I had not formed a clear general conception of the nature of religion, and was disposed to class magic loosely under it.

[1] A. Wiedemann, *Die Religion der alten Ägypter* (Münster i. W., 1890), pp. 142-145, 148; G. Maspero, *Histoire ancienne des peuples de l'Orient classique: les origines* (Paris, 1895), pp. 212 *sq.*

[2] Augustine, *De civitate Dei*, x. 11, quoting Porphyry.

[3] J. A. Dubois, *Mœurs, institutions et cérémonies des peuples de l'Inde* (Paris, 1825), ii. 60 *sqq.*

India: "The whole universe is subject to the gods; the gods are subject to the spells (*mantras*); the spells to the Brahmans; therefore the Brahmans are our gods."[1]

Hostility of religion to magic in history.

This radical conflict of principle between magic and religion sufficiently explains the relentless hostility with which in history the priest has often pursued the magician. The haughty self-sufficiency of the magician, his arrogant demeanour towards the higher powers, and his unabashed claim to exercise a sway like theirs could not but revolt the priest, to whom, with his awful sense of the divine majesty, and his humble prostration in presence of it, such claims and such a demeanour must have appeared an impious and blasphemous usurpation of prerogatives that belong to God alone. And sometimes, we may suspect, lower motives concurred to whet the edge of the priest's hostility. He professed to be the proper medium, the true intercessor between God and man, and no doubt his interests as well as his feelings were often injured by a rival practitioner, who preached a surer and smoother road to fortune than the rugged and slippery path of divine favour.

This hostility comparatively late: at an earlier time magic co-operated, and was partly confused, with religion.

Yet this antagonism, familiar as it is to us, seems to have made its appearance comparatively late in the history of religion. At an earlier stage[2] the functions of priest and sorcerer were often combined or, to speak perhaps more correctly, were not yet differentiated from each other. To serve his purpose man wooed the good-will of gods or spirits by prayer and sacrifice, while at the same time he had recourse to ceremonies and forms of words which he hoped would of themselves bring about the desired result without the help of god or devil. In short, he performed religious and magical rites simultaneously; he uttered prayers and incantations almost in the same breath, knowing or

[1] Monier Williams, *Religious Thought and Life in India* (London, 1883), pp. 201 *sq.*

[2] To prevent misconception I would ask the reader to observe that the earlier stage here spoken of, in which magic is confused with religion, is not, in my opinion, the earliest of all, having been preceded by a still earlier stage in which magic existed alone. See below, pp. 233 *sqq.* On my view, the evolution of thought on this subject has passed through three stages: first, a stage in which magic existed without religion; second, a stage in which religion, having arisen, co-operated, and was to some extent confused, with magic; and third, a stage in which, the radical difference of principle between the two having been recognised, their relation was that of open hostility.

recking little of the theoretical inconsistency of his behaviour, so long as by hook or crook he contrived to get what he wanted. Instances of this fusion or confusion of magic with religion have already met us in the practices of Melanesians and of other peoples.[1] So far as the Melanesians are concerned, the general confusion cannot be better described than in the words of Dr. R. H. Codrington :—" That invisible power which is believed by the natives to cause all such effects as transcend their conception of the regular course of nature, and to reside in spiritual beings, whether in the spiritual part of living men or in the ghosts of the dead, being imparted by them to their names and to various things that belong to them, such as stones, snakes, and indeed objects of all sorts, is that generally known as *mana*. Without some understanding of this it is impossible to understand the religious beliefs and practices of the Melanesians ; and this again is the active force in all they do and believe to be done in magic, white or black. By means of this men are able to control or direct the forces of nature, to make rain or sunshine, wind or calm, to cause sickness or remove it, to know what is far off in time and space, to bring good luck and prosperity, or to blast and curse." " By whatever name it is called, it is the belief in this supernatural power, and in the efficacy of the various means by which spirits and ghosts can be induced to exercise it for the benefit of men, that is the foundation of the rites and practices which can be called religious ; and it is from the same belief that everything which may be called Magic and Witchcraft draws its origin. Wizards, doctors, weather-mongers, prophets, diviners, dreamers, all alike, everywhere in the islands, work by this power. There are many of these who may be said to exercise their art as a profession ; they get their property and influence in this way. Every considerable village or settlement is sure to have some one who can control the weather and the waves, some one who knows how to treat sickness, some one who can work mischief with various charms. There may be one whose skill extends to all these branches ; but generally one man knows how to do one thing and one another. This various knowledge is handed down from father

Confusion of magic and religion in Melanesia.

