

THE MAKING OF RELIGION

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The making of religion by Samuel M. Crothers

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SAMUEL M. CROTHERS

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ONE day as you stood at the foot of a mountain you looked up and saw a little cloud upon the summit. Elsewhere the sky was clear, but on the peak the cloud rested as if it were becalmed. You climbed the mountain. Then you saw that it was not calmly resting there, 'shepherded by the slow, unwilling wind.' The wind was keen, and was driving the cloud away.

You stood and watched the particles of hurrying mist. Every instant they were

being driven away before the wind. So you said to yourself, 'I will wait, and in a little time the cloud will be dissipated.'

You wait, but you wait in vain. At length you realize that you are in the laboratory of the sky—you are in the place where clouds are being made; you are watching not only something that is being destroyed, but something that is being created. The warm air is rising from the valley, bearing with it an invisible burden. As it comes to the cool mountain-summit that burden is revealed—the cloud appears. What you are watching is the process both of destruction and of creation. The same winds that are blowing the particles of mist away are also the forces that are creating the cloud.

Upon the summit of human life, at its highest point, there has always been a mystery. Always there have been the forces that seem to be dissipating that mystery—the keen winds of thought continually blowing the cloud away; and yet the wonder of it is that the mystery abides—the pillar of cloud by day—the mystery of love, of wonder, of worship, and aspiration—all that we call Religion.

We speak of ourselves as being in an age of transition, which only means that we can see what is going on in our age more clearly than we can see or imagine what has been going on in other ages. We can see the particles blown before the wind, the changing of the substance of the cloud. One mystery

after another is explained, yet all the time the wonder grows.

It is from this standpoint, that I wish to approach the subject of the Making of Religion. It is a process that is never finished. It is going on all about us. It passes through many phases, and the forces which are destroying are the same forces which are creating. Let us ask ourselves, not what are the arguments for this or that form of opinion in regard to religion. What we are interested in is the nature of the energy that is behind it all. What are the forces which tend to make religions, and which impel to worship and to hopeful service?

The great thing for the student of religion

is to have a strong grasp upon his subject-matter. That which strikes one in many books is the fact that the writers in their attempt to give a clear definition and analysis of Religion lose the sense of the reality of that which is the object of their research. What they have defined is some single phase of historic religion. It is

The fluent image of the unstable Best

Still changing in their very hands that wrought.

After catching one image distinctly and making it the standard for all else, all further change seems to be sheer destruction.

In the attempt to find the origin of religion we are likely to lose ourselves in antiquarian research. We take it for granted that it must be found in its purity in its historic