

AN INTRODUCTIVE ENQUIRY IN THE STUDY OF OJIBWA  
RELIGION.

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Although the present paper is concerned almost exclusively with the Ojibwa of South-Eastern Ontario, there is little doubt that the data presented hold likewise for all the other divisions of the Ojibwa group, except perhaps for the extreme western branches in western Manitoba and Saskatchewan, and the so-called Northern Saulteaux, where they have come in contact with the Cree. Even there, however, we do not anticipate any great changes, for the investigations of Wm. Jones on the Manito belief of the Sauk and Fox, and those of Alanson Skinner among the Cree and Menominee, seem to indicate that the Ojibwa beliefs differed only in detail from those of these other tribes.

In dealing with the subject of the religion of primitive peoples, it will be well to bear in mind that it must be treated in the same manner in which that subject is treated among civilized people. The unjustified and unsubstantiated assumption that there is any real difference has been the cause of considerable confusion hitherto and has resulted in the development of some erroneous conceptions on cardinal points in the religious life of the North American Indians. But, perhaps, more harmful than any erroneous point of view, has been the utter absence of critical analysis with which the sources for religious life have been treated. Rarely have investigators made an attempt to go behind the data, to realize its individual significance, the character of the individual or individuals from whom it has been obtained, his relation to the tribe, and numerous other pertinent points, and as a result we see primitive religious beliefs discussed as though they pertained to some vague social unit. No suggestive or correct view-point can possibly grow out of such a treatment.

Just as among us, there are religious and unreligious people among the Indians, and it is a matter of the very gravest consequence—of far more consequence than among us—from whom our information is ob-