[1] See above, pp. 72, 77 *sq.*, 130, 163 *sq.*

to son, from uncle to sister's son, in the same way as is the knowledge of the rites and methods of sacrifice and prayer; and very often the same man who knows the sacrifice knows also the making of the weather, and of charms for many purposes besides. But as there is no order of priests, there is also no order of magicians or medicine-men. Almost every man of consideration knows how to approach some ghost or spirit, and has some secret of occult practices."[1]

Confusion of magic and religion in ancient India.

The same confusion of magic and religion has survived among peoples that have risen to higher levels of culture. It was rife in ancient India and ancient Egypt; it is by no means extinct among European peasantry at the present day. With regard to ancient India we are told by an eminent Sanscrit scholar that "the sacrificial ritual at the earliest period of which we have detailed information is pervaded with practices that breathe the spirit of the most primitive magic."[2] Again, the same writer observes that "the ritual of the very sacrifices for which the metrical prayers were composed is described in the other Vedic texts as saturated from beginning to end with magical practices which were to be carried out by the sacrificial priests." In particular he tells us that the rites celebrated on special occasions, such as marriage, initiation, and the anointment of a king, "are complete models of magic of every kind, and in every case the forms of magic employed bear the stamp of the highest antiquity."[3] Speaking of the sacrifices prescribed in the *Brâhmaṇas*, Professor Sylvain Lévi says: "The sacrifice has thus all the characteristics of a magical operation, independent of the divinities, effective by its own energy, and capable of producing evil as well as good. It is hardly distinguished from magic strictly so called, except by being regular and obligatory; it can easily be adapted

[1] R. H. Codrington, *The Melanesians*, pp. 191 *sq.* The word *mana* is Polynesian as well as Melanesian. In the Maori language it means "authority," especially "supernatural power," "divine authority," "having qualities which ordinary persons or things do not possess." See E. Tregear, *Maori-Polynesian Comparative Dictionary* (Wellington, N.Z., 1891), p. 203. Compare R. Taylor, *Te Ika A Maui, or New Zealand and its Inhabitants*,[2] p. 184, "the *mana*, virtue of the god."

[2] H. Oldenberg, *Die Religion des Veda*, p. 59.

[3] H. Oldenberg, *op. cit.* p. 477. For particular examples of the blending of magical with religious ritual in ancient India see pp. 311 *sqq.*, 369 *sq.*, 476 *sqq.*, 522 *sq.* of the same work.

to different objects, but it exists of necessity, independently of circumstances. That is the sole fairly clear line of distinction which can be drawn between the two domains; in point of fact they are so intimately interfused with each other that the same class of works treats of both matters. The *Sâmavidhâna Brâhmaṇa* is a real handbook of incantations and sorcery; the *Adbhuta Brâhmaṇa*, which forms a section of the *Ṣaḍviṃça Brâhmaṇa*, has the same character."[1] Similarly Professor M. Bloomfield writes: "Even witchcraft is part of the religion; it has penetrated and has become intimately blended with the holiest Vedic rites; the broad current of popular religion and superstition has infiltrated itself through numberless channels into the higher religion that is presented by the Brahman priests, and it may be presumed that the priests were neither able to cleanse their own religious beliefs from the mass of folk-belief with which it was surrounded, nor is it at all likely that they found it in their interest to do so."[2] Again, in the introduction to his translation of the *Kausika Sûtra*, Dr. W. Caland observes: "He who has been wont to regard the ancient Hindoos as a highly civilised people, famed for their philosophical systems, their dramatic poetry, their epic lays, will be surprised when he makes the acquaintance of their magical ritual, and will perceive that hitherto he has known the old Hindoo people from one side only. He will find that he here stumbles on the lowest strata of Vedic culture, and will be astonished at the agreement between the magic ritual of the old Vedas and the shamanism of the so-called savage. If we drop the peculiar Hindoo expressions and technical terms, and imagine a shaman instead of a Brahman, we could almost fancy that we have before us a magical book belonging to one of the tribes of North American redskins."[3] Some good authorities hold that the very name of Brahman is derived from *brahman*, "a magical spell"; so that, if they are right, the Brahman would seem to have been a magician before he was a priest.[4]

[1] S. Lévi, *La Doctrine du sacrifice dans les Brâhmaṇas* (Paris, 1898), p. 129.

[2] M. Bloomfield, *Hymns of the Atharva-Veda*, pp. xlv. *sq.* (*Sacred Books of the East*, vol. xlii.).

[3] W. Caland, *Altindisches Zauberritual*, p. ix.

[4] O. Schrader, *Reallexikon der indogermanischen Altertumskunde* (Stras-

Confusion of magic and religion in ancient Egypt.

