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EDWIN W. SMITH

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LONDON
STUDENT CHRISTIAN MOVEMENT

32 RUSSELL SQUARE, W.C. 1

1929

First published . . . May 1929

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN BY
THE EDINBURGH PRESS, 9 AND 11 YOUNG STREET, EDINBURGH

PREFACE

IN 1927 and 1928, at the invitation of the Church Missionary Society, I delivered a course of lectures on the religion of the Africans. They were called "The Long Lectures," not because of their dimensions, but because the Lectureship was instituted by the late Rev. James Long. The lectures were extensively reported week by week in *East Africa*, and I received many requests for their publication in full. Hence this volume. I have made certain additions and emendations of a minor character, but otherwise the lectures now appear as they were delivered.

Since they were prepared, the S.C.M. has issued the English edition of my friend Professor W. C. Willoughby's book, *The Soul of the Bantu*, in which he deals mainly with ancestor-worship. My readers who wish to follow up that side of the subject cannot do better than study Mr Willoughby's volume.

EDWIN W. SMITH.

20th March 1929.

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THE SECRET OF THE AFRICAN

CHAPTER I

THE BASIS OF AFRICAN RELIGION

I

I PROPOSE to begin by narrating a series of events which occurred at or near Kasenga, a mission station in Northern Rhodesia, in the year 1913.

There was living at that time a man named Mupumani. He was middle-aged and had the misfortune of being a leper. I was not acquainted with him previous to the happenings which I am about to describe, and if he had come at all under the influence of the mission it was only in an indirect way.

Mupumani retired to rest one evening as usual, and slept. Then he heard a movement and, looking up, saw a man's leg dangling down from the roof of his hut. A body appeared following the leg, and presently the person to whom it belonged reached the floor and stood by Mupumani's bedside. He could not see the person's face. The stranger lifted him upon his shoulders and carried him off, apparently through the hole made in the roof. Mupumani did not know whither he was conveyed,

but presently found himself in the presence of Namulenga, the Creator. Namulenga was about to take Mupumani's leprous body from him and mould for him a new body, with complete fingers and toes, when another person intervened and said: "No, do not do that. If Mupumani goes back to earth with a new body people will die of amazement to see him." So Namulenga desisted, and gave him messages to take to the people. He proposed to give Mupumani a small calabash filled with blood: "You are to pour this out," he said, "and all the people will die." But once again the second figure intervened and restrained Namulenga from carrying out his purpose. The Creator then instructed Mupumani to tell people, in his name, that certain tribal customs were contrary to his will, and must be abandoned. The Africans of that region are accustomed to kill many cattle when a man of any importance dies—as many as a hundred head may be slaughtered during the funeral rites of a great chief. The mourners rush about with spears, and go through all the evolutions of a mock battle—the men being dressed as if for war. All this, Namulenga declared, was to cease. He had often, he said, sat by invisible and watched the antics, which were so ridiculous that he had split his sides with laughing at them. He, the Creator, took men from earth, and caused them to be reborn, as it pleased him; it was not for people to mourn at the time of death, but to accept his will. Furthermore, he told Mupumani to denounce witchcraft. "Go down again," concluded Namulenga, "and carry my words. Perhaps the people will refuse to listen,

and will revile you; perhaps they will hearken and treat you well. I shall see."

Dismissed in this way from the presence of the Creator, Mupumani found himself back in his house: how he got there he could not tell.

He was not disobedient to the Creator's commands. He began to tell the message to the people of his village. In a short time the news of what had happened spread throughout the country and people flocked to see Mupumani and to listen to his story. They came from hundreds of miles around. Mupumani repeated the Creator's message to all who came to him. The impression which he made was profound. The people demanded fresh signs and wonders. They asked for magic medicine to make their corn grow and to give them success in hunting, and Mupumani, much against his will, had to yield to their insistence, thereby departing from the purity of his original mission. With that perversity which seems to be inbred in our human nature, the people, though they flocked to him and acknowledged the reality of the revelation, showed little signs of obeying the Creator's commands, but required loaves and fishes. Mupumani regretted the calabash of blood. With that in his hand, he thought, perhaps his message would have been more persuasive.

There were folk who scoffed openly at the pretensions of Mupumani, the prophet. A man named Mungaba, who lived near me, was one of these sceptics. He declared that he would not go to hear the madman's ravings. Suddenly, without

warning, more than one member of his household was stricken mysteriously by death, to the consternation of the unbeliever. Could this be the act of the Creator as a warning to him?

Then something else happened. In the centre of the Kasenga district stands a great grove of ancient trees sacred to Shimunenga, a revered ancestor who is regarded as the demigod of the community. He communicates occasionally with his people by means of a medium. While people were wondering what had caused the sudden death of the members of Mungaba's household this medium fell into a trance. The news quickly spread, and people gathered to hear the expected message from Shimunenga. It came: "I am Shimunenga. Mungaba's children have been slain by the Creator because Mungaba scoffed at the Creator's messenger. It is your habit, it seems, to disbelieve, and scoff at, those who come to announce the will of God. There is the missionary, too—you do not listen to him. Look out for yourselves!"

This announcement made by the medium in a state of trance caused a great sensation. The fame of it spread; those who had hitherto mocked at Mupumani hastened to travel to his village and join the crowds that were listening to his oft-repeated story.

Then happened another portent. Some of the women of the Kasenga villages had been going for some days to collect firewood from a great tree which had been blown down in a storm. One morning they found the great tree standing

upright! You cannot imagine the excitement that prevailed that day. A number of men and women came to tell me about it, and I went with them to the spot. A brief examination convinced me that the strange tale was true. The great tree was indeed standing. That it had been lying prone for some time was evident, for it had left its marks on the soil. The side of the tree which had been in contact with the earth was marked by the ravages of white ants, and fragments of bark loosened by them littered the ground where the tree had lain. Moreover, a fire had swept over the forest and the side of the tree where it had not been in contact with the ground was charred. It appeared to be certain that the tree had been blown down; there was no doubt that it was now standing erect. It did not seem possible that human hands had raised it. For a time I was puzzled, and then the explanation dawned upon me. When the tree was torn up by the gale a deep hole was made. The women came and lopped off many of the branches, and they dug away under the lower end of the tree to get at the roots. Thus they had lightened the tree at the top, and had enlarged the hole, until the tree, weighted at the lower end by the great mass of earth attached to the roots, had simply tipped up and stood erect. This, it seemed to me, is what had happened; but the explanation did not commend itself to the people. They were convinced that occult powers had been at work.

Nor was this all. One evening, some men who were returning from a hunt had to cross the river

which ran about a mile from their village. They left their canoes and mounted the high bank in the direction of home. Before them in the dusk they were surprised to see a tall figure clad from head to foot in white. They allowed it to get well ahead of them, and then followed. Midway along the path it vanished from their eyes; they could see no footprints on the sandy path; the figure simply melted away. They said it was a ghost, though how a dead man of their community could appear in white they did not know.

This accumulation of portents stirred the people to the depths of their being. I had seen them in many frames of mind—at times placid, easy-going, insouciant; at other times, pulsating with an almost uncontrollable passion for war against their neighbours; but at no time had I ever seen them worked up to such a pitch of excitement. They wondered what was coming next. An indescribable sense of awe seemed to pervade the community, as if the veil hiding the invisible world had been rent asunder, and there was no telling what would happen.

