

Magic and Religion.

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IN a previous article the subject of Sympathetic Magic as based on the association of ideas by virtue of resemblance or contiguity was dealt with. It was attempted to be shown that sympathetic magic involved no belief in the supernatural, and was related to science rather than to religion. In this view the question of the priority of magic to religion or of religion to magic need not be raised. Sympathetic magic is simply the applied science of the savage. Sympathetic magic is not rooted out by religions, high or low, but survives alongside of even the highest, and may therefore have coexisted with religion from the beginning.

We shall now discuss Magic in its various aspects as set forth by Mr. Frazer¹ in relation to Religion as defined by him.

Premising that it is impossible to frame a definition that will satisfy everyone, and that all that a writer can do is to say clearly what he means, and to employ the word consistently in that sense and throughout his work, Mr. Frazer says: 'By religion 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. In this sense it will be perceived that religion is opposed in principle both to magic and to science. 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 mechanical laws operating mechanically. In 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' (*G.B.*² i. 63, 64).²

Mr. Frazer appears to define magic in several ways, or to look at it from different stages in the evolution of the race, and the terms witchcraft and sorcery seem to be used by him as synonymous with magic.

1. *Sympathetic (including Mimetic) Magic prior to Religion.*—He defines it as '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' (i. 70). The germ of the idea of the world as a system of impersonal forces acting in accordance with fixed and invariable laws, the savage, whether European or otherwise, 'certainly has,' says Mr. Frazer, 'and acts upon it not only in magic, but in much of the business of daily life' (*G.B.*¹ i. 31, ² i. 129). But this 'mistaken application of the very simplest processes of the mind' is not characteristic of primitive man and the lowest contemporary savages alone. Educated people make similar mistakes, and probably four-fifths of mankind believe in sympathetic magic in the sense of this minimum definition, while at the same time they have always believed in 'religion.' The higher processes of thought which result in the conception of religion (if it be a purely intellectual conception) may be at work in the mind of the savage along with the most elementary. 'If magic be deduced immediately from elementary processes of reasoning, and be, in fact, an error into which the mind

¹ *The Golden Bough*. A Study in Magic and Religion. By J. G. Frazer, D.C.L., LL.D., Litt.D. Second edition. Macmillan. 3 vols. 36s. net.—*Magic and Religion*. By Andrew Lang. Longmans. 10s. 6d. net.

² With this view of religion cf. Tiele's *Elements of the Science of Religion*, vol. ii. 135, and W. R. Smith's *Religion of the Semites* (ed. 1894), pp. 54, 55.

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' (*G.B.*² i. 70). This *à priori* conclusion is supposed by Mr. Frazer to be confirmed inductively by what we know of the lowest existing race of mankind, the aborigines of Australia. 'Without metals, without houses, without agriculture, the Australian savages represent the stage of material culture which was reached by our remote ancestors in the Stone Age; and the rudimentary state of the arts of life among them reflects faithfully the stunted condition of their minds' (i. 71). This argument for the priority of magic (sympathetic and mimetic) is based on the assumption 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' prior to the dawning of an Age of Religion (i. 73 *et seq.*).

The correlation of material and intellectual evolution in certain aspects is no doubt verifiable, but Sir Arthur Mitchell points out in his Rhind Lectures in Archæology, *The Past in the Present: What is Civilization?* (1880): 'that a classification of antiquities into those belonging to the stone, bronze, and iron ages fails to indicate stages of culture and capacity, necessarily consecutive, and universally applicable to all the races of the human family' (p. 117). Similarly, a classification of the phenomena of intellectual culture into successive ages of magic, religion, and science, though it may have a certain 'practical utility,' as in the case of material culture, 'may lead to error when its nature is imperfectly understood' (*op. cit.* p. 109).

2. *Magical Spells.*—Sympathetic magic, in both forms, especially in the simpler or mimetic form, seems to involve nothing of that constraining or coercing which Mr. Frazer regards as the distinguishing mark of magic as opposed to that conciliation or propitiation which he considers to be the distinguishing mark of religion. It is when man essays 'to bend nature to his wishes by the sheer force of spells and enchantments' (i. 70) that magic is something more than mere 'sympathetic magic,' which rests 'on the belief in a certain secret sympathy which unites indissolubly things that have once been connected with each other,' or than even 'mimetic,' the efficacy

of which 'must be supposed to depend on a certain *physical influence or sympathy* linking the imaginary cause or subject to the imaginary effect or object' (i. 10). The spells or enchantments may or may not involve a belief in spirits or in personal powers superior to man, but they are something or other used to supplement, accelerate, control, or, it may be, to counteract the action of the secret sympathy or physical influence. A careful study of the instances of so-called mimetic and sympathetic magic given by Mr. Frazer will supply illustrations of what I mean.