Speaking of the importance of magic in the East, and especially in Egypt, Professor Maspero remarks that "we ought not to attach to the word magic the degrading idea which it almost inevitably calls up in the mind of a modern. Ancient magic was the very foundation of religion. The faithful who desired to obtain some favour from a god had no chance of succeeding except by laying hands on the deity, and this arrest could only be effected by means of a certain number of rites, sacrifices, prayers, and chants, which the god himself had revealed, and which obliged him to do what was demanded of him."[1] According to another distinguished Egyptologist "the belief that there are words and actions by which man can influence all the powers of nature and all living things, from animals up to gods, was inextricably interwoven with everything the Egyptians did and everything they left undone. Above all, the whole system of burial and of the worship of the dead is completely dominated by it. The wooden puppets which relieved the dead man from toil, the figures of the maid-servants who baked bread for him, the sacrificial formulas by the recitation of which food was procured for him, what are these and all the similar practices but magic? And as men cannot help themselves without magic, so neither can the gods; the gods also wear amulets to protect themselves, and use magic spells to constrain each other."[2] "The whole doctrine of magic," says Professor Wiedemann, "formed in the valley of the Nile, not a part of superstition, but an essential constituent of religious faith, which to a

burg, 1901), pp. 637 *sq.* In ancient Arabia the *kâhin* (etymologically equivalent to the Hebrew *kôhen*, "priest") seems to have been rather a soothsayer than a priest. See J. Wellhausen, *Reste arabischen Heidentums*[2] (Berlin, 1897), pp. 134, 143. The confusion of magic with religion, of spell with prayer, may also be detected in the incantations employed by Toda sorcerers at the present day. See W. H. R. Rivers, *The Todas*, pp. 272 *sq.*: "The formulae of magic and of the dairy ritual are of the same nature, though the differentiation between the sorcerer and the priest who use them is even clearer than that between the sorcerer and the medicine-man. It is probable that the names of the gods with the characteristic formulae of the prayer are later additions to the magical incantation; that at some time the sorcerer has added the names of the most important of his deities to the spells and charms which at one time were thought to be sufficient for his purpose."

[1] G. Maspero, *Études de mythologie et d'archéologie égyptienne* (Paris, 1893), i. 106.

[2] A. Erman, *Ägypten und ägyptisches Leben im Altertum*, p. 471.

great extent rested directly on magic, and always remained most closely bound up with it."[1] But though we can perceive the union of discrepant elements in the faith and practice of the ancient Egyptians, it would be rash to assume that the people themselves did so. "Egyptian religion," says the same scholar, "was not one and homogeneous; it was compounded of the most heterogeneous elements, which seemed to the Egyptian to be all equally justified. He did not care whether a doctrine or a myth belonged to what, in modern scholastic phraseology, we should call faith or superstition; it was indifferent to him whether we should rank it as religion or magic, as worship or sorcery. All such classifications were foreign to the Egyptian. To him no one doctrine seemed more or less justified than another. Nay, he went so far as to allow the most flagrant contradictions to stand peaceably side by side."[2]

Confusion of magic and religion in modern Europe.

Among the ignorant classes of modern Europe the same confusion of ideas, the same mixture of religion and magic, crops up in various forms. Thus we are told that in France "the majority of the peasants still believe that the priest possesses a secret and irresistible power over the elements. By reciting certain prayers which he alone knows and has the right to utter, yet for the utterance of which he must afterwards demand absolution, he can, on an occasion of pressing danger, arrest or reverse for a moment the action of the eternal laws of the physical world. The winds, the storms, the hail, and the rain are at his command and obey his will. The fire also is subject to him, and the flames of a conflagration are extinguished at his word."[3] For example, French peasants used to be, perhaps are still, persuaded that the priests could celebrate, with certain special rites, a "Mass of the Holy Spirit," of which the efficacy was so miraculous that it never met with any opposition from the divine will;

Mass of the Holy Spirit.

[1] A. Wiedemann, *Die Religion der alten Ägypter* (Münster i. W., 1890), p. 154.

[2] A. Wiedemann, "Ein altägyptischer Weltschöpfungsmythus," *Am Urquell*, N.F. ii. (1898) pp. 95 *sq.*

[3] J. Lecœur, *Esquisses du Bocage Normand* (Condé-sur-Noireau, 1883-1887), ii. 78. In Beauce and Perche it was especially conflagrations caused by lightning which the priest was supposed to extinguish by the recitation of certain secret formulas. There was a regular expression for this procedure, namely, "barring the fire." See F. Chapiseau, *Le Folk-lore de la Beauce et du Perche*, i. 216.