It was my custom to gather people together, in one village or another, on Sunday. As a rule my congregation comprised a hundred or so. I sat in their midst in the open air and talked to them simply, taught them to sing hymns of my own composing, taught them to pray in a Christian manner. I went as usual one Sunday, after warning the people in a certain village of my intention. Instead of the hundred or so that I expected, I found upwards of fifteen hundred

people assembled, and immediately became aware that something was about to happen. I should explain that up to this time the tribe as a whole had shown no sign of accepting the Gospel; here and there an individual had come out, but the mass appeared, not hostile, and not altogether indifferent, but merely interested. In all my experience I never knew such a meeting as that proved to be. Abandoning the simple instruction I had intended to give, I stood up in the midst of that throng, and preached as I never have preached, before or since. Presently I launched an appeal for acceptance of the message I had brought. "You know what I teach: you know how I have tried to bring you out of the twilight of ignorance concerning God in which you and your fathers have walked; I am here to offer you a new way of life; when will you accept?" I was interrupted at that point. The whole multitude that had been listening to me intently sprang to their feet, raised their arms above their heads and roared in chorus: "We will accept! We will accept!" It was an overwhelming moment.

2

I do not propose to go on further with the story. I want to examine with you the events that led up to this great ebullition of emotion. They bring us to the heart of the rudimentary forms of religion.

I do not offer these portents as something unique in the African's experience. It is possible that they occur rarely in the cumulative manner I have described; but single events of this nature do,

I believe, often happen. Moreover, other mysteries force themselves upon the African's notice—mystery hems them round as with a garment on every side. Things happen which prove to them that the tangible and visible does not exhaust the realities of the universe—there is always something beyond their grasp, beyond their ken, things uncanny, outside the range of the ordinary.

What I want to say is that these are real experiences. They do not have their origin in the imaginations of poets and artists. The things happen. And I want us to try to distinguish the occurrences from the explanation which they and we offer.

Mupumani goes to sleep at night as we all do; and his sleep is disturbed as ours often is. He finds himself carried away into an unknown region, where he sees and hears things. We explain this by saying that he had a dream; and if we belong to a particular school of the new psychology we shall endeavour to show that the dream represents the fulfilment of a wish, perhaps a concealed wish, repressed into the subconscious during waking life and expressed in the dream symbolically by a series of dream-pictures and actions. Mupumani, not being a psycho-analyst or a psychologist of the Freudian type, says that he was carried away to some region where he heard the voice of the Creator. He has no doubt whatsoever that this is what actually happened to him; when, in obedience to the voice, he conveys the message to his fellow-men, he does not speak of a dream; he tells

them he has heard the voice of God. His dream, if dream it is, is coloured by the traditional teaching of his fathers. They have taught him that this world did not come into being of itself, but was fashioned by Namulenga, the Creator; they have taught him also that the body which can be seen and handled is not the whole of man, but that there exists within him something else which can live independently from the body, and in that state can see and hear things that are beyond the range of the physical ear and eye. They explain the occurrences, that is to say, by recourse to the concepts of God and the soul. But I suppose the experience came prior to the explanation—before the belief. In any case the experience and the explanation are not to be confused.

So, too, with the so-called medium who fell into a trance. He lay there as if in profound sleep when sounds issued from his lips which the people who heard them interpreted as a message uttered, not by the person they actually saw, but by one who died a great many years ago—perhaps two or three centuries ago—but who continues to live in invisible form; a man who knows the mind of the Creator and communicates that mind to the people whose chief he was when he lived on earth in bodily form. We may interpret the event in other terms; we may affirm that the people who say they heard the voice were deluded; or we may resort to telepathy; or we may talk about multiple personalities. We are all familiar with the fact that persons exist in civilised society who claim, or for whom it is claimed, that they are mediums of

communication between discarnate beings and living people. So far as I know the phenomena reported in Europe or America do not differ essentially from those of which we learn in Africa; and many people here interpret them as the Africans do. Whatever the true explanation may be, the phenomena do occur; and we may suppose that they occurred before any explanation of them was sought.

So, again, with the tree which stood upright. I have no doubt that the event happened much as I have described. Independently of any explanation it was a fact that appealed to the senses. I explained it by reference to the little I know of the laws of gravitation; it was not necessary to deduce any occult power at work, such as that of a spirit. The Africans interpreted the fact in accordance with their traditional belief in the agency of spirits; it was an omen, a message from the Creator, not delivered in words but embodied in a deed, to warn them against obduracy of mind.

And, lastly, the white figure discerned by the returning hunters on the road before them, may be explained in more ways than one. You may say, if you like, that it was an hallucination; in other words that the men saw something which was not there. The hunters said they had seen a ghost; and thousands of people, who are not Africans, have in similar circumstances declared the same. They were sure they had seen something, and, having been taught from childhood that there are such things as ghosts, they inferred that what they saw was a ghost.

These events which I have described are but examples of what continually occurs. Prophets do not every day come with a message from the unseen; only once in a lifetime may a fallen tree regain its upright position; Africans do not see ghosts every evening, nor are trance messages received every day. But things are constantly happening which evoke wonder, and call for interpretation. The movement of leaves on the trees; the descent of water from above; the rolling of the thunder; the flashing of fire in the sky; the strange action of certain animals; the mysterious powers of drugs to heal or to harm; the intoxicating effect of beer made from honey or grain—in short, the thousand mysteries all around them excite deep feelings in Africans: they know that they stand before a Presence, which surpasses definition. We have penetrated deeper than they into the secrets of Nature: or at least we think we have done so. We can explain thunder and lightning, and the rest; yet even to us this sense of ineffable mystery abides. John Ruskin gave expression to the feeling that almost overwhelms us at times when he said that in his youth he had “a continual perception of Sanctity in the whole of nature, from the slightest thing to the vastest; an instinctive awe, mixed with delight; an indefinable thrill, such as we sometimes imagine to indicate the presence of a disembodied spirit. I could only feel this perfectly when I was alone; and then it would often make me shiver from head to foot with the joy and fear of it, when after being some time away from hills I first got to the shore

of a mountain river, where the brown water circled among the pebbles, or when I first saw the swell of distant land against the sunset, or the first low broken wall, covered with mountain moss. I cannot in the least describe the feeling. . . .”

You may think it absurd to quote John Ruskin in this connection. You cannot imagine the uncultured African to possess anything of that fine sensibility which marks the English poet; yet those of us who study the Africans are aware that their feeling has the same quality, however less intense it may be.

3

We are here at the root of rudimentary religion.

Religion, as we have often been told, has not to do with any one of the elements of our psychical life. Primarily perhaps, it is feeling; but it is not feeling alone. It has to do with the intellect; we are constrained to find a reason for what arouses our religious emotion; but religion, even in the lowest stage, is more than knowledge and belief. Religion, we are sure, must issue in practice, or it ceases to be true religion; but it is more than morality—more even than morality touched with emotion. The three elements enter into religion: the emotional, the intellectual, the volitional, corresponding to the three elements into which psychologists analyse the condition of mind at any moment: feeling, cognition, conation. We feel; we know, or seek to know; we do, or desire to do.

“The dogmas of religion,” says Dr Whitehead

in his recent book, *Religion in the Making*, "are the attempts to formulate in precise terms the truths disclosed in the religious experience of mankind. In exactly the same way the dogmas of physical science are the attempts to formulate in precise terms the truths disclosed in the sense-perception of mankind."

You may think it incongruous to associate dogmas with Africans; but however vaguely formulated they may be (and the vagueness to our minds is largely due to our lack of understanding), the dogmas are there. We have encountered in this chapter some of the articles of their creed; their belief in a Creator; in the soul; in the survival of personality after death; in the reality of communications from the invisible spirits. These represent their attempts to formulate the truths disclosed in their religious experience.

We put our religion to work. We seek to come into communion with God: to make use of the ineffable Power to which our religion introduces us. And Africans do not differ essentially from us in this respect. They express their religious belief in various rites—in prayers and offerings, by means of which they have communion with the unseen. Their religion has practical effects upon their conduct as members of the community.

