

ORIGIN, AUTHORITY, AND RELIABILITY OF THOSE RELIGIOUS
IDEAS AND BELIEFS.

Looking, then, at these convictions and beliefs, which have been the common possession of earth's various tribes and races, which have exercised a mighty power in the march of centuries, and which are deeply rooted in the thoughts and life of this later age, the demand for an origin which will account for and explain these beliefs and the vast consequences which have flowed from them through past ages, becomes one of the most imperative subjects with which we have to deal.

Here are great anticipations and beliefs, which have come sounding down through the years of the past, whose "distant footsteps echo on the corridors of time," which contain "presences that will not be put by," and possess a strange vitality which enables them to "outlive all the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune."

To say that these religious convictions of mankind owe their origin to mere "Hebrew dreams," "Galilean visions," or to speculations of some far-off, obscure and unhistoric past, is too unsatisfactory to be entertained for a moment. "A pool of water on the street," says Prof. Fisher, "may be explained by a summer shower, but not so the gulf stream."

Not the inventions of savage brains, or the outcome of some unaccountable mechanical evolutionary process, or the teachings of some dim traditions coming up out of the misty ages of a dateless antiquity, can for a moment explain the world's faiths now under review.

Even Mr. Spencer endeavors to show that any artificial explanation for religious belief is utterly untenable.

To attempt to reduce the origin of the religious ideas of the race, as some speculators have done, to the phenomena of dreams, is altogether too frivolous an explanation for what has proved itself the mightiest force in the history of man. Professor Bowne, in his "Studies in Theism," referring to such speculations, says: "They trace the whole religious history of the race to the fact that some ancestral savage dreamed, and mistook his dream for realities. The idea of the supernatural