The very first examples of magical images cited by him (*G.B.* i. 10, 11) do this. When the Ojebway Indian intends to kill his enemy outright, he burns or buries the puppet, *uttering certain magical words as he does so.* In the first form of the Malay charm given on p. 11, in order to kill the intended victim, you 'scorch the figure slowly by holding it over a lamp every night for seven nights, and say—

It is not wax that I am scorching,
It is the liver, heart, and spleen of So-and-so that I scorch.'

And so, as Mr. Tylor points out in his interesting chapter on 'Images and Names' in his *Early History of Mankind*, a man may be cursed or bewitched through his name as well as through his image (p. 124). But in numerous instances of this variety of magic there is more involved than the mere mimetic principle, there is belief in the virtue of the use of set words and phrases accompanying mimetic action.

3. *Demonology.*—A third aspect of magic is that in which it is supposed to deal with spirits (good or bad). 'Whenever it does so in its proper form' (*i.e.* as magic unalloyed with religion), 'it treats them exactly in the same fashion as it treats inanimate agents—that is, it constrains or coerces' them.

The definition of magic in this aspect given by Principal Whitehouse in his article on 'Magic, Magician' (*Hastings' Dictionary of the Bible*, vol. iii. p. 207a), may appropriately be quoted at this point: 'Magic may, in its historic sense, be best described as the special and abnormal agency whereby certain superhuman personal powers are constrained either to create evil (or good) or to avert baneful effects. Accordingly, magic falls into two parts,' viz.: (1) *sacred magic*—

the art 'whereby the superior deities or good demons are influenced to exercise their good offices to avert the evil,' *i.e.*, whereby counter-spells or charms are worked; and (2) *sorcery*, or *the black art*, 'whereby evils are wrought on the human victim through the power of the evil eye, etc., by the male sorcerer, or more frequently through the female witch, who is able to summon supernatural powers of darkness to his or her aid.' Here magic is regarded as 'the necessary accompaniment of a belief in demons.' 'These spirits,' says Blau (quoted in *D.B.*³ 207a), 'the magician endeavours by his occult methods to bring under his power, or to compel them to carry out his will. The conceptions respecting the nature and power of these spirits, whom man can make serviceable to himself, differ with the different races.' Demonology, however, says Principal Whitehouse, 'does not wholly explain magic in all its varied forms and ramifications.'

These three aspects of magic are included in what Mr. A. E. Waite calls 'the popular significance attached to the term magic.' Put briefly, in the popular significance 'there is generally implied one of two things—either that it is the art of producing effects by the operation of causes, which are apparently inadequate to their production, and are therefore in apparent defiance of the known order of nature; or that it is the art of evoking "spirits," and of forcing them to perform the bidding of the operator.'¹

Mr. Waite, after quoting the definitions of magic given by the historians of magic—Christian, Ennemoser, and Lévi—says: 'By these definitions it is plain that magic is not merely the art of evoking spirits, and that it is not merely concerned with establishing a communication with other forms of intelligent subsistence in the innumerable spheres of the transcendental. If such communication can be truly established, it is evidently by *the intervention of certain occult forces resident in the communicating individual, man*. Now it is reasonable to suppose that the same forces can be applied in other directions, and the synthesis of the methods and processes by which these forces are utilized in the several fields of experiment, combined with a further synthesis of methods and processes by which the latent potentialities of a variety of physical substances are developed into

manifold activity, constitute magic in the full, perfect, and comprehensive sense of that much abused term.'² I have quoted this definition in full, italicizing what seems to be the essence in all forms of the *art of magic*.

Mr. Lang has devoted the first part of his work, *The Making of Religion*, to an examination of 'the X-region of our nature,' the phenomena of which may 'indicate the existence of a transcendental region of human faculty.' 'Anthropologists,' he says, 'have gone on discussing the trances and visions, and so-called "demoniacal possession" of savages, as if no new researches into similar facts in the psychology of civilized mankind existed; or, if they existed, threw any glimmer of light on the abnormal psychology of savages. I have, on the other hand, thought it desirable to sketch out a study of savage psychology in the light of recent research' (Pref. 2nd ed. p. viii.). The importance of such examination is still hardly realized by students of early religion or by anthropologists generally. Mr. Frazer does not appear to realize it, though his work is full of illustrations of abnormal psychological phenomena. The history of the 'Occult Sciences' also throws light on the subject. See Waite's *Occult Sciences*, *passim*.