Behind this practice and this creed there is an experience. There is an immediate awareness of Something other than themselves; Something whose character is not yet known; Something or Somebody. And so closely attending that awareness that we cannot separate them, there is a

feeling of the uncanny, a thrill of awe and reverence, a sense of inferiority and dependence. It is that feeling which pervaded those African communities when the mysterious portents occurred which I have described.

In the case of the African tribe with which I had to do, some definition of the Powers manifested was already current; the people had a name for the Creator; they had a theory of trance; they could identify a ghost. They were not in the most primitive stage of religion; but I am suggesting that the deep sense of awe which fell upon them, a sense of awe accompanying the awareness of something uncanny in their midst, is the original and basic element in African religion—indeed in all religion—preceding all attempts at the formulation of a creed, and all efforts to conciliate or make use of the Power which was manifested.

No doubt you are familiar with Dr Otto's book, entitled *The Holy*, which has exercised so great an influence over our thinking in recent years. He coined a name for this specific non-rational apprehension of the Something, of which I have spoken. The Latin word *numen* signifies supernatural divine power of the most general and undefined nature; and from *numen* Dr Otto formed the adjective "numinous." The two words, it must be remembered, bear no ethical import; we must not confound them with "holy, holiness," "sacred, sanctity." They bear no ethical import, but stand for the specific non-rational religious apprehension and its object, at all its levels, from the first dim stirrings where religion can hardly yet be said to

exist to the most exalted forms of spiritual experience. The object of this non-rational apprehension is called by Dr Otto *mysterium tremendum*. It is something outside the self, something which grips or stirs the mind of man: a mystery inexpressible and above all creatures. When we meet it we respond in a specific kind of way by a fear which is yet other than mere fear—a terror fraught with an inward shuddering. "It first begins," says Dr Otto, "to stir in the feeling of 'something uncanny,' 'eerie,' or 'weird.' It is this feeling which, emerging in the mind of primeval man, forms the starting-point for the entire religious development in history. 'Dæmons' and 'gods' alike spring from this root, and all the products of 'mythological apperception' or 'fantasy' are nothing but different modes in which it has been objectified. And all ostensible explanations of the origin of religion in terms of animism or magic or folk psychology are doomed from the outset to wander astray and miss the real goal of their inquiry, unless they recognise this fact of our nature—primary, unique, underivable from anything else—to be the basic factor and the basic impulse underlying the entire process of religious evolution."¹

Dr Otto insists that the numinous emotion is not a "natural" fear, but a specific feeling, with a quality all its own. We know, perhaps, the terror which creeps over us when we come into the presence of the supernatural—the uncanny; or we know, at least, the feeling which steals over us when

¹ *The Holy*, p. 15.

we listen to ghost stories in the uncertain light of a winter's fire—when our flesh creeps, and we feel impelled to look over our shoulder to see what is there, yet dreading what we may see. You remember how Eliphaz described his experience to Job:—

Amid thoughts (arising) out of visions of the night,
 When deep sleep falleth on men,
 Fear came upon me, and trembling,
 And filled my bones with dread.
 And a breath passed before my face;
 The hair of my flesh bristled up.
It stood still, but I discerned not its appearance;
 (It was) a form before mine eyes.
 I heard a still voice (saying):
 "Can a mortal be just before God?
 Or can a man be pure before his Maker?"¹

The feeling we have in the presence of the uncanny is the numinous emotion in its crudest form; in its highest form it is felt by the mystic whose soul "held speechless, trembles inwardly to the furthest fibre of its being" in the realised presence of God.

It may be, as Dr Otto suggests, that when the rationalising process sets in and concepts of ghosts and spirits are formed, the numinous experience is weakened and deadened. He means, I suppose, that most of us experience it more rarely, and with a lesser degree of intensity, than the primitive pagan whose creed is not yet formulated. The Africans with whom I have dealt in this chapter are certainly, as I have already said, not in the stage where

¹ Job iv. 13-17. Driver and Gray's translation.

no religious concepts have yet been formed; but in the presence of the *mysterium tremendum*, manifested in the events I have described, they were moved to the depths by the numinous feeling.

A stage is reached at some time when men try to appropriate the prodigious force of the *numen* for their own purposes. Here we enter upon the subject of our second chapter: magic and religion. The Africans whom I know have reached that stage, and I shall describe one of the processes by means of which they seek to control and conciliate the Power of which they are aware.

In the earlier stage, however, men did not, we may suppose, seek to control and conciliate. Religion and magic had not yet dawned. There was an awareness of the *mysterium tremendum*; but the intellect had not yet begun to play upon it, trying to define and rationalise it by myths and creeds, nor had the practical mind sought to use it by means of prayer or spell.

If you ask me to point to any people in the world who are to-day in this hypothetical simplest stage where all is feeling, and creed and practice do not exist, I cannot oblige you. There may be such people, but we do not know them. I put it to you as a working hypothesis that religion and magic spring from this intuition of mysterious force working in the world. It is not the outcome of any ratiocinative process; men do not reach it by reasoning. They are simply aware of it; and they feel awed by its presence. Reasoning and ritual follow; but this experience is the ground out of which they spring. And because we never grow

out of our sense of the mysterious, but the universe becomes the more mysterious the more we learn of its secrets, men never leave behind the emotion of wonder and awe. St Paul was possessed of it: "Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and the knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgements, and his ways past tracing out!"

CHAPTER II

MAGIC AND RELIGION

I

WE have spoken of man's awareness of mysterious power working in the world, and of his emotional response thereto. Sooner or later men, being what they are, were bound not only to reason as to the nature of that power, but also to seek to ally themselves with it, to control or conciliate it, to use it, or to dodge it, or to render it innocuous, according to the conclusions at which they arrived as to its character. We are now to consider the methods men have adopted in these directions.

I ought to say that it should not be forgotten that magic and religion do not make up the whole of life, however great a part—and it is a very great part—they play in the life of Africans and other peoples in the same stage of culture. Professor Malinowski has done good service by insisting upon this fact in his brilliant essay in the collection published some time ago under the title *Science, Religion, and Reality*. He controverts the opinion expressed by Professor Levy-Bruhl and others that these peoples are completely immersed in a mystical frame of mind, incapable of dispassionate and consistent observation, and unable to draw any

benefit from experience, to construct or comprehend even the most elementary laws of Nature. What Dr Malinowski says of Melaneseans is true also of Africans: "Success in their agriculture depends . . . upon their extensive knowledge of the classes of the soil, of the various cultivated plants, of the mutual adaptation of these two factors, and, last not least, upon their knowledge of the importance of accurate and hard work." In their fishing, their iron-smelting, and their other arts and industries, they are guided by knowledge "and by a conviction that this knowledge is true and reliable, that it can be counted upon and must be scrupulously obeyed." Africans and other barbarians observe and think in a way that we should call rational, and the inferences which they draw determine much of their activity. They possess, that is to say, the rudiments of science.

Yet, mixed with procedure which we, from our more enlightened elevation, should pronounce to be rational, there are rites and practices which seem to us to be utterly irrational. In their agriculture they know the seeds which should be planted in a particular soil, and they know the fertilising virtue of wood ash; so far, we should say, their knowledge is sound; but we should not agree that seed is certain to grow when it is planted by a person who has *chesha*—a "lucky hand." We see no sense in a prohibition of whistling in a field when the seed has been sown. The Africans among whom I lived practised rational methods of iron-smelting; but at the same time they were convinced that the

ore would not melt in the kiln if any of the workers broke the rule of strict continence during the operation; and certain medicines had to be placed in the kiln with the ore, for without them the smelting would prove a failure. Two of the medicines are a piece of hippopotamus hide and some guinea-fowl feathers; the guinea-fowl and the hippopotamus make harsh cries which have some supposed resemblance to the crackling of a fire, and therefore the presence of these things in the kiln somehow or other adds to the fierceness of the fire.

