



# The Origin of Man and of his Superstitions

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## **The Origin of Man and of his Superstitions** Carveth Read

The volume now published explains in its first part an hypothesis that the human race has descended from some ape-like stock by a series of changes which began and, until recently, were maintained by the practice of hunting in pack for animal food, instead of being content with the fruits and other nutritious products of the tropical forest. The hypothesis occurred to me many years ago, and was first published (in brief) in *The Metaphysics of Nature* (1805), Chap. XIII., and again in *Natural and Social Morals* (1909); but all it implied did not become clear until, in lecturing on Comparative Psychology, there was forced upon me the necessity of effecting an intelligible transition from the animal to the human mind, and of not being satisfied to say year after year that hands and brains were plainly so useful that they must have been developed by Natural Selection. Then one day the requisite ideas came to light; and an outline of the hypothesis was read at the Meeting of the British Association (Section H) at Birmingham in 1913, and printed in *Man*, November 1914. The Council of the Anthropological Institute has kindly consented to my using the substance of that article in the first chapter here following.

The article in *Man* dealt chiefly with the physical changes which our race has undergone. The correlative mental changes were explained in the *British Journal of Psychology* in an article which supplies the basis of the second chapter of this book.

The hunting-pack, then, was the first form of human society; and in lecturing on Ethnopsychology two questions especially interested me: (1) Under what mental conditions did the change take place from the organisation of the hunting-pack (when this weakened) to the settled life of the tribe or group? and (2) Why is the human mind everywhere befogged with ideas of Magic and Animism? They seemed at last to have the same answer: these superstitions were useful and (apparently) even necessary in giving to elders enough prestige to preserve tradition and custom when the leader of the hunt was no longer conspicuous in authority. A magic-working gerontocracy was the second form of society; and the third form was governed by a wizard-king or a priest-king, or by a king supported by wizards or priests. One must, therefore, understand the possibility of these beliefs in Magic and Animism, and how they arose and obtained a hold upon all tribes and nations; and hence the second part of this volume—on Superstition.

Some results of inquiry into these matters were also published in the *British Journal of Psychology* (namely, much of the substance of Chaps. III., IV., V., VI., and VIII.) and are here reproduced, with the editor's consent, enlarged and, for the most part, rewritten: the least altered are Chaps. VI. and VIII. Chaps. VII., IX. and X. have not hitherto been printed; but part of Chap. X. was read at the Meeting of the British Association at Bournemouth last year.

Messrs. Williams and Norgate have given permission to use the diagram in the footnote to p. 3, based on one of Prof. Keith's in his *Antiquity of Man*.

Extensive use has, of course, been made of the works of Darwin, Herbert Spencer and E. B. Tylor, and (among living authors) of the volumes of Sir J. G. Frazer and Prof. Ed. Westermarck. I am grateful to my friends and colleagues, Prof. Spearman, Prof. J. P. Hill and Prof. Arthur Keith for assistance in various ways. Mr. Pycraft, too, of the Natural History Museum has given me important information; and my old friend, Mr. Thomas Whittaker, has helped me, as usual, when my need was greatest.

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