

THE RIDDLE OF THE UNIVERSE

original absence of the dogma of immortality (in the primitive uncivilized races); secondary thanatism is the later outcome of a rational knowledge of nature in the civilized intelligence.

We still find it asserted in philosophic, and especially in theological, works that belief in the personal immortality of the human soul was originally shared by all men—or, at least, by all “rational” men. That is not the case. This dogma is not an original idea of the human mind, nor has it ever found universal acceptance. It has been absolutely proved by modern comparative ethnology that many uncivilized races of the earliest and most primitive stage had no notion either of immortality or of God. That is true, for instance, of the Veddahs of Ceylon, those primitive pygmies whom, on the authority of the able studies of the Sarasins, we consider to be a relic of the earliest inhabitants of India;* it is also the case in several of the earliest groups of the nearly related Dravidas, the Indian Seelongs, and some native Australian races. Similarly, several of the primitive branches of the American race, in the interior of Brazil, on the upper Amazon, etc., have no knowledge either of gods or immortality. This *primary* absence of belief in immortality and deity is an extremely important fact; it is, obviously, easy to distinguish from the *secondary* absence of such belief, which has come about in the highest civilized races as the result of laborious critico-philosophical study.

Differently from the primary thanatism which originally characterized primitive man, and has always been widely spread, the *secondary* absence of belief

* E. Haeckel, *A Visit to Ceylon*.