Between magic, in the full sense of the term, or, as it may otherwise be described, occult or transcendental science, and religion in general, 'as a frame of mind, an emotion, and at the same time as the inspiration of a higher spirit,'³ there is no necessary antagonism. Religion, as Professor Tiele points out,⁴ is not truly hostile to science, philosophy, poetry, etc.; and in so far as magic is the science of occult or transcendental phenomena, the existence of which has been vouched for in all ages among all races, and studied in all the so-called occult sciences, religion is not necessarily hostile to it.

4. *Fusion of Magic with Religion*.—Mr. Frazer adduces evidence to show that in the earlier stages of the history of religion there is 'fusion or confusion of magic with religion' (*G.B.*⁴ i. 65) and that 'the functions of priest and sorcerer were often combined, or, to speak perhaps more correctly, were not yet differentiated from each other' (p. 64). He cites Dr. Codrington

² *Op. cit.* p. 12.

³ Professor C. P. Tiele, *Elements of the Science of Religion* (Gifford Lectures), vol. ii. p. 257.

⁴ *Op. cit.* p. 257 *et seq.*

¹ *The Occult Sciences* (1891), pt. i. Magical Practices: Definitions, p. 10.

with reference to the Melanesians. With them the belief in an invisible supernatural power (*mana*) residing in spiritual beings, whether in the spiritual part of man or in the ghosts of the dead, and in the efficacy of the various means by which spirits and ghosts can be induced to exercise it for the benefit of men, is the foundation of religious rites and practices, and from it everything which may be called magic and witchcraft draws its origin (p. 65). Here apparently is no opposition of principle between magic and religion. Mr. Frazer himself adds that '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' (p. 66). Professor Wiedemann is quoted as saying that Egyptian religion was compacted 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 we would call faith or superstition, whether we would rank it as religion or magic, as worship or sorcery (p. 67).

The evidence adduced by Mr. Frazer, which, it seems to me, may bear another interpretation than that given by him, and other evidence that might be produced, rather support Mr. Lang's contention that 'religion and magic may have been concurrent from the first,' but that 'we have no historical evidence on this point of relative priority.'¹ This hypothesis seems a more reasonable one than the hypotheses (1) that magic is prior to religion (Frazer); or (2) that religion is prior to magic, and that 'magic, wherever it sprang up, was a degradation or relapse in the evolution of religion' (Jevons, *I.H.R.* pp. 25 and 177). That is true of magic in its third aspect, in what may be called its fourth aspect, where there is fusion or confusion of magic with religion, and in a fifth aspect, where the belief in and practice of magic survives, in a debased form, in civilized or semi-civilized countries among the aborigines or isolated races, survivors of which are to be found coexisting with the higher, perhaps conquering, race that has dispossessed their ancestors, or even in civilized countries among back-

¹ 'Mr. Frazer's Theory of Totemism,' by A. Lang, *Fortnightly Review*, June 1899, p. 1012; see also Lang's *Magic and Religion*, and Tiele's *Gifford Lectures* (1899), Index, under 'Magic.'

ward or uneducated members of a community. At this stage the opposition between religion and magic has become acute, and reputed wizards and witches are persecuted, perhaps even put to death at the instance of the religious and civil authorities. (Tylor's *Primitive Culture*³, c. iv.)

But if the practice of magic be based on the action of certain occult forces resident in individuals in all races, savage and civilized alike, and religion be a 'psychological necessity' of human nature, which the possession even of *mana*, or occult powers, cannot satisfy, which the belief in religious or magical man-gods only accentuates, each has its function in the evolution of humanity, and as a creed, a science, or a philosophy, call it what you like, each has its justification, in its own successive developments, as a working hypothesis for its devotees. The history of magic and religion, on this view, is something more than a 'melancholy record of human error and folly,' as Mr. Frazer deems the illustrations of it unfolded in his volumes. It is surely the effort of the human spirit, aided by the divine, to free itself from illusion in thought and wrong in conduct by means of a synthesis that harmonizes, without confusing, the divine and the human, that weds thought and action in a union fruitful of good to humanity through the action and reaction on each other of a creed that is 'the highest science or wisdom, based upon knowledge and practical experience,' and of conduct that is true service of God and of man in his physical, mental, moral, and spiritual needs, no element being ignored or neglected. If this synthesis be the Christian religion, purified of the accretions and corruptions that have gathered around it and at times hindered its growth into, and influence over, the life of the races of men it has reached, the faith of the future, as of the past, will be religious, not magical nor scientific, but religious in a sense that includes all that is true in the imperfect syntheses of magic and science.

