

**PROLEGOMENA OF
THE HISTORY OF
RELIGIONS**

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Prolegomena of the history of religions by Albert Réville & A. S. Squire

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ALBERT RÉVILLE & A. S. SQUIRE

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PROLEGOMENA
or
THE HISTORY OF RELIGIONS.

Relig.
Hist.

PROLEGOMENA
OF
THE HISTORY OF RELIGIONS.

BY
ALBERT RÉVILLE, D.D.

PROFESSOR IN THE COLLÈGE DE FRANCE, PARIS; AND HIBBERT LECTURER
FOR 1884.

TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH

BY
A. S. SQUIRE.

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY PROFESSOR F. MAX MÜLLER.



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PREFACE.

THIS book is the reproduction, in a condensed form, of Lectures which I gave at the Collège de France during some months of the last spring and summer. I have not reproduced them literally, *in extenso*, because it seems to me that the same forms which are suitable to an oral lesson are not so suitable to a book. That which the Professor says in a lecture in order to be well and clearly understood by his audience, is apt to degenerate into redundancy and prolixity in a book. Reading allows of more reflection than hearing; it requires also more rapidity in development.

I do not claim to have exhausted in these chapters all that might come into a general Introduction to the History of Religions. There are subjects which those who are familiar with this kind of studies could easily point out which are not even approached, because it is only later that they could be usefully dealt with. At the beginning of a course in which his powers would fail the Professor long before the matter he has to treat of is exhausted, I have sought simply to bring together data and judgments which are most necessary for those who wish to follow it profitably. It is a digest to which I may from time to time be allowed to refer, in order not to lengthen the way by fatiguing repetitions or digressions. Misunderstandings will thus be avoided by this statement of the principles and of the

tendency which direct my researches in a domain where confusion of ideas and of words is as easy as it is frequent. I would venture to hope that, in default of any other merit, the mark of that strictly scientific spirit which should preside over studies of this kind will be found here. I do not consider the very real sympathy which I openly profess for their object as in any way opposed to that spirit. I believe, on the contrary, that the love of religion within one's-self—like the love of nature to the naturalist, like the love of art to the theorist of the beautiful—is indispensable to the historian of religions. These various affections are not at war; on the contrary, they nourish and inspire the love of truth.

ALBERT RÉVILLE

INTRODUCTION.

I WAS delighted when I heard that M. Réville's excellent *Prolegomènes de l'Histoire des Religions* were to be translated into English, and if I hesitated before acceding to the request that I should add a few lines by way of introducing his book to the English public, it was simply because I remembered the old English saying that good wine needs no bush.

I do not doubt that all real students of the History of Religion have by this time read M. Réville's book in the original. But the interest in the Science of Religion is spreading rapidly and widely, and there are large classes of English readers who seldom see a book which is published abroad, and who are more easily reached by an English translation.

I hope, therefore, that M. Réville's book in its English translation will be read even more widely in England than it has been; and I trust that it may help to remedy the injury which has of late been done to the Science of Religion in this country, both by its indiscriminate enemies and by its indiscriminate admirers.

Its indiscriminate enemies have often represented that new science as entirely hostile to religion. The author of our book, however, has not only been an active clergyman, but he is not afraid, as the first Professor of the History of Religions at the *Collège de France*, to confess his real love of religion.

But the indiscriminate admirers of the Science of Religion have proved almost more mischievous than our enemies by raising a prejudice against us among men who, though few in number, always tell in the end, and who, from the unscientific way in which the history of religion, or, I should rather say, the evolution of religion, has often been treated in recent publications, have naturally been led to believe that this new so-called science is rather an amusement for amateurs than a study for scholars. Long ago, I ventured to apply to the study of religion what Goethe had said of the study of language, that he who knows one knows none. A man may know his own religion very well, but he is not thereby a theologian, as little as a man is an astronomer because he knows the sun and the moon and the stars that rise above his own horizon. Now in *M. Réville* we have a writer who has carefully studied, not his own religion only, but most of the really important religions of mankind, and who never forgets the duty of the true historian to treat all religions, the lowest as well as the highest, with perfect impartiality and fairness.

But greater mischief even than has been done by those who know or who recognize one religion only, has been done to our young science by those who profess to know all religions, whether ancient or modern, whether savage or civilized. This comprehensive treatment of religions may have its advantages, and may no doubt claim its proper place in anthropological and psychological works. It is full of interest, and even of amusement, but it is simply intolerable in the Science of Religion. In Comparative Theology, no less than in Comparative Philology and Mythology, it is necessary before all things that whosoever wishes to do any real good, should make himself a scholar, and should acquire not only the knowledge, but also the conscience

of a scholar. What should we say of a writer who undertook to teach us anything about Zeus, and was not able to spell his name rightly? Yet men venture to write about the religions of literate and illiterate nations without attempting to learn even the alphabet or the grammar of their languages. *C'est magnifique, mais ce n'est pas la guerre.*

Lastly, our young science has suffered much from the embraces of that philosophy which tries to know how everything ought to have been, without first trying to know something of what really has been, and which, if facts happen to run counter to its postulates, disposes of all difficulties with a self-complacent *Tant pis pour les faits*. Having been myself one of the earliest and most outspoken admirers of Darwin's work, and having stood up, even before Darwin, for the theory of evolution, which nowhere, I believe, has achieved greater triumphs than in the Science of Language, I cannot protest too strongly against degrading the name of Darwin by applying it to that pseudo-philosophical sciolism which tries to put evolution in the place of history, and which, instead of descending from the known to the unknown, imagines that we can ascend far more easily from the unknown to the known. Before we have recourse to the theories of evolution in religion, language, or mythology, we ought surely first to learn what history has to teach us. When that is done, but not till then, there will be time for reasoning out what is required as necessarily antecedent by the very facts which are still within our reach. Let us by all means study history in order to show that there is a unity of purpose, that there is the evolution of an idea in it. But let us not imagine that evolution can defy the authority of history. It was one of the glories of our century that in the study of the earliest history of mankind we had shaken ourselves free from the *à priori* theories of the last