

**HOW RELIGION ARISES:
A PSYCHOLOGICAL
STUDY**

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How Religion Arises: A Psychological Study by Duren J. H. Ward

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BY
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CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCTION.

§ 1. CHAOS IN RELIGIOUS OPINION.

THE universal and "all-absorbing" ideas of the human being are few. We may conclude their universality results from their necessity. What continues in being during ages has reason (in the nature of things) for being. What everybody does must be done. What is everywhere is exotic nowhere. Religion is cosmopolitan. In some form, it is at home in every breast. Its products are two-sided, the soul's experiences and the soul's expressions. Again they are from two causes, the internal impulse and the external influence. As languages grow from the linguistic tendency and necessity, so religions are growths from the religious attitude and needs. All such ideas (language, morality, religion) are both spontaneous and necessitated. They germinate and develop because such is the nature of life. They develop with this character or that because such is the nature of their environment. Their tendency is unconscious. Hence, whoever lives naturally lives religiously. Only by reasoned artifice and studied doubt is he otherwise, and even this may become religious to him. He may find the object of his adoration or his ideal in a charmed bit of stone, a tree, a mountain, the sea, the sun, his ancestor, a noble woman, deified humanity, an ideal life, the Grand Lama, an anthropomorphic pantheon, or the high and holy One who inhabiteth eternity. He may bow down to this or bend his knee to that; but something inevitably commands his reverence, and draws forth whatever longings toward fuller, higher life he is capable of. A thinking, feeling, acting being must

live by thinking, feeling, and acting. What is built into nature must be exhibited when nature is made manifest. Its varieties may be as numerous as its individuals, for these must be as varied as the circumstances under which they develop. Hence, the universality of religion becomes also an explanation of its variety. In all minor matters, among those who think it is quite safe to say, *quot homines tot sententia*.

Yet how few do their own thinking! Millions hire it done to suit their taste; but in doing so they sell their birthright, and forfeit what they might be. "What I want is not instruction, but provocation," said Emerson. What any mind wants is suggestion, frequent stirring up. Clear thinking is of all importance; yet how little of it is done! From absence of this, what worlds of confusion! and confusion is the evil of evils. Religion, the commonest, is almost the least clear of our ideas. What everybody "knows" nobody *knows*. What is more an every-day affair? Yet who can define it? We all talk about Christianity much of the time; yet what is Christianity? One runs a mortal risk of dethroning a man's faith by the confusion one puts him to in asking him to define it. One principal reason of so little faith is so little effort on the part of the "faithless" to express what they have. Better try and mistake than not try at all. Bacon was wise when he said, "Truth emerges sooner from mistake than confusion."

Then another class seem to abound in faith, but analysis shows it to be only credulity. It has its basis on nothing firmer than unreasoned and unreasonable authority. It is of the sort described by the boy in Sunday-school, who, on being asked what faith was, replied, "It is being perfectly sure of a thing when you have nothing to back it up."

To many, religion is the Church. They see it and know it only through the Church. What the Church does is religious; what is done outside the Church is secular or irreligious. If religion is the Church, all the good it has done is from the Church. There is no religion elsewhere. Other

so-called religions are "of the devil." Their people are worse off than they would be without them. They are a great hindrance to the cause of good and to the success of the Church.

Others, with just as little realization of the nature of the religious life, and hating the Church for one or another reason, attribute all its evils and mistakes to religion. If the Church has catered to the rich and slighted the poor, religion is to blame. If a hierarchy in the name of religion has supported tyranny and opposed freedom, religion is responsible. And so on for every abuse which irreligious, selfish souls in hypocritical religious garb have found opportunity to perpetrate. But is the sunlight to blame because men fight in it? Shall we condemn the night because men steal? Is fire bad because it burns up houses? Is water a curse because men get drowned in it? Is enthusiasm an evil because some become fanatic? Is good bad because misused? Not more so is religion vile because a Church has discredited it. Not creeds, not theologies, not *isms*, not religions, but *religion* is the substance, the essence. "Unter der Hülle aller Religionen liegt die Religion selbst," said Schiller. Not these created religion, but religion created these out of such material as it found to work with.

