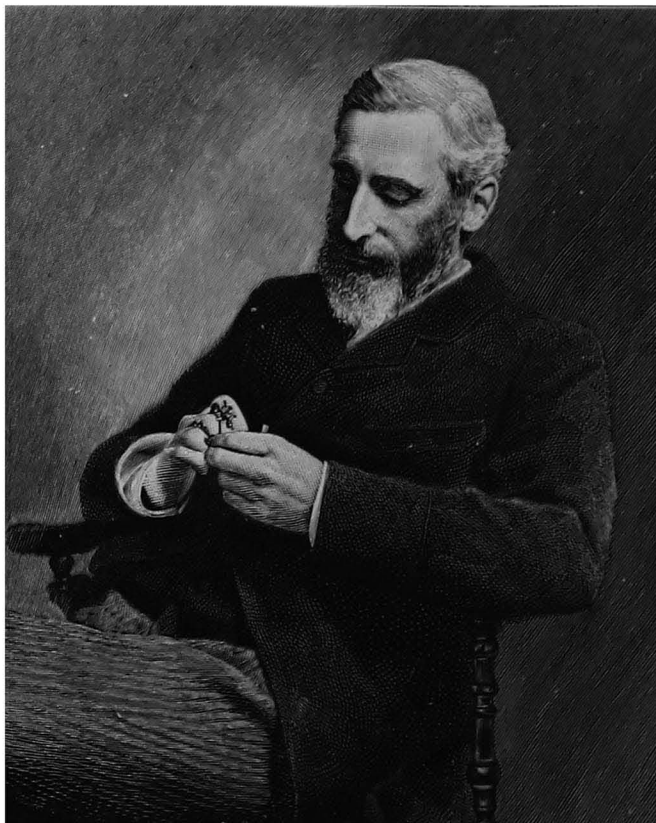


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THE HAND OF GOD
AND OTHER POSTHUMOUS ESSAYS



THE HAND OF GOD

AND OTHER POSTHUMOUS ESSAYS

TOGETHER WITH SOME REPRINTED PAPERS

BY

GRANT ALLEN

[ISSUED FOR THE RATIONALIST PRESS ASSOCIATION, LIMITED.]

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<i>(The foregoing four chapters, hitherto unpublished, were intended to form part of a supplemental volume to "The Evolution of the Idea of God.")</i>	
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PREFATORY NOTE

THE hitherto unpublished portion of this book, comprising the chapters on "The Hand of God" and "The Worship of Death," was intended by Grant Allen as the opening section of a volume supplemental to, and confirmatory of, the theory advanced in the *Evolution of the Idea of God*, of which a slightly abridged edition is included in the R. P. A. Reprints. Twenty years' study of the subject convinced him that "in its origin the conception of a God is nothing more than that of a dead man regarded as a still surviving ghost or a spirit, and endowed with increased or supernatural powers and qualities" (*Evolution of the Idea of God*, end of Chapter I.); corpse-worship being, as he tersely puts it, "the protoplasm of religion."

Largely influenced at the outset of his inquiry by the examples and arguments marshalled in Herbert Spencer's *Principles of Sociology*, he independently examined a mass of material, the result being to confirm him in the theory summarised in the foregoing quotation. We had many long discussions on the matter; "of course, as usual, we split on the rock of Animism, which, when my long-delayed book on religion comes out, will be ground to powder like the images of Baal," he humorously says in one of his letters to me. I could never understand why he, whose bones and marrow the theory of unbroken continuity in mental development permeated, did not see that the cult and deification of the dead could not be a primary stage in the history of religion. He recognised that religion is a branch of sociology, to be included in what Spencer termed "the super-organic"; yet he would see in ancestor-worship (the importance of which, as a well-nigh universally-diffused cult, cannot be overrated) the one ultimate source of the God-idea. For what is called Animism, or the accrediting of things, both living and non-living, with indwelling spirits, *is itself not primary*. It must have been preceded by a stage when man's impressions of the powers around him, whose influence, for good or evil, was ever being borne in upon him, were vague, indeterminate, and impersonal. Such a pre-animistic stage is represented

to-day by the jungle dwellers of Chutia Nagpur, of whom, in his *People of India*, Sir Henry Risley says: "In most cases the indefinite something which they fear and attempt to propitiate is not a *person* at all in any sense of the word.....All over Chutia Nagpur we find sacred groves, the abode of equally indeterminate things who are represented by no symbols, and of whose form and function no one can give an intelligible account. They have not been clothed with individual attributes; they linger on as survivals of the impersonal stage of religion" (p. 215). This falls into line with all that is to be logically assumed as to the continuity of the animal and the human psychology; hence, there is no point in the process on which we can lay finger and say, Here man began to be religious; because what has become explicit in him is implicit in his nearest congeners.