God was forced to grant whatever was asked of Him in this form, however rash and importunate might be the petition. No idea of impiety or irreverence attached to the rite in the minds of those who, in some of the great extremities of life, sought by this singular means to take the kingdom of heaven by storm. The secular priests generally refused to say the "Mass of the Holy Spirit"; but the monks, especially the Capuchin friars, had the reputation of yielding with less scruple to the entreaties of the anxious and distressed.[1] In the constraint thus supposed by Catholic peasantry to be laid by the priest upon the deity we seem to have an exact counterpart of the power which, as we saw, the ancient Egyptians ascribed to their magicians.[2] Again, to take another example, in many villages of Provence the priest is still reputed to possess the faculty of averting storms. It is not every priest who enjoys this reputation; and in some villages, when a change of pastors takes place, the parishioners are eager to learn whether the new incumbent has the power (*pouder*), as they call it. At the first sign of a heavy storm they put him to the proof by inviting him to exorcise the threatening clouds; and if the result answers to their hopes, the new shepherd is assured of the sympathy and respect of his flock. In some parishes, where the reputation of the curate in this respect stood higher than that of his rector, the relations between the two have been so strained in consequence that the bishop has had to translate the rector to another benefice.[3] Again, Gascon peasants believe that to revenge themselves on their enemies bad men will sometimes induce a priest to say a mass called the Mass of Saint Sécaire. Very few priests know this mass, and three-fourths of those who do know it would not say it for love or money. None but wicked priests dare to perform the gruesome ceremony, and you may be quite sure that they will have a very heavy account to render for it at the last day. No curate or bishop, not even the archbishop of

Mass of Saint Sécaire.

[1] Amélie Bosquet, *La Normandie romanesque et merveilleuse* (Paris and Rouen, 1845), p. 308.

[2] See above, p. 225.

[3] L. J. B. Bérenger-Féraud, *Superstitions et survivances* (Paris, 1896), i. 455 *sq.*, iii. 217 *sq.*, 222 *sqq.* Compare *id.*, *Reminiscences populaires de la Provence* (Paris, 1885), pp. 288 *sqq.*; D. Monnier, *Traditions populaires comparées* (Paris, 1854), pp. 31 *sqq.*

Auch, can pardon them; that right belongs to the pope of Rome alone. The Mass of Saint Sécaire may be said only in a ruined or deserted church, where owls mope and hoot, where bats flit in the gloaming, where gypsies lodge of nights, and where toads squat under the desecrated altar. Thither the bad priest comes by night with his light o' love, and at the first stroke of eleven he begins to mumble the mass backwards, and ends just as the clocks are knelling the midnight hour. His leman acts as clerk. The host he blesses is black and has three points; he consecrates no wine, but instead he drinks the water of a well into which the body of an unbaptized infant has been flung. He makes the sign of the cross, but it is on the ground and with his left foot. And many other things he does which no good Christian could look upon without being struck blind and deaf and dumb for the rest of his life. But the man for whom the mass is said withers away little by little, and nobody can say what is the matter with him; even the doctors can make nothing of it. They do not know that he is slowly dying of the Mass of Saint Sécaire.[1]

The early confusion of magic with religion was probably preceded by a still earlier phase of thought, when magic existed without religion.

Yet though magic is thus found to fuse and amalgamate with religion in many ages and in many lands, there are some grounds for thinking that this fusion is not primitive, and that there was a time when man trusted to magic alone for the satisfaction of such wants as transcended his immediate animal cravings. In the first place a consideration of the fundamental notions of magic and religion may incline us to surmise that magic is older than religion in the history of humanity. We have seen that on the one hand magic is nothing but a mistaken application of the very simplest and most elementary processes of the mind, namely the association of ideas by virtue of resemblance or contiguity; and that on the other hand religion assumes the operation of conscious or personal agents, superior to man, behind the visible screen of nature. Obviously the conception of personal agents is more complex than a simple recognition of the similarity or contiguity of ideas; and a theory which assumes that the course of nature is determined by conscious

[1] J. F. Bladé, *Quatorze superstitions populaires de la Gascogne* (Agen, 1883), pp. 16 *sq.*

agents is more abstruse and recondite, and requires for its apprehension a far higher degree of intelligence and reflection, than the view that things succeed each other simply by reason of their contiguity or resemblance. The very beasts associate the ideas of things that are like each other or that have been found together in their experience; and they could hardly survive for a day if they ceased to do so. But who attributes to the animals a belief that the phenomena of nature are worked by a multitude of invisible animals or by one enormous and prodigiously strong animal behind the scenes? It is probably no injustice to the brutes to assume that the honour of devising a theory of this latter sort must be reserved for human reason. Thus, if magic be deduced immediately from elementary processes of reasoning, and be, in fact, an error into which the mind falls almost spontaneously, while religion rests on conceptions which the merely animal intelligence can hardly be supposed to have yet attained to, it becomes probable that magic arose before religion in the evolution of our race, and that man essayed to bend nature to his wishes by the sheer force of spells and enchantments before he strove to coax and mollify a coy, capricious, or irascible deity by the soft insinuation of prayer and sacrifice.