All inquiry concerning the evolution and historical origin of the religious sentiment and all discussion concerning its psychological basis have worth only as they tend to and culminate in a definite understanding of its real meaning and content. Foundations are important only that on them structures may rest. Roots are valueless unless from them trees and fruit grow. Highways are good for nothing unless to be travelled over. Temples are worse than useless, except as shrines at which pious folk may have their souls inspired. Therefore, if faith, hope, love, and worship be the worthy factors of human life, which men have supposed, the broadest and deepest philosophical inquiry should make faith more intelligent, hope more cheerful, love more earnest, worship more sincere. "The end of religion is not to an-

swer a question of ontology [merely], but to make men better," says Professor D'Alviella.¹ Whoever shrinks from or opposes the most searching, impartial examination of the foundations of his belief betrays his own palpable lack of faith, and is in grave danger of laying himself open to the charges of formality and hypocrisy.

In the study of religion there is something more than a notice of the vicissitudes and metamorphoses of each distinct kind. In these times of unbounded curiosity concerning Nature's secrets, the *origin* of everything under the sun—and above the sun—must be inquired into. Then there is a *progress* to be observed. The conceptions of man concerning his relation to superhuman powers have vastly changed during the ages. Sometimes this change has been for growth; sometimes, perhaps, for decay. In the hypothesis of a natural process, tending in the race as a whole toward growth and higher development, all the multitudinous transformations find their best explanation. It is the business of the history and philosophy of religion, not only to tell the tale of incidents, but to show how the evolution is determined by the character of the nations and races,—*i.e.*, causes mental and rational within; and by the outside influences bearing on their lives,—*i.e.*, conditions physical as to place and circumstances and conditions historical as to period and position. Moreover, the treatment of religion has for its task the discernment and explanation of the laws controlling this life, growth, and decay. "Religions are beliefs in action," says Fairbairn, "and the relation between belief and action must be discovered."² The history of religion must be conducted in a thoroughly impartial, universal, and scientific manner, while its philosophy must have been derived from a careful study of its history. It is the business of philosophy in its application to religion to deal philosophically with the questions of its *origin, nature, and function; i.e.*, to deduce and arrange these from the facts which may be obtained. Philosophy must leave to history and science the

¹ These figures refer to "Notes," at the end.

collection of the facts, the data, of which it is to judge the result. Yet the would-be philosopher must himself have been a thorough student of those data, or his philosophy will be but a mass of metaphysical conjectures. In the matter of origin, philosophy must, as psychology, ransack the human mind to find the facts of consciousness. From these and the data afforded by its helpmates in science, it has the task of constructing the universe and arranging all within it harmoniously and consistently.

§ 2. RETROSPECT.

Before our century, religions received no truly scientific attention; though religion (or, more accurately, theology) has from time immemorial been a theme of greatest interest, and monopolized a considerable part of man's attention. Yet we may only look to former times for information concerning religions, not for methods of treating them as a study. For the most part, men recognized as religion only the views and practices of their own nation or sect;³ all else was heathendom, and heathendom was wholly superstition and evil. Indeed, we may still further limit the time; for what we mean by an effort to treat this problem *scientifically* was unknown till far into the present century, and even yet is confined to a very limited number of exponents. The expression "scientific" now embodies an ideal so high that almost without exception works on religions written more than fifty years ago are worthless as expositions; hence, from them we cannot hope for more than scattered facts, and even these must be sifted out with the utmost care. Historical collections and philosophical discussions there were, and many; but their attitude was always like that of a bribed jury which had its verdict ready before it had heard the case. And, even had the method been better and the bias less, the facts were not at hand from which to make up a science of the subject. It is since the year 1771 that the sacred writings of the Persians,⁴ Hindus, Chinese, Japanese, Egyptians, Assyrio-Babylonians,