

ESSAYS

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Essays by George John Romanes & C. Lloyd Morgan

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GEORGE JOHN ROMANES & C. LLOYD MORGAN

ESSAYS

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ESSAYS

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PREFACE

IT was Mr. Romanes' wish that some of his essays should be collected and republished. The following selection has been made, I trust, with due care, and serves to show the range of his thought and the versatility of his mind. Those who knew him well will doubtless still feel that the man was even greater than his works. His conversation was so suggestive, his personality so genial and loveable, that one cannot but feel how inadequate is the printed page.

Except for the correction of a few obvious misprints the Essays are reprinted as they stand in the pages of the magazines and reviews from which they are by courteous permission extracted.

C. LLOYD MORGAN.

BRISTOL, *October 1896.*

CONTENTS

	PAGE
1. PRIMITIVE NATURAL HISTORY (<i>Nineteenth Century</i> . August, 1890.)	1
2. THE DARWINIAN THEORY OF INSTINCT (<i>Nineteenth Century</i> . September, 1884.)	25
3. MAN AND BRUTE (<i>North American Review</i> . August, 1884.)	59
4. MIND IN MEN AND ANIMALS (<i>North American Review</i> . March, 1885.)	75
5. ORIGIN OF HUMAN FACULTY (<i>Brain</i> . October, 1889.)	86
6. MENTAL DIFFERENCES BETWEEN MEN AND WOMEN (<i>Nineteenth Century</i> . May, 1887.)	113
7. WHAT IS THE OBJECT OF LIFE? (<i>Forum</i> . June, 1887.)	152
8. RECREATION (<i>Nineteenth Century</i> . September, 1879.)	164
9. HYPNOTISM (<i>Nineteenth Century</i> . September, 1880.)	213
10. HYDROPHOBIA AND THE MUZZLING ORDER (<i>Contemporary Review</i> . March, 1891.)	226



ESSAYS



I.

PRIMITIVE NATURAL HISTORY.

THE notions of plants and animals which were entertained in the most primitive stages of human culture may be gathered from two sources—the one indirect, general, and inferential, the other direct, special, and historical. The general character of primitive ideas of natural history before the dawn of the historical period may be inferred with tolerable certainty from the notions which are entertained by savages at the present time. In the most ancient books of the Bible—possibly the oldest, certainly the most interesting, records of early thought—these primitive ideas are exhibited in a literary and historical form. The two sources taken together present the primitive philosophy of natural history, and it is from this standpoint that I propose to examine the notions of plants and animals now held by savages, as well as those which are exhibited in the most ancient books of the Bible.

The notions entertained of plants and animals

by existing savages are pretty uniform in different parts of the world. Whether it be owing to a speculative interpretation of their dreams, to an observation of their shadows, or to the worship of their deceased ancestors—who are felt to be in some sense alive because their names are still in use,—it is certain that savages, as a general rule, entertain a belief in the continued existence of their dead. Such existence is supposed to be thus continued in a world of shadows, ghosts, or spirits—a world, however, which is not far removed from that in which the dead had previously lived. Indeed, so far as we are able to interpret the not very clear notions which savages entertain upon the locality and conditions of spirit-life, the locality seems still to be mundane, and the conditions continue to resemble those of corporeal existence as closely as is compatible with the absence of a human body; for the soul or spirit of the deceased man is still supposed to hover around the scenes of his earthly life, and it is usually supposed to be even so far material in its nature as to leave footprints upon sand, to require food and drink, and so forth.

From the idea that human beings are animated by spirits, which during the life of the body fill every part of the body, and therefore in their subsequent or incorporeal existence continue to present in every detail the form of the body—from this idea there arises another, namely, that not only all animals and plants, but likewise all inanimate objects, present a spiritual or shadow-like sub-