

Jove at Rome, or slew turtle-doves on the altar of Jahweh, god of Israel, at Jerusalem. The ghost-theory and the practice of ancestor-worship show us a natural basis and genesis for all these customs, and explain them in a way to which no mythological enquiry can add a single item of fundamental interest.

It may be well at this point to attempt beforehand some slight provisional disentangling of the various extraneous elements which interweave themselves at last with the simple primitive fabric of practical religion.

In the first place, there is the mythological element. The mythopœic faculty is a reality in mankind. Stories arise, grow, gather episodes with movement, transform and transmute themselves, wander far in space, get corrupted by time, in ten thousand ways suffer change and modification. Now, such stories sometimes connect themselves with living men and women. Everybody knows how many myths exist even in our own day about every prominent or peculiar person. They also gather more particularly round the memory of the dead, and especially of any very distinguished dead man or woman. Sometimes they take their rise in genuine tradition, sometimes they are pure fetches of fancy or of the romancing faculty. The ghosts or the gods are no less exempt from these mythopœic freaks than other people; and as gods go on living indefinitely, they have plenty of time for myths to gather about them. Most often, a myth is invented to account for some particular religious ceremony. Again, myths demonstrably older than a particular human being—say Cæsar, Virgil, Arthur, Charlemagne—may get fitted by later ages to those special personalities. The same thing often happens also with gods. Myth comes at last, in short, to be the history of the gods; and a personage about whom many myths exist, whether real or imaginary, a personification of nature or an abstract quality, may grow in time to be practically a divine being, and even perhaps to receive worship, the final test of divinity.