Among the Australian aborigines magic is universal, but religion almost unknown.

The conclusion which we have thus reached deductively from a consideration of the fundamental ideas of religion and magic is confirmed inductively by the observation that among the aborigines of Australia, the rudest savages as to whom we possess accurate information, magic is universally practised, whereas religion in the sense of a propitiation or conciliation of the higher powers seems to be nearly unknown. Roughly speaking, all men in Australia are magicians, but not one is a priest; everybody fancies he can influence his fellows or the course of nature by sympathetic magic, but nobody dreams of propitiating gods by prayer and sacrifice.[1]

Magic is probably older than religion, and faith in it is still universal

But if in the most backward state of human society now known to us we find magic thus conspicuously present and religion conspicuously absent, may we not reasonably conjecture that the civilised races of the world have also at some period of their history passed through a similar in-

[1] For the evidence see my *Totemism and Exogamy*, vol. i. pp. 141 *sqq.*

tellectual phase, that they attempted to force the great powers of nature to do their pleasure before they thought of courting their favour by offerings and prayer—in short that, just as on the material side of human culture there has everywhere been an Age of Stone, so on the intellectual side there has everywhere been an Age of Magic?[1] There are reasons for answering this question in the affirmative. When we survey the existing races of mankind from Greenland to Tierra del Fuego, or from Scotland to Singapore, we observe that they are distinguished one from the other by a great variety of religions, and that these distinctions are not, so to speak, merely coterminous with the broad distinctions of race, but descend into the minuter subdivisions of states and commonwealths, nay, that they honeycomb the town, the village, and even the family, so that the surface of society all over the world is cracked and seamed, sapped and mined with rents and fissures and yawning crevasses opened up by the disintegrating influence of religious dissension. Yet when we have penetrated through these differences, which affect mainly the intelligent and thoughtful part of the community, we shall find underlying them all a solid stratum of intellectual agreement among the dull, the weak, the ignorant, and the superstitious, who constitute, unfortunately, the vast majority of mankind. One of the great achievements of the nineteenth century was to run shafts down into this low mental stratum in many parts of the world, and thus to discover its substantial identity everywhere. It is beneath our feet —and not very far beneath them—here in Europe at the present day, and it crops up on the surface in the heart of the Australian wilderness and wherever the advent of a higher civilisation has not crushed it under ground. This universal faith, this truly Catholic creed, is a belief in the

among the ignorant and superstitious.

[1] The suggestion has been made by Prof. H. Oldenberg (*Die Religion des Veda*, p. 59), who seems, however, to regard a belief in spirits as part of the raw material of magic. If the view which I have put forward tentatively is correct, faith in magic is probably older than a belief in spirits. The same view as to the priority of magic to religion, and apparently also as to the absence of spirits from primitive magic, was held by Hegel. It was not until long after the discussion in the text had been written that I became aware that my conclusions had been to a large extent anticipated by the German philosopher. See Appendix at the end of this volume.

efficacy of magic. While religious systems differ not only in different countries, but in the same country in different ages, the system of sympathetic magic remains everywhere and at all times substantially alike in its principles and practice. Among the ignorant and superstitious classes of modern Europe it is very much what it was thousands of years ago in Egypt and India, and what it now is among the lowest savages surviving in the remotest corners of the world. If the test of truth lay in a show of hands or a counting of heads, the system of magic might appeal, with far more reason than the Catholic Church, to the proud motto, "*Quod semper, quod ubique, quod ab omnibus*," as the sure and certain credential of its own infallibility.

Latent superstition a danger to civilisation.

It is not our business here to consider what bearing the permanent existence of such a solid layer of savagery beneath the surface of society, and unaffected by the superficial changes of religion and culture, has upon the future of humanity. The dispassionate observer, whose studies have led him to plumb its depths, can hardly regard it otherwise than as a standing menace to civilisation.[1] We seem to move on a thin crust which may at any moment be rent by the subterranean forces slumbering below. From time to time a hollow murmur underground or a sudden spirt of flame into the air tells of what is going on beneath our feet. Now and then the polite world is startled by a paragraph in a newspaper which tells how in Scotland an image has been found stuck full of pins for the purpose of killing an obnoxious laird or minister, how a woman has been slowly roasted to death as a witch in Ireland, or how a girl has been murdered and chopped up in Russia to make those candles of human tallow by whose light thieves hope to pursue their midnight trade unseen.[2] But whether the influences that make for further progress, or those that threaten to undo what has already been accomplished, will