Here we have a mixture of what our superior minds would call science and magic. And the reason for this is not, I think, difficult to discover. Africans are aware that while you may do much by your unaided efforts, you cannot accomplish everything. The contingent, the incalculable, enter into all our doings. Notwithstanding every endeavour, you cannot always be certain of attaining your end—indeed you can never command success; ill luck may attend you, fortune may refuse to smile upon you. Therefore you are wise to bring to your assistance the hidden, mysterious powers, which you may not be able to name, but which are certainly present.

How to turn those powers to effective use becomes then an urgent problem.

It is particularly in times of crisis that the need of the assistance of these powers is felt. Birth and death, entry into adult life, marriage—these are some of the occasions when we are brought into contact with the unknown and incalculable, and

the greater part of African rites and ceremonies is focussed upon these critical moments.

I will illustrate this by dwelling upon what takes place at another great crisis—drought. Even in our rain-sodden English climate it happens sometimes that lack of rain threatens the success of harvest. We then offer prayers for rain. In Africa, drought is a more serious matter even than in England. In general the people are dependent, as we are not dependent, upon the produce of the fields, and in the absence of irrigation the success of their field-work depends entirely upon the rains. The year is divided into the wet season, when much rain falls normally; and a dry season, when no rain falls. October arrives; no drop of rain has fallen since March, but now the appearance of the Pleiades in the sky after sunset warns men and women that it is time to prepare the fields before the commencement of the rainy season. They till the ground with their hoes, gathering into heaps and burning the grass and rubbish. As soon as the ground is hoed, the seed is sown. The seed may lie two or three weeks waiting for rain, and sprouts readily after a good shower; but should the first rains be scanty, the seed rots and the field has to be resown. If at any time before harvest the rain fails, the outlook for the people is very serious. It happens sometimes, and then starvation begins to stare them in the face. They see the gaunt form of Famine coming towards them.

When one remembers these things, it is not difficult to understand why the rain-doctor is such

an important person in African communities. When the rain fails, everybody turns to him.

The people gather together to assist the rain-doctor with their songs and prayers. He comes with an earthenware pot, the roots of a certain tree, and some water. Sitting there in the midst of the people, he puts some scrapings from the roots into the pot with water; then holding a small forked stick between the palms of his hands, he twirls it round in the liquid, producing froth. Some of this froth he throws in all directions; then he burns another drug which throws up a dense smoke. The ashes of this drug are put into a pot of water, and turn the water black. Then the doctor twirls once again in this mixture with his stick. Meanwhile the people sing and invoke the Supreme Being, who is named *Leza*. One of their refrains is:—

Tuendele o muyoba, Leza, kowa!

“Come to us with a continued rain, O *Leza*, fall.”

It is a prayer which reminds us of the ancient prayer of the Athenians:—

“Rain, rain, O dear Zeus, on the cornland of the Athenians and on the plains.”

2

Now, if we analyse the procedure which I have just described, we see in it two apparently incongruous elements—at least, incongruous from our point of view. We can sympathise with the prayer, for we, too, have on occasions joined in

prayers to Almighty God for rain. But there is something strange to us, if not repellent, in the doings of the rain-doctor—we shall probably call it hocus-pocus. What is he doing? Apparently a symbolic act.

The twirling of the stick in a liquid is evidently the principal part of it, for the whole process is named from the verb *kupuka*, "to twirl." When you twirl a stick in this way, there is rapid movement and a commotion in the water: evidently a symbol of the wind which brings up the clouds. The clouds are symbolised by the blackness of the water, and by the dense smoke that is sent up from the burning drug. But it is more than a symbolic act. The rain-doctor is not merely representing wind and rain-clouds: he is raising the wind, producing the clouds which shall break upon the parched earth. Either that or his action is supposed to influence in some way the Being to whom prayers are being simultaneously offered.

Let us glance for a moment at one or two ways in which Africans employ drugs.

Here is a man who has fallen desperately in love, and the lady frowns upon him. He goes to the doctor and secures the scrapings of a root of a certain bush, and mixes them with the tobacco which he smokes in his pipe. While he is smoking, he calls softly to the lady, or, if he is in company, he whispers inaudibly: "Angelina"—or whatever the name may be—"how I do love her! Would that she might love me too!" The effect of this is supposed to be that the woman dreams of him, and in the morning when she recalls her dream his

face appears appealingly before her, his image haunts her. She begins to think kindly of him. In this case the drug which the man smokes evidently is a necessary element in the procedure; without it his tender soliloquy would be of no avail; the drug wings his words, and in a manner we should call telepathic, causes them to reach the woman's mind over a distance, and to act as a stimulus upon her. The drug, that is to say, has some specific virtue.

In a similar way, a forlorn woman will seek from the doctor a drug which will attract a husband. She puts it in her pipe and smokes it; and as she smokes she speaks not to any particular man—for her appeal is to the male sex in general, not to any individual with whom she is in love—she speaks to the drug itself. She says: "*Uwe, musamo, ndakufweba mulombwana akanwale*"—"O medicine, I smoke thee in order that a man may marry me." In this case, too, the drug is supposed to have a specific virtue; it acts telepathically, over a distance, stimulating some man to desire this particular woman.

Let me give you another example of the use of what the Ba-ila call *musamo*, "medicine." We place an iron rod on the highest point of a building, and connect it with the ground, as a lightning conductor. The Africans, not knowing anything about electricity, have their own methods of warding off the lightning, which they have reason to fear because it often strikes their houses. One of their charms against lightning is a tortoise-shell which is hung under the eaves of a house. They

argue that the shell protects the tortoise from the elements, and therefore should be able to protect them. When a thunderstorm comes up, and the vivid forked lightning is playing in all directions, they take a further step. They throw a piece of tortoise-shell upon the fire, and cry aloud: "*Laba kabotu, twafwa bowa tu bazhike bako. Twakabomba:*" "Open thy mouth gently; we, thy slaves, are nervous. We are humble before thee." This invocation is addressed either to the lightning itself, or more probably I think to the Power behind the lightning, who is regarded as a person. The flash of fire in the sky is interpreted as the opening of his mouth; and they implore him to act carefully, gently, so that the fire issuing from him shall not harm them. The invocation is accompanied by the act of throwing the charm upon the fire; evidently in order that being consumed, it shall either by its own virtue counteract the celestial fire, or shall in some way impart efficacy to their prayer. It is very difficult in these cases to say exactly what the precise purpose may be.

I need not at this stage illustrate further the impressive faith which the Africans have in the virtue of medicine, or charms: suffice it to say that they resort to these things for a great variety of purposes. The trust they repose in them is wellnigh absolute. They place more confidence in them than—I might almost say—we place in the Providence of God. The implicit faith with which charms—or the power which works through charms—are regarded, deserves almost to be called religion.

Bearing these facts in mind, let us return to the rain-doctor and the people gathered around him.

