

RELIGION

THY NAME IS SUPERSTITION

Leaflet Number Ten

Primitive man must have been an unhappy and perplexed individual. He was surrounded by natural forces that manifested themselves both to his detriment and benefit. Thunders pealed and lightnings flashed, splitting the rock and the patriarch of the forest, and killing his companion of the chase. Flood, fire and earthquake gave their added testimony to the existence of an evil-disposed power, always near, never seen, whose awful omnipotence was beyond mortal conception. He naturally ascribed these terrors to some powerful, malignant, individual, in human shape (for he could conceive of no other man then, as now, making God in his own image) who took delight in causing sorrow and distress to shivering mortals. He was the "evil one," who needed to be appeased by bribes of good things to eat, and plenty of them. Primitive man's idea of heavenly ecstasy being to gorge himself to repletion he unconsciously endowed the figment of his brain with tastes that he himself possessed, and his conception of the attributes of his deity was necessarily drawn from the source of all his ideas—his own immediate environment. What he considered good was surely desirable to his God.

Other forces manifested themselves in an opposite direction. The warmth of the sun, the fruitfulness of the earth, the cooling breeze, the rain refreshing the parched earth, and numberless other agreeable effects could only be the results of the activity of an opposite nature to that of the evil one. This deity had to be thanked, and when a period of storm and famine gave way to one of mildness and plenty, what more natural than to ascribe it to the victory of the Good One over the Evil One? One was to be prayed to for success in the chase or in war, and for protection against the Evil One. The latter had to be appeased by the sacrifice of the most precious of his primitive wealth, in order that he might be kept in good temper.

Thus arose the ideas of God and the Devil, founded on man's ignorance of the laws that govern the forces of nature.

Every step taken by man along the pathway of knowledge has increased his skepticism as to the existence of a supernatural devil, who was responsible for the unhappiness caused by flood, drouth, famine, fire, earthquake, or sickness. He has learnt, in a large and consequently increasing measure, to control many of these forces that were wont to strike him with terror and dire forebodings when they ran amok—or at least to foretell their coming, and by preparation to minimize their effects. The science of meteorology tells him when to expect floods and drouths. By strengthening the banks of the rivers he minimizes the ravages of the former; by building reservoirs