

THE RIDDLE OF THE UNIVERSE

The crude beginnings of religion among primitive races spring partly from this hereditary superstition of their primate ancestors, and partly from the worship of ancestors, from various emotional impulses, and from habits which have become traditional.

The religious notions of modern civilized peoples, which they esteem so highly, profess to be on a much higher level than the "crude superstition" of the savage; we are told of the great advance which civilization has made in sweeping it aside. That is a great mistake. Impartial comparison and analysis show that they only differ in their special "form of faith" and the outer shell of their creed. In the clear light of reason the refined faith of the most liberal ecclesiastical religion—inasmuch as it contradicts the known and inviolable laws of nature—is no less irrational a superstition than the crude spirit-faith of primitive fetichism on which it looks down with proud disdain.

And if, from this impartial stand-point, we take a critical glance at the kinds of faith that prevail to-day in civilized countries, we find them everywhere saturated with traditional superstition. The Christian belief in Creation, the Trinity, the Immaculate Conception, the Redemption, the Resurrection and Ascension of Christ, and so forth, is just as purely imaginative as the belief in the various dogmas of the Mohammedan, Mosaic, Buddhistic, and Brahmanic religions, and is just as incapable of reconciliation with a rational knowledge of nature. Each of these religions is for the sincere believer an indisputable truth, and each regards the other as heresy and damnable error. The more confidently a particular sect considers itself "the only ark of salvation," and the more ardently this conviction is cherished, the more zealously does it contend