

## CHAPTER XV

### INTRODUCTION

IN entering upon the theoretical discussion of the material presented in the first volume of this book, it will be well to begin with a short consideration of the principles upon which the study and the mode of arrangement of the argument will be based.

At the present moment there exists a very wide divergence between different schools of thought in their attitude towards ethnographical material. While some are almost exclusively interested in the evolution of custom and institution, others devote their energies as exclusively to the study of geographical distribution with the aim of discovering how the cultures now existing on the earth have been built up. As I have recorded elsewhere<sup>1</sup>, my own standpoint altered very profoundly while I was writing the theoretical discussion contained in this volume. I began as a firm adherent of the current English school, being almost exclusively interested in the evolution of belief, custom and institution, paying little attention to the complexity of individual cultures, except where it was perfectly obvious that changes had been set up from without, as in the case of recent Polynesian influence in Melanesia. At a definite point in my argument I was led to see that Melanesian society is complex. I began my theoretical consideration with a comparative study of the systems of relationship which have been recorded in the first volume, and at first attended purely to their structure, neglecting the geographical distribution of the terms of relationship as linguistic facts. On the basis of this purely morphological study I was enabled to build up a scheme of the evolution of Melanesian social structure. It was only after I had followed out as far as possible the

<sup>1</sup> Presidential Address to Section H, British Association, 1911. See Rep. Brit. Assoc., 1911, p. 490, and *Nature*, 1911, LXXXVII, 350.