From what I have said about the uses of charms, or medicines, I think we may conclude that I was right in suggesting that the doctor's actions were not merely symbolic. A symbol represents something other than itself; it does not really accomplish anything directly. The twirling of the stick in the decoction of medicine did not simply represent the wind; it was intended to gather the winds. The dense smoke arising from the burning drug did not merely represent clouds; it was intended to gather the rain-laden clouds. The doctor was using some specific virtue in the drugs to accomplish the desired effect of causing rain to fall on the fields; just as the forlorn woman and the lovesick man employed drugs to produce the effects desired. How does the rain-doctor's medicine act precisely? Is it conceived as acting directly on the wind and on the rain-clouds, or does it in some mysterious way wing the words of the people's prayer to the ears of the Power that can cause rain to fall, or does it act upon that Power in a compelling manner so that, willy-nilly, he or it must respond? As I have said, it is extremely difficult to answer this question with entire satisfaction to our analytical minds. The difficulty is increased in this instance because of our uncertainty as to the concept of Leza. Is Leza, invoked by the people, It or He? Is Leza an impersonal Power, or a Person? The fact that prayer is addressed to Leza is not entirely conclusive, for we have heard a woman addressing

the drug which she is smoking—speaking to it as if it were a person. The form of the prayer sung by the assembled people is curious: “Come to us with a continued rain, O Leza, fall!” If we translate Leza “God,” we must say that they regard rain as God falling on the earth. And, indeed, these people, the Ba-ila, commonly speak in this way: *wawa Leza*, they say when rain descends, *wawa Leza*, “Leza falls.”

I shall have to return to this point when, in a later chapter, we deal with the African’s awareness of God. For the present I may say that Leza is the name given to the Power discerned working in cosmical phenomena, in creation, in the rain and thunder and lightning, and also in the supreme facts of human existence—in birth and death. We missionaries have taken the name “Leza” as equivalent to “God,” and I think justifiably so, for in the minds of many of the people Leza is undoubtedly a person. But among many of them there is the same uncertainty as exists among civilised people. The untutored African would agree with Herbert Spencer that “amidst all the mystery of our inscrutable existence there remains the one absolute certainty that we are in the presence of an infinite and eternal energy from which all things proceed.” But, like many of us, some of the Africans have reached the conviction that that infinite and eternal energy is a Person; others are not so sure about it—so little sure, indeed, that they can speak of this immanent energy, which they call Leza, as gathering in the clouds, flashing in the lightning, rolling in the

thunder, souging in the wind, and falling in the rain.

Our interpretation of the rain-ceremony depends, then, upon the degree to which the people have attained to the concept of a personal God. In so far as Leza is a Person, the words addressed to him are to be regarded properly as a prayer, not a spell. Words addressed, such as by the forlorn woman, to a charm, are properly not a prayer, but a spell. The people pray; their act is definitely religious. What, then, are we to call their use of drugs in the ceremony? Whether we regard Leza as personal or as mere energy, the drugs appear to have a compelling effect, acting directly on the rain-clouds, or making efficacious the words of the prayer. Is this part of the rain-making ceremony to be called religious, or what? Most people would call it "magical." Religion, they would say, entreats, conciliates, and acts through a prayer; magic, on the other hand, controls, compels, and acts through spells and charms. Let us provisionally accept this distinction between religion and magic, though in doing so, I should like to speak the word magic in, so to say, inverted commas, for we may see reason to substitute another word.

Accepting the terms religion and magic, we see here in the rain-making ceremony an instance of the alliance of religion and magic; one supplements the other. We are accustomed to regard them as two completely disparate and incompatible things. Religion entreats and conciliates: magic controls and compels. Logically they are poles

apart; but in practice we often find them working together, for the human mind is capable of harbouring two dissonant ideas at any moment. And not the African mind alone. Even in some forms of Christianity you will find religion and magic acting together. In our Lord's teaching and practice magic, whether positive, or negative in the form of taboo, is conspicuously absent; but some of His followers have not kept it out. Ignatius, the Apostolic Father, speaks, for example, of the Eucharist as "breaking one bread, which is the medicine of immortality"—using the Greek word *pharmakon*, which is equivalent to *musamo*, and means a magical charm. Which certainly is not what our Lord meant by the bread which He broke in the presence of the disciples.

3

Our discussion has introduced us to a series of questions which have aroused, and still arouse, considerable debate. What is religion, and what is magic? Wherein do they differ? If they are distinct, what relation exists between them? Did magic spring from religion, or did religion spring from magic? Or have religion and magic developed from something that was anterior to both?

It is customary to divide magic into black magic and white. A woman desires the death of a certain man who has injured her; she goes to a doctor, who, for a consideration, gives her a drug which he tells her to mix with ashes taken from the man's fireplace. She does so, and at her home

sits and ardently desires the man's death. In virtue of the power of that drug, her intense longing cast through space is efficacious; the man sickens and dies. That is witchcraft: black magic. If we compare such an action with a purely religious act, such as the calling of a distressful person upon God for grace to bear his trouble, we cannot see any likeness whatsoever between the two: magic and religion, we say, belong to entirely different spheres of human activity. But if at the extremes there are clearly marked distinctions between religious acts and magical, there is a region where they are not so strongly differentiated. Some authorities say that religion is the cement and support of the social community: whereas magic is anti-social. The arts of the witch are certainly inimical to society; but black magic and white do not differ in essentials, for they equally consist in the employment of the mysterious virtues resident in "medicines." The rain-making ceremony, in so far as it employs drugs, is magical, but it is not anti-social; it is practised for the benefit of the community. Nor can we say that magic is directed towards impersonal forces while religion is directed towards a Person. The lovesick man, the forlorn woman, both employ magic to influence persons. The African is seeking practical ends in both his magic and his religion; he seeks to use the mysterious powers of nature for his benefit, or at least he tries to ward off the harm that they may cause him. If he employs charms and spells, on the one hand, and sacrifices and prayers, on the other, he has the

same end in view; to preserve his life, or to benefit the community in some way. If, then, we seek for the differentia between magic and religion, we shall find it not in the purpose, not in the motive, not in the object towards which efforts are directed; we are thrown back upon the difference to which we have already alluded: magic differs from religion in its method: magic seeks to control, to compel; religion seeks to entreat, to persuade, to conciliate.

4

We come now to another question—a very important one, and one that has been much discussed: What is it that lies behind the belief in magic?

In his great work, *The Golden Bough*, Sir James G. Frazer declares that magic is based upon a mistaken application of the laws of the association of ideas. We all understand what is meant by a train of ideas. One idea calls up another, and that a third, and so on. If at any time a thing or person has been thought of in connection with another, then the perception or idea of the one will thereafter tend to call up the idea of the other; and this the psychologists name the law of the association of ideas by contiguity. Or one object may recall to your mind some other object with which you have not previously connected it—it is suggested to you because of some character which the two possess in common; this is the law of association of ideas by similarity. Now, says Sir James Frazer, one

form of magic—he calls it homœopathic or imitative magic—is founded on the association of ideas by similarity; the principle being that like produces like, or that an effect resembles its cause. A man who wishes to injure his enemy makes a figure of wax or wood to which he gives his enemy's name; then he sticks pins into it, or beats it, believing that simultaneously his enemy will suffer some excruciating pain. That is homœopathic magic. When a man wishes to bring rain upon the earth, he throws froth into the air and burns smoke-producing drugs, with the notion that these things which resemble clouds will bring the clouds. This kind of magic, says Sir James Frazer, commits the mistake of assuming that things which resemble each other are the same. The other form of magic, which he names contagious magic, is founded on the association of ideas by contiguity; it commits the mistake of believing that things which have once been in contact with each other are always in contact. As an example of this, we may take the widely-spread belief that it is possible to bewitch an absent person by doctoring a lock of his hair or some of his nail-parings. Sir James Frazer gives the name sympathetic magic to both kinds, since both homœopathic and contagious magic assume that things act on each other at a distance through a secret sympathy, “the impulse being transmitted from one to the other by means of what we may conceive as a kind of invisible ether, not unlike that which is postulated by modern science for a precisely similar purpose, namely, to explain how things can physically affect each

other through a space which appears to be empty.”¹

To this point I shall return presently; in the meantime let us ask what in the opinion of this illustrious writer is the relation between magic and religion. In brief, he considers that the evolution of thought has passed through three stages: First, a stage in which magic existed without religion; second, a stage in which religion, having arisen, co-operated, and was to some extent confused, with magic; and third, a stage in which the radical difference of principle between the two having been recognised, their relation was that of open hostility.² Religion Sir James Frazer defines as “a propitiation or conciliation of powers superior to man, which are believed to direct and control the course of nature and of human life.” Religion, in his view, assumes that the course of nature is to some extent elastic or variable, and that men 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. Religion, therefore, has to do with conscious, personal agents, whose favour can be gained. On the other hand, magic takes for granted that the course of nature is determined by the operation of immutable laws acting mechanically, and that it is possible for man to bend nature to his wishes by the sheer force of spells and enchantments. Everywhere men at one time believed this, and practised their magical arts.

