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# THE ORIGIN OF MAN

BY

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EMERITUS PROFESSOR IN THE UNIVERSITY  
OF LONDON

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**PREFACE TO *THE ORIGIN OF MAN*  
*AND OF HIS SUPERSTITIONS***

FIRST EDITION

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* (1905), Chap. xv, § 3, and again in *Natural and Social Morals* (1909), Chap. vii, § 2; 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 a 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

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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 Professor 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.

C. R.

*University College, London,*  
4 July, 1920.

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SECOND EDITION

THE original volume on *The Origin of Man and of His Superstitions* appeared to some reviewers and to some of my friends to consist of two parts not closely enough connected to justify their inclusion in one book. My own view was that Man as we know him lives everywhere under some kind of government or social regulation, which again depends for its efficacy (except perhaps in the most civilised states) very much upon the prevalence of certain superstitious beliefs. Social life is more influential than anything else in developing the mental and moral qualities that constitute his true humanity. Since, then, his social life has depended on his superstitions, an account of these is necessary to the understanding of his origin: a biological explanation is not enough. Still, the reflection that many who are interested in zoological Man may feel little concern for his beliefs, whilst others to whom these beliefs are an engrossing study may care little about his physical evolution, made it seem desirable to produce the two parts in separate volumes. Accordingly, this volume presents only the first part (Chaps I and II) of the original work, rearranged and much enlarged; and another book on *Man and His Superstitions* (comprising the last seven chapters of the former work) treats of Belief in general, Magic, Animism and related subjects.

In a long footnote at the end of Chap. I, § 1 (p. 4 of the first edition) are mentioned all the works indicating agreement with my account of our remote ancestry that were known to me four years ago. Recently, however, a much more explicit statement of these ideas has come to my knowledge in *Man and His Ancestors* by Mr Ch. Morris<sup>1</sup>; and I take this opportunity of repairing my oversight. Mr Morris has clearly stated the hypothesis that Man was differentiated from the anthropoids by

<sup>1</sup> Macmillan and Co., N. York, 1900; 2nd imp. 1902.

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adopting the life of a hunter, and has drawn some of the consequences. It is comforting to have a close ally in such a risky undertaking. Mr Morris is (I suppose) an American; and to give our ideas prestige it is a pity he should not have been more of a foreigner. Still, as the hypothesis must now be considered his property in virtue of prior publication, I am relieved of the obligation to be modest in speaking of it, and might even (if occasion offered) venture the length of saying how well I think of it.

Though some readers have found my argument plausible, few have been satisfied with it, and many regard it as vain and fanciful. The fact is that most students of animate nature are busy with experimental Biology, and admirable results they have obtained. It is the fashion to neglect general reasoning (though like ours proceeding upon acknowledged facts) that does not lead to direct experiment; and in this case experiments cannot be made. One reviewer thinks it enough to say—*“Die Zeit, in welcher man für solcher Hypothesen in der Wissenschaft Interesse hatte oder sogar sich begeistern konnte, ist wohl endgültig vorüber.”* In short, it is out of fashion, and there is as much a fashion in philosophemes as in furbelows. A well-disciplined pack follows only one quarry at a time. So irresistible is the fashion that we are told that “a generation has arisen that knows not Darwin.” The unhappy generation must have been badly taught. No wonder they will not listen to Mr Morris. The arrival of Man in the world is the most wonderful event since the formation of protoplasm; yet in minds that cannot explain it in their own way it excites no curiosity. Content with the evidence of their close relationship to the apes, they are indifferent to the causes that have made them a little lower than the angels.

I must venture to say that Man is not explained by showing his relationship to the apes. That is a classification on the ground of resemblance, and the resemblance is sufficiently explained by the hypothesis of heredity. But Man is constituted not by his resemblance to the apes but by his differences from them, and the differences cannot be explained by heredity. To indi-



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cate the probable cause of the differences is the purpose of Mr Morris's book and of mine. Such a problem cannot be peculiar to the case of Man: every species of plant and of animal presents the same problem; and we sometimes meet with suggestions as to the causes of their differentiation—as that the horse's single-toed hoof is an adaptation to open dry plains; that the spots, or stripes, or fulvous coloration of certain cats is an adaptation to life in forest, or jungle, or desert; and many other examples of "protective mimicry." With each species we may inquire—what causes in its genesis, habits or environment so modified its heredity as to establish its differences. The task is intimidatingly vast; but until it is accomplished in a considerable number of instances we do not understand evolution. Natural selection gives no particular explanation of anything unless we can point to the particular conditions (*a*) of variation (which may be investigated experimentally), and (*b*) of the habits and environment which determined the selection. For instance, in our own case, the environment (probably open or thinly-wooded country), wherever situated, must have been favourable to the enterprise of that remote ancestor of ours who took to hunting for a livelihood, and whose descendants, continuing that habit, acquired age by age the specific characters that constitute human nature.

C. R.

*Solihull,**September, 1924.*

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