[1] After a visit to the ruined Greek temples of Paestum, whose beauty and splendour impressed him all the more by contrast with the savagery of the surrounding peasantry, Renan wrote: "*J'ai tremblé pour la civilisation, en la voyant si limitée, assise sur une faible assiette, reposant sur si peu d'individus dans le pays même où elle est regnante.*" See E. Renan et M. Berthelot, *Correspondance* (Paris, 1898), pp. 75 *sq.*

[2] See above, pp. 68 *sq.*; "The Witch-burning at Clonmel," *Folklore*, vi. (1895) pp. 373-384; F. S. Krauss, *Volksglaube und religiöser Brauch der Südslaven*, pp. 144 *sqq.*

ultimately prevail; whether the impulsive energy of the minority or the dead weight of the majority of mankind will prove the stronger force to carry us up to higher heights or to sink us into lower depths, are questions rather for the sage, the moralist, and the statesman, whose eagle vision scans the future, than for the humble student of the present and the past. Here we are only concerned to ask how far the uniformity, the universality, and the permanence of a belief in magic, compared with the endless variety and the shifting character of religious creeds, raises a presumption that the former represents a ruder and earlier phase of the human mind, through which all the races of mankind have passed or are passing on their way to religion and science.

The change from magic to religion may have been brought about by the discovery of the inefficacy of magic.

If an Age of Religion has thus everywhere, as I venture to surmise, been preceded by an Age of Magic, it is natural that we should enquire what causes have led mankind, or rather a portion of them, to abandon magic as a principle of faith and practice and to betake themselves to religion instead. When we reflect upon the multitude, the variety, and the complexity of the facts to be explained, and the scantiness of our information regarding them, we shall be ready to acknowledge that a full and satisfactory solution of so profound a problem is hardly to be hoped for, and that the most we can do in the present state of our knowledge is to hazard a more or less plausible conjecture. With all due diffidence, then, I would suggest that a tardy recognition of the inherent falsehood and barrenness of magic set the more thoughtful part of mankind to cast about for a truer theory of nature and a more fruitful method of turning her resources to account. The shrewder intelligences must in time have come to perceive that magical ceremonies and incantations did not really effect the results which they were designed to produce, and which the majority of their simpler fellows still believed that they did actually produce. This great discovery of the inefficacy of magic must have wrought a radical though probably slow revolution in the minds of those who had the sagacity to make it. The discovery amounted to this, that men for the first time recognised their inability to manipulate at pleasure certain natural forces which hitherto they had believed to be completely within

their control. It was a confession of human ignorance and weakness. Man saw that he had taken for causes what were no causes, and that all his efforts to work by means of these imaginary causes had been vain. His painful toil had been wasted, his curious ingenuity had been squandered to no purpose. He had been pulling at strings to which nothing was attached; he had been marching, as he thought, straight to the goal, while in reality he had only been treading in a narrow circle. Not that the effects which he had striven so hard to produce did not continue to manifest themselves. They were still produced, but not by him. The rain still fell on the thirsty ground: the sun still pursued his daily, and the moon her nightly journey across the sky: the silent procession of the seasons still moved in light and shadow, in cloud and sunshine across the earth: men were still born to labour and sorrow, and still, after a brief sojourn here, were gathered to their fathers in the long home hereafter. All things indeed went on as before, yet all seemed different to him from whose eyes the old scales had fallen. For he could no longer cherish the pleasing illusion that it was he who guided the earth and the heaven in their courses, and that they would cease to perform their great revolutions were he to take his feeble hand from the wheel. In the death of his enemies and his friends he no longer saw a proof of the resistless potency of his own or of hostile enchantments; he now knew that friends and foes alike had succumbed to a force stronger than any that he could wield, and in obedience to a destiny which he was powerless to control.

Recognising their own inability to control nature, men came to think that it was controlled by supernatural beings.

Thus cut adrift from his ancient moorings and left to toss on a troubled sea of doubt and uncertainty, his old happy confidence in himself and his powers rudely shaken, our primitive philosopher must have been sadly perplexed and agitated till he came to rest, as in a quiet haven after a tempestuous voyage, in a new system of faith and practice, which seemed to offer a solution of his harassing doubts and a substitute, however precarious, for that sovereignty over nature which he had reluctantly abdicated. If the great world went on its way without the help of him or his fellows, it must surely be because there were other beings, like him-

