

**THE CELTIC CHRISTIANITY
OF CORNWALL:
DIVERS SKETCHES AND
STUDIES, PP. 2-184**

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THOMAS TAYLOR

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DIVERS SKETCHES AND STUDIES

BY
THOMAS TAYLOR, M.A., F.S.A.

VICAR OF ST. JUST-IN-PENWITH
AUTHOR OF "THE LIFE OF DR. TAYLOR OF ABBEVILLE"

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TO

M. JOSEPH LOTH

PROFESSEUR AU COLLÈGE DE FRANCE

IN GRATEFUL RECOGNITION OF A FRIENDSHIP
FROM WHICH I HAVE REAPED THE
FRUITS OF DISCIPLESHIP

*Sed quanquam utilitates multae et magnae
consecutae sunt, non sunt tamen ab earum spe
causae diligendi profectae.*

357804

PREFACE

IN one of the most brilliant of modern books its author¹ calls attention to the common fallacy which assumes that "if you can find a principle which gives an adequate explanation of three different facts it is more likely to correspond with the truth than three different principles which give adequate explanations of the same facts severally."

This fallacy underlies much that is being urged in favour of a common origin for religious doctrines and methods of worship. A single source of religious belief or of religious phenomena is preferred to several sources as being more tidy and more in keeping with what we have learnt to expect in other departments of research. It may be illogical, but still it is recommended as a safe guide to the truth.

Indeed, it is difficult for a modern student to conceive how any real advance can be made in scientific pursuits unless the principle, which prefers one explanation of phenomena to many, is favoured.

Before the days of Kepler and of Newton it may have been possible, it may be possible still, to imagine more than one explanation of the fall of a heavy body to the ground and of the action of one inert mass upon another. The law of gravity, as elaborated by Newton, represents what, so far as we know, has

¹ R. A. Knox, *Some Loose Stones*, p. 89.

invariably happened and what we believe will invariably happen in space between two or more bodies, namely, that they will, as heretofore, each attract all the other bodies directly as their mass and inversely as the square of their distance. This law is not merely preferred before all other laws ; it is the very foundation of the whole of what is called Physical Astronomy. It is a law to which there are, within its own province, no known exceptions.

We accept this law not because we prefer one explanation to many, but because it meets not only the requirements of cases which might conceivably be explained in other ways but also the requirements of cases for which no other explanation has been suggested or conceived. Among laws, which are not received as self-evident, the law of gravity is unique. This will be clear to anyone who contrasts the secure position which it occupies with the perilous position occupied by laws which have been formulated within recent years.

Men do not prefer Newton's explanation to other explanations : the evidence in its favour is so overwhelming that they feel compelled to accept it.

It is far otherwise with other laws like evolution. These fascinate or repel from the very first. Preference undoubtedly enters into the complex intellectual process which leads us first to accept and then to defend this or that explanation of an array of facts. And this preference, admittedly illogical, may arise from our limited knowledge of the facts or from regard for some particular protagonist of one of many conflicting theories ; but, other things being equal, it seizes hold of that explanation which claims to cover the most ground and to reconcile the largest number

of facts. It only becomes mischievous when it claims infallibility.

It is perhaps too readily assumed that in the domain of religious phenomena there is a law by which these phenomena are bounded and conditioned. Assuming such a law to exist, the attempts to formulate it will be directed in a greater or less degree by preference. For religious phenomena, by which is here meant the outward manifestations of religions, cannot be examined and classified, without a comprehensive knowledge of the religions themselves. And if, as a French writer has contended, "the man who would write the history of a religion must believe it no longer but must have believed it once," it follows that few persons, even in this versatile age, can claim to be proficient in more than three or four religions. From which it also follows that lack of knowledge must be supplied by fertility of imagination or by the exercise of preference on the part of him who employs the comparative method in order to discover the law.

And yet, it is only by eliminating this personal element and by confining our attention to material which is neither inaccurate nor defective that we can hope to arrive at the truth. It must be confessed that the rough and ready generalisations with which we are so familiar in this connection and the lack of care which is taken in gathering and sifting the materials upon which they are based, almost lead us to despair of useful results. The attempt to evolve a law from insufficient data is like an attempt to measure volume in terms of two dimensions or like an attempt to classify animals without an intimate knowledge of them. A salamander has four legs and a tail: so has a sheep. A zoology based on these

criteria alone would not carry us very far. The biologist might kindly step in with his law of evolution and say some soothing words respecting their common origin, but we should leave off where we began and know no more of those animals than we did at the start, namely, that they each have four legs and a tail.¹

In studying religions those points of resemblance which are most obvious are sometimes the most misleading. And for this reason. The essence of a religion—what may be called its soul—is not always revealed in its methods of worship. This is said to be especially true of Buddhism, at least by those writers who, like Mr. Feilding, strive to commend it to the Western world. Certainly it is no disparagement of a true religion that it should have, in the department of worship, many points in common with a false one. Every religion requires some machinery if it is to do its work. And it is more true to say of religions that they agree in machinery but differ in what they teach than to say that they agree in what they teach but differ in machinery. It would be most untrue, nevertheless, to assert that these common elements have always been acquired in the same way or have meant

¹ A friend of mine performed the surprising feat of evolving an entire system—god, religion, worshippers and all—out of much less than four legs and a tail. His only material consisted of a word, half-obsolete, of uncertain derivation and meaning. The jaw-bone in the hands of Samson was as nothing compared with the magic of this word in the mind of the valiant expositor of prehistoric religions. While reading the paper in which he proclaimed his discovery to a learned society, one could not fail to note the profound impression which it made upon the hearers or to admire the transparent sincerity of the reader.

It will not surprise those who read this book to learn that its author spent some portion of the wakeful night which followed the reading of the paper in the composition of a simple liturgy to crown his friend's achievement.