Mr. Frazer asks whether there is not 'some more general conclusion, some lesson, if possible, of hope and encouragement, to be drawn from the melancholy record of human error and folly which has engaged our attention in these volumes. If then we consider, on the one hand, the essential similarity of man's chief wants everywhere and at all times, and, on the other hand, the wide difference between the means he has adopted

to satisfy them in different ages, we shall perhaps be disposed to conclude that the movement of the higher thought, so far as we can trace it, has on the whole been from magic through religion to science' (*G.B.*² iii. 458). But science—though 'the hope of progress, moral and intellectual, as well as material, in the future is bound up with the fortunes of science'—is not necessarily a complete and final synthesis. 'In the last analysis magic, religion, and science are nothing but theories of thought; and as science has supplanted its predecessors, so it may hereafter be itself superseded by some more perfect hypothesis, perhaps by some totally different way of looking at the phenomena,—of registering the shadows on the screen,—of which we in this generation can form no idea. The advance of knowledge is an infinite progression towards a goal that for ever recedes. . . . The dreams of magic may one day be the waking realities of science. But a dark shadow lies athwart the far end of this fair prospect. . . . In the ages to come man may be able to predict, perhaps even to control, the wayward courses of the winds and clouds, but hardly will his puny hands have strength to speed afresh our slackening planet in its orbit or rekindle the dying fire of the sun. Yet the philosopher who trembles at the idea of such distant catastrophes may console himself by reflecting that these gloomy apprehensions, like the earth and the sun themselves, are only parts of that unsubstantial world which thought has conjured up out of the void, and that the phantoms which the subtle enchantress has evoked to-day she may ban to-morrow. They too, like so much that to common eyes seems solid, may melt into air, into thin air' (*Ibid.* 460-461).

It is impossible to do other than feel respectful sympathy with this eloquent but sombre conclusion, however little one may be disposed to agree with Mr. Frazer's complex argument throughout his learned and fascinating volumes and the more general conclusion to which his own studies and the state of modern thought seem to point him.

Over against Mr. Frazer's agnostic summing up

I would fain set the closing pages of the second volume of Professor Tiele's Gifford Lectures, but of these I have room for only a few extracts:—

Discussing the theory that science may perhaps take the place of religion, he says: 'Science has indeed worked marvels during the present century in every department, and has thus earned a rich harvest for our social life, and earned our gratitude. We who love it, and devote our lives to it, can but rejoice that its light shines around us more brightly than at any previous period in the world's history. That light is essential to our very lives; but light is not the only essential—we also require warmth for our souls, and science has no warmth to offer. . . . Among other things, our science has demonstrated by historical and psychological research that the religious need is a general human need. . . . Our science cannot call forth a new manifestation of religious life, but *it may pave the way for it* by tracing the evolution of religion, explaining its essentials and showing where its origin is to be sought for. Let it do its own duty in throwing light upon the part that religion has ever played in the history of mankind, and still plays in every human soul. And then, without preaching, or special pleading, or apologetic argument, but solely by means of the actual facts it reveals, our beloved science will help to bring home to the restless spirits of our time the truth that there is no rest for them unless "they arise and go to their Father."¹

May these noble words of a master of the science of religion reassure those who may be led by Mr. Frazer and others to fear that the science of religion, with its 'battery of the comparative method,' must necessarily 'strike at the foundations of beliefs in which, as in a strong tower, the hopes and aspirations of humanity through long ages have sought a refuge from the storm and stress of life.' *Where it does its own duty*, it but demonstrates the *eternal* foundation of religion. May Mr. Frazer's general treatise on religion, which all students eagerly await, breathe the more hopeful spirit of Professor Tiele's Gifford Lectures.

¹ Professor Tiele's *Elements of the Science of Religion* (Gifford Lectures), vol. ii. pp. 259-263.