self, but far stronger, who, unseen themselves, directed its course and brought about all the varied series of events which he had hitherto believed to be dependent on his own magic. It was they, as he now believed, and not he himself, who made the stormy wind to blow, the lightning to flash, and the thunder to roll; who had laid the foundations of the solid earth and set bounds to the restless sea that it might not pass; who caused all the glorious lights of heaven to shine; who gave the fowls of the air their meat and the wild beasts of the desert their prey; who bade the fruitful land to bring forth in abundance, the high hills to be clothed with forests, the bubbling springs to rise under the rocks in the valleys, and green pastures to grow by still waters; who breathed into man's nostrils and made him live, or turned him to destruction by famine and pestilence and war. To these mighty beings, whose handiwork he traced in all the gorgeous and varied pageantry of nature, man now addressed himself, humbly confessing his dependence on their invisible power, and beseeching them of their mercy to furnish him with all good things, to defend him from the perils and dangers by which our mortal life is compassed about on every hand, and finally to bring his immortal spirit, freed from the burden of the body, to some happier world, beyond the reach of pain and sorrow, where he might rest with them and with the spirits of good men in joy and felicity for ever.

The change from magic to religion must have been gradual.

In this, or some such way as this, the deeper minds may be conceived to have made the great transition from magic to religion. But even in them the change can hardly ever have been sudden; probably it proceeded very slowly, and required long ages for its more or less perfect accomplishment. For the recognition of man's powerlessness to influence the course of nature on a grand scale must have been gradual; he cannot have been shorn of the whole of his fancied dominion at a blow. Step by step he must have been driven back from his proud position; foot by foot he must have yielded, with a sigh, the ground which he had once viewed as his own. Now it would be the wind, now the rain, now the sunshine, now the thunder, that he confessed himself unable to wield at will; and as province after province of

nature thus fell from his grasp, till what had once seemed a kingdom threatened to shrink into a prison, man must have been more and more profoundly impressed with a sense of his own helplessness and the might of the invisible beings by whom he believed himself to be surrounded. Thus religion, beginning as a slight and partial acknowledgment of powers superior to man, tends with the growth of knowledge to deepen into a confession of man's entire and absolute dependence on the divine; his old free bearing is exchanged for an attitude of lowliest prostration before the mysterious powers of the unseen, and his highest virtue is to submit his will to theirs: *In la sua volontade è nostra pace.* But this deepening sense of religion, this more perfect submission to the divine will in all things, affects only those higher intelligences who have breadth of view enough to comprehend the vastness of the universe and the littleness of man. Small minds cannot grasp great ideas; to their narrow comprehension, their purblind vision, nothing seems really great and important but themselves. Such minds hardly rise into religion at all. They are, indeed, drilled by their betters into an outward conformity with its precepts and a verbal profession of its tenets; but at heart they cling to their old magical superstitions, which may be discountenanced and forbidden, but cannot be eradicated by religion, so long as they have their roots deep down in the mental framework and constitution of the great majority of mankind.

The belief that the gods are magicians may mark the transition from magic to religion.

A vestige of the transition from magic to religion may perhaps be discerned in the belief, shared by many peoples, that the gods themselves are adepts in magic, guarding their persons by talismans and working their will by spells and incantations. Thus the Egyptian gods, we are told, could as little dispense with the help of magic as could men; like men they wore amulets to protect themselves, and used spells to overcome each other. Above all the rest Isis was skilled in sorcery and famous for her incantations.[1] In Babylonia the great god Ea was reputed to be the inventor of magic, and his son Marduk, the chief deity of Babylon, inherited the art from his father. Marduk is described as "the master of exorcism, the magician of the gods."

[1] A. Erman, *Ägypten und ägyptisches Leben im Altertum*, p. 471.

Another text declares that "the incantation is the incantation of Marduk, the exorcist is the image of Marduk."[1] In the legend of the creation it is related that when Marduk was preparing to fight the monster Tiamat he gave a proof of his magical powers to the assembled gods by causing a garment to disappear and reappear again at the word of his mouth. And the other Babylonian deities had in like manner recourse to magic, especially to magical words or spells. "The word is above all the instrument of the gods; it seems to suit the high conception of their power better than mere muscular effort; the hymns celebrate the irresistible might of their word; it is by their word that they compel both animate and inanimate beings to answer their purposes; in short, they employ almost exclusively the oral rites of magic." And like men they made use of amulets and talismans.[2] In the Vedic religion the gods are often represented as attaining their ends by magical means; in particular the god Bṛhaspati, "the creator of all prayers," is regarded as "the heavenly embodiment of the priesthood, in so far as the priesthood is invested with the power, and charged with the task, of influencing the course of things by prayers and spells"; in short, he is "the possessor of the magical power of the holy word."[3] So too in Norse mythology Odin is said to have owed his supremacy and his dominion over nature to his knowledge of the runes or magical names of all things in earth and heaven. This mystical lore he acquired as follows. The runic names of all things were scratched on the things themselves, then scraped off and mixed in a magical potion, which was compounded of honey and the blood of the slain Kvasir, the wisest of beings. A draught of this wonderful mead imparted to Odin not only the wisdom of Kvasir, but also a knowledge of all things, since he had swallowed their runic or mystical names along with the blood of the sage.[4]

[1] C. Fossey, *La Magie Assyrienne* (Paris, 1902), pp. 123, 125.