This admitted, the value of what Grant Allen tells us about the later (in themselves immeasurably early) stages of the development of the world's religions is not to be easily over-estimated. His skill in disentangling a mass of material and presenting it in coherent form; his insight into its significance, and in the resolution of the fundamental elements of which it is composed, are remarkable. What is apparent in his writings was yet more so in his talk, and in this they who were privileged to hear it will testify that it brought them into contact with one of the most fertile and suggestive minds of our time.

A brief outline of his career may conclude this Note. He was born at Alwington, near Kingston, Canada, on February 24th, 1848. On the spear-side he was Irish (his father, who survived him, was a clergyman); on the spindle-side there was a blend of Scotch and French blood. Until he was thirteen his father was his tutor. Never robust, he could find no zest in the games of boyhood; but this left him free for rambles among the Thousand Isles and other happy hunting grounds for flower and bird and insect-rambles, whose outcome was to be manifest in the delightful nature-studies which are the theme of the *Evolutionist at Large*, of *Flowers and their Pedigrees*, and numerous kindred volumes. From school at Dieppe, and afterwards at Birmingham, he passed to Oxford, matriculating in 1867 at Merton College. His university life was hampered by narrow means; adverse turns in the family fortune, never large, threw him on his own efforts, and he took to that usual resource of the impecunious—coaching and private tutoring. He accepted masterships in Brighton College, Cheltenham College, and Reading Grammar School succes-

sively, supplementing a slender income by essays in journalism, using any spare time in pursuit of what to him were one—philosophy and science; reading Spencer, Darwin, and their intellectual kindred, in whose footsteps he learned to tread with the easy grace evidenced by his books. In 1873 he was a successful candidate for the Professorship of Mental and Moral Philosophy in a newly-founded Government College at Spanish Town, Jamaica, the object of which was the education of coloured youth. It was a failure which his succession to the Principalship could not avert; the scheme was too ambitious and academic; the place, he said, "should have been run as a Board school." When I visited the derelict building in 1905, I was shown cases filled with insect-eaten mortar-boards and gowns, while the ordure of birds and bats lined the rickety stairs. In 1876 Allen came back empty in pocket, but rich in garnered facts stored up during his sojourn among "All shades," to cite the title of one of his novels; facts which were to be deftly worked into that and other stories, notably his masterly "Reverend John Creedy." His struggle, aggravated by ill-health, to get bread for himself and his brave helpmeet (their only child, a son, was born 1878), was long and sharp. "There is no money in science," he said in bitterness, and his first book, a remarkable treatise on *Physiological Esthetics*, which won praise from Spencer, left him £50 to the bad.

Work on the *Indian Gazetteer* at Edinburgh, and fitful guineas for scientific "middles" in the *Cornhill* and other serials, helped to keep the "wolf from the door"; but his income remained barely enough for even modest demands until he discovered in himself a certain aptitude for story-telling, drawing, as remarked above, mainly on his tropical experiences for "copy." The result was to give him the means of recruiting health by spending winters abroad—an absolute necessity for him until he found in the upland air of Hind Head a substitute, making hibernation at Antibes no longer necessary. Though he enjoyed novel-writing (he drolly said that he "disapproved of fiction"), his heart was in serious pursuits, and he rejoiced in the stretches of leisure which enabled him to give to the small public avid for such things works of the type of his *Evolution of the Idea of God*. But he was not to live long in the land where, too late, he had come to a goodly heritage. In the spring of 1899, while staying at his beloved Venice, about whose art treasures, as about those of other cities, he has written so illuminatively, he was seized with

illness, which made return to England imperative. In the following October, after weeks of acute suffering, there came "the crowning impotence of death."

Those who knew him in the fire-side intimacy which reveals a man will recognise true assessment of him in this tribute with which his old friend, the late Professor F. York Powell, enriched the *Memoir* published shortly after Allen's death: "He was one of the best and truest friends a man could have—generous, fair-minded, and unforgetful of the old comradeship; so that, though he was always able down to the last to make new friends, I do not think that he ever lost his old friends, save those whom death too soon removed. I do not see how such a straightforward, sympathetic, enthusiastic nature as Allen's could have passed through the world without influencing those with whom he came in contact very definitely for the better. Few men I have known well have cared more for the essentials than Grant Allen. Truth, justice, pity, love, gratitude, and sympathy were to him throughout his life real things to be upheld at all hazards. His faith was always great; his hope was continually and wonderfully sustained; his charity was invincible."

EDWARD CLODD.

August, 1909.

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