¹ *The Golden Bough*, Vol. I, p. 54.

² *Idem.*, p. 226 n.

But at last some men, with shrewder intelligences than their fellows possessed, came to see that there was nothing in it; that they had taken for causes what were no causes, and that all efforts to work by means of these imaginary causes were in vain. For a time the primitive philosopher, cut adrift from his ancient moorings, must have been sadly perplexed and agitated. Then he found rest in religion—in a belief in other beings, like himself but far stronger, who, unseen themselves, directed the course of nature and brought about all the varied series of events which he had hitherto believed to be dependent on his own magic. The Power in the world was conceived to be not impersonal, but personal—not one, perhaps, but many. “To these mighty beings, whose handiwork he traced in all the gorgeous and varied pageantry of nature, man now addressed himself, humbly confessing his dependence on their invisible power, and beseeching them of their mercy to furnish him with all good things, to defend him from the perils and dangers by which our mortal life is compassed about on every hand, and finally to bring his immortal spirit, freed from the burden of the body, to some happier world, beyond the reach of pain and sorrow, where he might rest with them and with the spirits of good men in joy and felicity for ever.”¹

In this way, the deeper minds made the great transition from magic to religion; but only gradually, and in the meantime the great mass of mankind clung tenaciously to the old creed of

¹ *The Golden Bough*, Vol. I, p. 239.

magic. Hence it is that to-day we find the two things still associated, and religion has constantly to be fighting against magic, its bitterest and most inveterate enemy.

Sir James Frazer's view of the nature of magic and of the relation between magic and religion—a view set forth with an impressive array of facts and clothed with superb literary art—may, I suppose, be regarded as the orthodox opinion of anthropologists. But it has been strongly criticised, among others by Messrs Hubert and Mauss in France, and by Dr Marett in England. I cannot here dwell at length upon these criticisms, but must be content to refer you, if you want to follow up the subject, to Mr Hartland's *Ritual and Belief*, and to Dr Marett's *The Threshold of Religion*. Sir James Frazer's theory of magic is declared to be too intellectualist, to be founded upon an obsolete psychology, and not to cover all the facts. Magic, he says, assumes that things act on each other at a distance through a secret sympathy; but this misses a very vital point. Sympathy is only the means by which the magical force passes from the magician to the object at which it is aimed; it is not the magical force itself. Quite evidently from the examples of magical practice which I have quoted, there is something which works in the magician's drug and spells: and a theory which relies simply upon laws of association does not take this into account. Sir James Frazer himself feels that this theory is not sufficient; for in his footnotes he acknowledges that while his theory supplies the logical basis of magic, the physical

basis of magic is found in the mysterious force which the Melanesians name *Mana*;¹ and he speaks elsewhere of the magic essence emanating from times and seasons, from persons and from things. This mystic force that is released and set at work by the rite or the spell is the chief factor in magic. Unless we recognise this, magic is incomprehensible.

5

There are many other points which I should like to have discussed. Perhaps, in conclusion, I may be allowed to state the conviction which I have arrived at after studying these matters closely at first hand.

I put before you in the first chapter the working hypothesis that religion and magic spring from an intuition of mysterious force working in the world. I believe that before men conceived the Power to be personal—that is before they came to believe in the existence of spirits and gods—they looked upon it as mere force, or energy, and they came to regard it as something which could be used for their benefit. In various parts of the world people have a name for this mysterious power. Thus North American Indians speak of *orenda*, of *manitou*, of *wakonda*; the Bafioté of the Lower Congo speak of *lunyensu*; and the Yoruba of Nigeria (as Dr Farrow tells us in his recent book²), speak of *ogun*. The Moors of North Africa, Dr Westermarck tells us in his most valuable treatise,

¹ *The Golden Bough*, Vol. I, p. 111 n.

² *Faith, Fancies and Fetich*, pp. 116 et seq.

Ritual and Belief in Morocco, apply the Arabic word *baraka* to a mysterious wonder-working force. Their belief in it has taken on a Muhammadan colouring, but is much more ancient than Islam. Most familiar of all, the Melanesians speak of *mana*. "All Melanesian religion consists," says Dr Codrington, "in getting this mana for one's self, or getting it used for one's benefit."

Thus in many parts of the world we find this notion of mystic power or potentiality, often concentrated in individual persons or things, but in effect spread throughout the world.¹ And where no name is given to it, the idea lies implicit in the practices of the peoples of lower culture.

Personally I should like to discard the word magic, or at most to retain it for what we call black magic, the nefarious, anti-social practices of the witch and warlock. I should prefer to group the beliefs, and the practices associated with the belief, in this impersonal, all-pervading force, under the name of Dynamism; and when I wrote my description of the religion of the Ba-ila I did employ this term.² I do not claim to have invented it; it is used by Dr Marett for a stage of religion that is pre-animistic. That is to say, before men attained to theism, and before they came to believe in animism—belief in souls and spirits—their faith reposed in an impersonal energy or force. I think it right to speak of Dynamism as religion. It has no god, but it is directed to a power that is in many

¹ Hartland, *Ritual and Belief*, p. 61.

² Smith and Dale, *The Ila-speaking peoples of Northern Rhodesia*, Vol. II, Chap. XX.

respects superior to man; and that power is regarded with the awe which is the proper religious response to the supernatural. As I said before, the faith that is reposed in the charms which embody this power is of an intensity that can only be described as religious. You may rightly say that this is a poor kind of religion, but it is one that keeps a very tenacious hold upon men; it is the *religione vecchia*, as the Italians say, that underlies our Christianity, and comes to the surface whenever Christianity wears thin. It is very prevalent in our midst to-day, as witness the common use of mascots. It is found in Africa mixed with belief and practice of a higher character—with animism, or, as I should prefer to call it, spiritism; and with an incipient theism. Moreover, this Dynamism is the basis of a very large part of the tribal morality of the Africans—all that part of it which depends upon taboo, as I have described it in Chapter VIII of *The Golden Stool*.

An excellent example of what I mean is provided by Mr Bullock in his newly-published work *The Mashona*. A jealous man would give his wife a drug named *runinzo*, which is so powerfully subtle that if she touched another man's hand, that man would feel something like an electric shock pass up his arm; and, if he followed up his familiarity, he would die in his sin. A husband is separated from his wife until the weaning of their child. If he broke the taboo, and thereafter tried to cross a river, he would perish, for the ancients placed "medicine" in these streams to ensure respect for the tribal laws. That is to say, the mysterious

energies working through drugs are enlisted to enforce morality.

Dynamism is an insecure basis for ethics. When belief in the efficacy of charms is destroyed the results may be serious. This is one reason of the disintegration that we are witnessing in Africa to-day. The influx of our Western civilisation is destroying the roots of dynamistic morality. Mr Bullock quotes an African as saying: "The roads and the railways, the white man's food and his money, have broken our laws. The taboo-breaker no longer swells to an enormous size when he crosses his river boundary. He crosses at a drift made by the whites. The adulteress has no fear. She travels on the white man's road, and has changed her lover into a multitude of buyers."