[2] C. Fossey, *op. cit.* pp. 137-139. For the incident of the magical disappearance and reappearance of the garment, see P. Jensen, *Assyrisch-Babylonische Mythen und Epen* (Berlin, 1900), p. 23; R. F. Harper, *Assyrian and Babylonian Literature* (New York, 1901), p. 291.

[3] H. Oldenberg, *Die Religion des Veda*, pp. 66-68, 514-517.

[4] Fr. Kauffmann, *Balder, Mythus und Sage* (Strasburg, 1902), pp. 177-203. Compare J. Grimm, *Deutsche Mythologie*,[4] ii. 1024-1026.

Hence by the utterance of his spells he could heal sickness, deaden the swords of his enemies, loose himself from bonds, stop the flight of an arrow in mid-air, stay the raging of the flames, still the winds and lull the sea; and by graving and painting certain runes he could make the corpse of a hanged man come down from the gallows-tree and talk with him.[1] It is easy to conceive how this ascription of magical powers to the gods may have originated. When a savage sorcerer fails to effect his purpose, he generally explains his want of success by saying that he has been foiled by the spells of some more potent magician. Now if it began to be perceived that certain natural effects, such as the making of rain or wind or sunshine, were beyond the power of any human magician to accomplish, the first thought would naturally be that they were wrought by the more powerful magic of some great invisible beings, and these superhuman magicians might readily develop into gods of the type of Odin, Isis, and Marduk. In short, many gods may at first have been merely deified sorcerers.

The fallacy of magic is not easy to detect, because nature herself generally produces, sooner or later, the effects which the magician fancies he produces by his art.

The reader may well be tempted to ask, How was it that intelligent men did not sooner detect the fallacy of magic? How could they continue to cherish expectations that were invariably doomed to disappointment? With what heart persist in playing venerable antics that led to nothing, and mumbling solemn balderdash that remained without effect? Why cling to beliefs which were so flatly contradicted by experience? How dare to repeat experiments that had failed so often? The answer seems to be that the fallacy was far from easy to detect, the failure by no means obvious, since in many, perhaps in most cases, the desired event did actually follow, at a longer or shorter interval, the performance of the rite which was designed to bring it about; and a mind of more than common acuteness was needed to perceive that, even in these cases, the rite was not necessarily the cause of the event. A ceremony intended to make the wind blow or the rain fall, or to work the death of an enemy, will always be followed, sooner or later, by the occurrence it is meant to bring to pass; and primitive man may be excused for regarding the occurrence as a direct result of the ceremony, and

[1] G. Vigfusson and F. York Powell, *Corpus Poeticum Boreale*, i. 24 *sqq.*

the best possible proof of its efficacy. Similarly, rites observed in the morning to help the sun to rise, and in spring to wake the dreaming earth from her winter sleep, will invariably appear to be crowned with success, at least within the temperate zones; for in these regions the sun lights his golden lamp in the east every morning, and year by year the vernal earth decks herself afresh with a rich mantle of green. Hence the practical savage, with his conservative instincts, might well turn a deaf ear to the subtleties of the theoretical doubter, the philosophic radical, who presumed to hint that sunrise and spring might not, after all, be direct consequences of the punctual performance of certain daily or yearly ceremonies, and that the sun might perhaps continue to rise and trees to blossom though the ceremonies were occasionally intermitted, or even discontinued altogether. These sceptical doubts would naturally be repelled by the other with scorn and indignation as airy reveries subversive of the faith and manifestly contradicted by experience. "Can anything be plainer," he might say, "than that I light my twopenny candle on earth and that the sun then kindles his great fire in heaven? I should be glad to know whether, when I have put on my green robe in spring, the trees do not afterwards do the same? These are facts patent to everybody, and on them I take my stand. I am a plain practical man, not one of your theorists and splitters of hairs and choppers of logic. Theories and speculation and all that may be very well in their way, and I have not the least objection to your indulging in them, provided, of course, you do not put them in practice. But give me leave to stick to facts; then I know where I am." The fallacy of this reasoning is obvious to us, because it happens to deal with facts about which we have long made up our minds. But let an argument of precisely the same calibre be applied to matters which are still under debate, and it may be questioned whether a British audience would not applaud it as sound, and esteem the speaker who used it a safe man—not brilliant or showy, perhaps, but thoroughly sensible and hard-headed. If such reasonings could pass muster among ourselves, need we wonder that they long escaped detection by the savage?