

the ultimate character and results of his religion or want of it become nearly the same.

The steps by which men came to worship fire, the great god Agni of the Hindoo mythology, are well explained by Max Müller in his Gifford Lectures, though the view which he presents is necessarily one-sided and imperfect, regarding, as it does, man as a being working his way to religious ideas from a state of destitution of religion, and supposing that the habit of speaking of his own actions was transferred to what seemed to be the actions of fire and other agents, as when we now speak of fire as raging, roaring, devouring; natural, even necessary modes of speech, which might, perhaps, lead simple minds to fancy the fire a living agent. So we may think or speak of the sun as "like a bridegroom coming out of his chamber" to run his daily race, or of the moon as "walking in brightness;" but there is no necessary connection between these forms of speech and idolatrous worship.

The magic influence of fire is indeed one which many may have felt. Its spontaneous action, its devouring energy, require but little imagination to convert it into a living, active agent. I remember an incident of my own youth which strongly impressed this upon me. I used to take long rambles through the woods in search of rare birds or other animals to add to my collections. On one occasion, on a hot, still summer day, I suddenly came on a tall, dead tree on fire from top to bottom. There was no other fire near, and there it stood blazing quietly in the still air. How it was set on fire I do not know, probably not by human hands, and it may have been by lightning. The strange, causeless, spontaneous burning struck me forcibly. I could sympathize with Moses when he saw the bush that burned without being consumed, and could easily imagine some primitive savage unacquainted with fire, in presence of such a sight, imagining that he saw a god or at least something supernatural. This might be superstitious, but when we see any strange natural phenomenon, or even the ordinary rising and setting of the sun, and are ignorant of the causes, it is surely natural and not irrational to refer the effect directly to a divine first cause, and it requires but a small stretch of imagination to deify the seen agent. When, however, we find that neither the sun nor fire are voluntary agents, but obey unchanging laws which we can understand, and in the case of fire, can regulate to our own advantage, we learn that these are not gods, but only manifestations of a higher power. It will be a curious failure of sound reason if, when disenchanted as to the divinity of natural objects, we fail to recognize their Maker. There is good reason to believe that in ancient times the priests and the initiated did not make this mistake, but continued to regard natural objects as emblems of God. But whatever may have been the case among the heathen, this was certainly the attitude of the Hebrew writers, to whom nature was not itself divine, but the manifestation of the unseen Elohim.

On the other hand, it is to be observed that hero-worship, regarded in