CHAPTER III

AFRICAN SPIRITISM

I

WE now pass from Dynamism to Spiritism. The Africans believe not only in the mysterious, impersonal potency which I described in Chapter II; they believe also in psychic beings, intelligent, purposive, personal powers, which may be associated for a time with material things, but which have a distinct and separate life of their own. This is Spiritism. His attitude towards these beings constitutes a phase of the African's religion.

I begin by drawing two pictures: the first of a festival, which takes place annually among the Ba-ila of Northern Rhodesia; and the second of a funeral. These pictures will bring out some of the characteristic features of Spiritism.

According to the Ba-ila, the year begins about October with the rising of the Pleiades above the horizon after sunset. The turn of the year is regarded as important by many peoples. To the Ba-ila it is a portentous season, because they are on the point of cultivating their fields. They look for rain at this time, and unless it falls, they may be in peril of famine. It is also the time for sending

their cattle away from the villages to distant outposts near the river-bank, where they will have water and pasture, but where they will be more exposed to danger from wild beasts. The people, therefore, have two supreme needs at this time of the year: they want safety for their precious cattle, and fertility in field and herd. To secure these blessings they turn to their communal divinity who is named Shimunenga.

In the centre of the Kasenga district where I lived there stands a great grove of evergreen trees. It is a very sacred place. No person would venture to desecrate it by breaking a branch off one of the trees, or even by using for firewood the dead branches which fall to the ground. This dense thicket might be fitly named the Holy of Holies of the tribe; only one man ever penetrates its interior, and he enters only once a year. This man is Shimunenga's representative on earth. Shortly before the annual festival he cuts his way into the grove, and there holds communion with the divinity; and having ascertained Shimunenga's will concerning the date, he goes round the villages telling the people to make their preparations for the festival by brewing great quantities of beer. When all is ready, the festival takes place on the days appointed. The first day is the women's day. They assemble before the grove, dressed in all their barbaric finery, and there they sing and dance. The following day the men take their turn. Attired as if for war, they drive the cattle to the grove, and after much singing and dancing and drinking of beer, they escort the

cattle to the outposts on the river-bank. On both days Shimunenga is invoked by all the people; they call out his praise-titles, thus: *Shimunenga, Lobwe, Udimbabachembe*: "Shimunenga, Gatherer-of-men, Giver-of-virility-to-males." No sacrifice is offered; and this invocation is the only form of prayer that is used. Other things are done which I need not describe; suffice it to say that this is a fertility feast. The whole purpose of the festival is to honour their communal divinity and to bring prosperity upon the tribe in their fields and herds. Just as a living chief is pleased and complimented by an exhibition of his people's happiness and wealth, so Shimunenga is thought to be gratified by this display—so gratified that at this critical season of the year he will in return do his utmost to increase their prosperity. So far, we may say that the festival is religious. The accompanying immoralities and singing of ribald songs by women and men are, I think, in the nature of a charm, intended to work directly, that is to say, by "magic" force, upon field and herd.

Now here we are evidently in an atmosphere that is not purely dynamistic. We are not dealing, that is to say, merely with impersonal agency that can be moved through the operation of drugs and spells. If I am right in my interpretation of the sexual irregularities, magic and religion combine in this festival in a manner similar to that in which they are combined in the rain-making ceremony. We were rather uncertain, you may remember, whether Leza could be regarded as an entirely personal being, since he, or it, was implored to fall upon the

earth as rain. But we need have no such uncertainty as to the Shimunenga to whom the festival is directed. We know something of his history. He lived here on earth in bodily form. He was a great chief in ancient time. He is regarded as the founder of the community of Kasenga where his grove stands. Although he is no longer seen by mortal eye, he still lives. He is capable of pleasure and of beneficent action. His word is still law to his people. He has his mouthpiece on earth to-day; he speaks with his own voice through a medium lying in trance. He has greater power over the minds of his people than any man whom they can see with their eyes. His people approach him, with awe indeed, but not with shrinking dread; they come confidently, with a song upon their lips. This is not Dynamism; it is Spiritism.

Now let us look at the second picture which I proposed to draw for you.

You are visiting a village, and in the night a loud wailing disturbs your sleep. It comes from a woman whose husband has at that moment passed into the other world. In that warm climate burial follows rapidly upon death, and when you go into the village early in the morning the preparations are already being made. The corpse is anointed with butter and, to a degree that depends upon the wealth and position of the deceased, is decorated with beads. It is put into the pre-natal position and wrapped in skins or blankets. Meanwhile the grave is being dug in the cattle enclosure. When it is ready the corpse is brought out for burial, but before it is lowered into the grave the bereaved

wife and children come to say farewell. One by one they lie by the side of the corpse and embrace it, crying: *Mulumu angu!* "My husband!" *Tata! Tata!* "Father! Father!" The corpse is lowered gently into the grave, where it is laid upon a skin. A wooden stool is placed under the head. Then various articles are put by the side of the corpse; some maize and ground-nuts, a calabash of milk or beer; a lump of tobacco and a pipe—the pipe the man used while alive. A member of the family kneels by the graveside and calls, as each article is placed in position: "*Tata* (father), here is tobacco which we give you to smoke. . . . Here is beer which we give you to drink . . .," and so on. Then finally, one cries aloud: *Kochiya! Kukashimuna kabotu kudi babo bakatanguna kufwa, ati, Ndabashia balalanga kabotu*—"A good journey to you! Tell them who died before you: I left them living well." This final farewell message given, they begin to fill the grave. The soil is not shovelled in rudely. One woman kneeling by the graveside gently sweeps with her arm a quantity of soil into the grave, and others coming to her assistance, kneel around the grave and do likewise. They keep up a mournful chant while thus engaged. Then they give place to the diggers, who complete the filling of the grave and stamp down the soil. When they have finished, they may not step off the grave until they have been purified, for they, like all who have come into close contact with the corpse, are in a state of taboo. Water is brought, and all who have handled the corpse wash their hands over the grave; then a stick, the end of

which has been rubbed in the ashes of a fire, is pressed to the lips of each of them and thrown away.

The mourning now begins in earnest. Some of the women run and throw themselves headlong upon the grave, so violently that you wonder they do not injure themselves. They raise a dirge, which perhaps takes the form of a ribald song. This is one of the most curious features of the funeral. You might expect songs reflecting upon the sadness of life and death, the shortness of the one, the inevitability of the other; or at least you might expect to hear praises of the dead person. But as a matter of fact most of the songs I have heard at a funeral—as at the festival I described before—are such that I could not translate in this place. Under ordinary circumstances it is strictly forbidden for men to utter such things in the presence of women, or women in the presence of men; but at a funeral everybody has complete licence to act as he or she pleases. There is some idea here that is difficult to understand—and I do not pretend to offer any satisfactory explanation.

The men take their part in the mourning. They dress as if for war, and paint themselves over with white ash. They form in line and charge across the cattle kraal and back, vociferating, brandishing their spears, leaping into the air, all with the utmost vigour. This again is not easy to interpret. I said once to some of these mourners: "You all look as if you were fighting death!" This was taken as a great joke, though I did not at all mean it as a joke. "Our father says we look as if fighting death!" they said to each other, and they

were all highly amused. To all appearances the men are engaged in driving death away.

