

Attention is drawn to the statements in the Treasurer's report that dues and subscriptions totaled \$762.23 while printing and mailing four issues of the NEW PHILOSOPHY cost \$980.60, and that the membership of the Association decreased during the year from 275 to 267. If every member will make a serious effort to gain one new member before the next annual meeting the result, while it cannot be expected to be fully successful, will surely be a substantial increase in membership that will wipe out this deficit and, what is far more important, strengthen the hands of the Association in the performance of its uses. The Association believes that those uses are vital, and the infusion of new blood into the organization is much needed.

BOOK REVIEW

THE GOLDEN BOUGH, A STUDY IN MAGIC AND RELIGION. By Sir James George Frazer. One Volume Abridged Edition. New York: The Macmillan Company. (1922, reprinted as a Book-of-the-Month Club Book Dividend in 1951.)

To review a book which had its genesis over a half-century ago may seem a worthless task. However, important books are not published every day, nor classics every year. Whether *The Golden Bough* fits the latter category must wait for time to tell; but if the judgment of John Dewey, Charles Beard, and Edward Weeks be at all definitive, here is one of the most important books of the last seventy-five years.

This being the case or not, the reviewer must apologize for ignoring the bulk of the work and reflecting only on the author's general conclusions drawn from the mass of historical evidence presented. *The Golden Bough* is largely descriptive (sometimes lyrically so) of tribal ritual and folk custom the world over. But in its historical implications it is essentially a consideration of the working of magic and religion in the lives of men, and of modern science as their successor.

On the now-traditional conflict between science and religion Sir James barely touches. Indeed, as the urbane though enthusiastic historian of custom and belief, he remains amicably aloof from

the arena of argument. And his interpretation of the amazing lore which he has accumulated is presented with modesty as one possible among others.

Nonetheless, there can be no doubt in reading the book that the author's attitude and approach is that of the scientist looking with favored hindsight upon earlier systems of faith and knowledge as less true than his own. That is, he *accepts* the scientific attitude and the scientific method as true today, and judges the beliefs of magic and of religion (with equal impartiality) from his chosen standard. "Their errors were not wilful extravagances or the ravings of insanity, but simply hypotheses, justifiable as such at the time when they were propounded, but which a fuller experience has proved to be inadequate. It is only by the successive testing of hypotheses and rejection of the false that truth is at last elicited. After all, what we call truth is only the hypothesis which is found to work best" (p. 307).

This is the tolerance of a man who is sure of his grounds. The New Church student may be called equally sure of his. It remains to examine what Sir James calls the "hypotheses" of the magician and of religion, in terms of our own understanding.

Two striking conclusions of *The Golden Bough* which may seem at first sight contradictory are, first, that the belief in the efficacy of magic is more akin to modern science than to religion; and second, that magical practices preceded religious worship in the history of the race.

The similarity underlying the assumptions of magic and of science, in Sir James's view, rests on their common view of nature as unalterably regular in its order and sequence. "Magic . . . assumes that in nature one event follows another necessarily and invariably without the intervention of any spiritual or personal agency. Thus its fundamental conception is identical with that of modern science. . . . The magician does not doubt that the same causes will produce the same effects, that the performance of the proper ceremony, accompanied by the appropriate spell, will inevitably be attended by the desired result. . . . He supplicates no higher power: he sues the favor of no fickle and wayward being: he abases himself before no awful deity" (p. 56).

Chapters are devoted to evidence supporting this view of magic, in its two chief manifestations: homeopathic magic ("like produces

like," the voodoo doll-image) and contagious magic ("things once in contact are always in contact," evinced by the superstitious care given extracted teeth among many primitive peoples).

While Frazer recognizes the prevalence of magical arts in ancient Egypt and the high degree of skill in their practice, he nowhere suggests a law of correspondence between spiritual and natural phenomena which—as the Writings tell us in many places—was the key to their magic. Indeed, he does not really accept the historical faith in a supernatural world. Thus, when he speaks of the propitiation of spirits by priests with the advent of religion, he does not place these spirits on another plane of life, but simply calls them "superhuman"—"beings like men in kind, though vastly superior to them in power" (p. 824).

Sir James, in short, pictures the magicians as calling upon their own powers to invoke inevitable laws, thus bringing about desired natural events. Insofar as they believed in beings living within natural phenomena, they thought they could command these beings to their will. But after awhile the wiser among these primitives recognized that nature did not always respond readily at command, that some other force often thwarted their magic. This force they acceded to as more powerful than they; personifying it, they bowed their will and sought to conciliate it to their own ends. Thus was born religion—belief, not in one's own powers, but in those of another or others superior to oneself.

In placing the arts of magic anterior to the practice of religious faith, Sir James falls into the common error of modern historical criticism. He reaches beyond the traditional biblical story of early man, to the records unearthed in the dark caves explored by science; but in going beyond scripture, he does not go back far enough to find the truth. This, of course, he cannot do without the aid of a later revelation, but it is ironic that in pushing back his natural horizons, he has but added confusion to his knowledge.

Underlying Frazer's thesis concerning the advent of religion are two errors of even greater import. One is that God—or whatever name is assigned to deity—is capricious. The other is that the end of religion is, and ever was, to gain the personal ends of the believer. Both these fallacies stem from the anthropomorphic genesis of religion accepted by Frazer. Man created his gods in his own image; since he was selfish and wilful, so became they. Here *The Golden Bough* is professing no new idea, but simply

repeating and giving historical worth to the perversions of corrupted churches. The point of interest is that the ancient perversion can lead so directly to a modern scientific fallacy.

And fallacy begets fallacy, as crime begets crime. The gods being both powerful and capricious, it follows that they can and do, for the faithful, alter the course of nature itself. The Valley of Ajalon is only one of many places noted by Sir James that have haunted the imaginations of mankind ridden by fear and desire. Or, to put it in Sir James's even tones: "If religion involves, first, a belief in superhuman beings who rule the world, and second, an attempt to win their favor, it clearly assumes that the course of nature is to some extent variable or elastic, and that we can persuade or induce the mighty beings who control it to deflect, for our benefit, the current of events from the channel in which they would otherwise flow. Now this . . . is directly opposed to the principles of magic as well as of science, both of which assume that the processes of nature are rigid and invariable. . . . The distinction between the two conflicting views of the universe turns on their answer to the crucial question, Are the forces which govern the world conscious and personal, or unconscious and impersonal?" (pp. 58-59).

Here is the false dilemma of the human reasoner, the all-too-familiar "either-or" assertion under the conditions of which modern man must be man of science or man of religion, but not both. How unyielding is this formula today was impressed upon the reviewer by the recent matter-of-fact observation of a college professor that *if* there is a God, He must be evolving and developing like the natural universe He is creating. The mind that becomes locked in this position cannot see the possibility of two worlds of creation, each obeying its own laws with constant regularity. Yet this, in one sense, was the goal of Swedenborg's preparatory works, which culminated in his study of the human mind as the soul's repository. The whole story of the spiritual forces impinging on man's mind, rendering it a free agent amid the rigorous necessities of nature, able with growing power to see the dual operation of the Divine for the sake of eternal ends—such a story, not merely of human research and reason, is the story of science *and* religion in rational harmony—rational because Divinely given and humanly received.

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