

the ideas of primitive races from actual experience or from competent testimony. The most striking thing in all savage belief is the low estimate put on man when unaided by divine, uncreated power. In Indian belief every object in the universe is divine except man. Divinities have an immense range of power, there is an incalculable difference between the greatest and the smallest of them, — some have inconceivable strength and knowledge, while others are measurably weak and of limited intelligence, — but all belong to one category, all are divine, all are extra-human.

Vegetable gods, so called, have been scoffed at by writers on mythology. The scoff is baseless, for the first people were turned, or turned themselves, into trees and various plants as frequently as into beasts and other creatures. Maize or Indian corn is a transformed god who gave himself to be eaten to save man from hunger and death. When Spanish priests saw little cakes of meal eaten ceremonially by Indians, and when the latter informed them that they were eating their god, the good priests thought this a diabolical mockery of the Holy Sacrament, and a blasphemous trick of Satan to ruin poor ignorant Indians.

I have a myth in which the main character is a violent and cruel old personage who is merciless and faith-breaking, who does no end of damage till he is cornered at last by a good hero and turned into the wild parsnip. Before transformation this old parsnip could travel swiftly, but now he must