One cannot watch such a scene as this and remain unmoved. The grief of the mourners, at least the grief of those most closely related to the deceased, is sincere and demonstrative. The emotions of the Africans are generally repressed, but they break forth on such an occasion as this. I remember seeing our head chief Mungaila at the funeral of one of his headmen. He was coated from head to foot with white ash and wore the scantiest bit of cloth around his loins. With a broken stick in one hand, and a wildebeest tail, containing medicine, in the other, he marched about alone. When he stood, with his long thin shanks and wizened body, gesticulating with the tail and shouting, as if expostulating with death, he presented a most pathetic figure. Every now and then, he would flop down and wallow in the dust, throwing ash over himself. When, after a time, he came over to speak to me, the old man was quite exhausted. I remember too, on that day, three old women who were sitting together with their arms around each other, the picture of grief. On the grave lay, as if lifeless, four of the deceased's wives; and a son, a lad of fourteen or so, was lying on an ash-heap, his body shaking with sobs. These were real mourners, and one hungered to say some word of consolation to them.

I suspect that of the great crowds who flock to a funeral there may be some who are attracted by the feasting. Cattle-keeping Africans do not kill their beasts for food; practically the only time they

eat them is at a funeral, and then it is not mere feasting, but a ritual. The purpose of killing oxen is that these may accompany the dead man into the next world—the flesh is eaten by the mourners. It is the ambition of every man among the Ba-ila to procure as many large handsome beasts as he can to be eaten at his own funeral. In the case of an important chief, I have known as many as a hundred of his cattle to be slaughtered; and every person who attends a funeral brings an ox, or a goat, or a pot of beer, according to his degree of intimacy with the deceased. Such things are named technically *shidizho*: literally, things by means of which one expresses sorrow. Many African tribes were not content with killing beasts. They thought that a dead chief would in the spirit world need his wives and children to cherish him, his slaves to serve him; and being strict in their logic, and knowing that there was but one way of sending them to the other world, they killed these unfortunate people.

It was a terrible custom, but nothing more indisputably proved their conviction that death does not end everything. This has been evident, too, in the two pictures I have drawn for you—that is why I have drawn them. Shimunenga, the great chief who lived in bodily shape one does not know how long ago, still lives in some form; can still take cognisance of his people; can still communicate with them. The ordinary person, member of the tribe, is, while lying in his grave, addressed as if he were present to hear; is given things he will need on his journey; is entrusted

with a message to those who have preceded him into the spirit world. All these things speak loudly of the African's firm belief in a future existence. I should not like to describe their belief as belief in the immortality of the soul; but it is certainly belief in the survival of human personality after death.

2

My reasons for not thinking that the Africans believe in the immortality of the soul are, first, that I doubt whether they regard men as immortal. Shimunenga has lived in the spirit world for perhaps two hundred years, but if all his people perished and he ceased to be remembered in his yearly festival, he might be looked upon as having passed out of existence. But about that I should not like to dogmatise. My other reason for not talking about the immortality of the soul is that I am not at all confident that Africans believe in a soul as we do. Perhaps if we were asked, we might have some difficulty in putting our idea of the soul into words; and we might not agree in our definition. I suppose we mean by "soul" a spiritual entity which is sharply distinct and separable from the material substance of the body, and which is the cause of the bodily life and psychical activities of the individual. We must not expect the Africans to have precisely the same idea. We missionaries generally use some such word as *moza*, "the breath," to translate the New Testament term *psyche* or *pneuma*, but I doubt

whether to any unsophisticated African, apart from Christian teaching, the word *moza* is an equivalent to our word "soul." Indeed, I doubt if there is in any African language a word which would either be equivalent to "soul," or would cover all their conception of the inner life of man. You will generally find quite a number of words in a Bantu language to describe various aspects of that inner life. Some investigators have indeed come to the conclusion that Africans conceive of man as possessing three or four souls.

Mr Amaury Talbot, for example, speaking of the Bantu, semi-Bantu and Sudanese tribes of Southern Nigeria, says: "There is a general belief that each person possesses four souls: first, an ethereal one, the double and inner frame of the physical form; secondly, the soul proper, the consciousness, the thinking or mental body; thirdly, the spiritual, or minor ego; and fourthly, the Over-soul, or Chi, the great spirit, which often includes several lesser egos, and always 'stays with God.' . . . The shadow is considered the sign usually of the ethereal, but sometimes of the mental body . . . it is thought by most people that a man will be affected by any action on it. The ethereal one dissolves with the physical structure, while the greater part of the soul is relatively immortal, and the third and fourth never perish."¹

Dr Farrow puts the matter differently. He says the Yoruba and other tribes "believe that each human being is indwelt by certain spirits. These

¹ *Southern Nigeria*, Vol. II, p. 259.

spirits are not to be regarded as the man himself, or even part of him. His own soul is quite distinct from them." These spirits are, he says, three in number, according to the Yoruba. The man's own personal soul is called *okan*, which is literally "heart," or *oji*, that is "shadow."¹

It may be that this is the correct way to explicate the African's belief. We are told that the ancient Egyptians had a very complicated idea of the human ego—it comprised about ten entities in all. Among the Ba-ila I often heard men speak of the *mozo*, "heart," *chingvhule*, "shadow," *moza*, "breath," as if they were distinct and separable parts of the human ego; but it seemed to me that these were all only phases of that inner mysterious life of man which they recognise to exist, but which they, like ourselves indeed, have not yet been able fully to understand.

Be the soul single or multiple, or be there nothing that can be defined as "soul," the time arrives when this mysterious personality of ours undergoes a change. Death comes; the body decays, but the man survives. He becomes what the Ba-ila call a *musangushi*: a changed, transformed being.

3

Whither does he go? What is his destiny? The answer to such questions is not simple. The Dean of St Paul's says somewhere: "All religious eschatology is a mass of contradictions." We Christian people are not quite free from apparent

¹ *Faith, Fancies and Fetich*, p. 132.

contradictions in our belief. We speak of our beloved dead as being in heaven; at the same time many of us think of them as being ever near to us, and we also naturally cling to the idea that they sleep their long last sleep yonder in God's Acre, whither we go occasionally to place flowers upon their graves. In a similar manner the Africans will tell you, almost in the same breath, that the dead have gone to a great village under the earth, or to some far country in the east or north, where they still till the fields and reap abundant harvests; that they are in the forest surrounding their earthly home; that they are in the houses inhabited by the living; that they are wandering about in the guise of animals; that they are in their graves, which are the homes of the dead. They will tell you any one or all of these things; or make a more general statement that the dead are gone to God. When I remind you that many African tribes believe that the dead for the most part return to be born again on earth, you may draw one of two conclusions: either that the thought of the Africans is extremely confused as to the destiny of the departed; or, on the other hand, that what appears to be confusion may point to some subtlety of thought which we have not yet fathomed.

When Sezongo, one of the great chiefs in the country where I lived, died, he was buried inside his hut. I called one day to visit his grave soon after the funeral was over. I found some men there engaged in cleaning out the hut. They drew my attention to a tortoise which was slowly perambulating in the hut, and told me that tortoise was

the dead chief, Sezongo. They scraped away some earth from the grave and disclosed a potsherd, which they removed, and I saw that it had covered the orifice of a reed. This reed, they told me, was planted in the ear of the corpse, and along its clear passage the tortoise which was Sezongo had emerged. Subsequently, I was informed, two lion cubs had appeared in the hut, and they also were Sezongo. One night, ten or a dozen lions congregated near my house, which was not far from the grave, and made a prodigious roaring, so that the earth seemed to quiver. Next morning, the people asked me, in awestruck tones, whether I had heard the lions. "Yes, certainly," I said, "and I wondered what they were making so much noise for." "Well," they said, "we know. The lions came to greet and to pay homage to the two young lions who are Sezongo." Sometime afterwards Sezongo's son had a son born to him, and it was proved, when in the usual way recourse was had to the diviner, that this child was his grandfather, Sezongo, returned in the flesh. Notwithstanding these facts, I noticed that when the time came round for making offerings to the deceased chief's spirit, the people congregated at his grave as if he were there. I asked myself, as doubtless you may ask, where exactly was Sezongo—in the grave, or around the grave, or in the tortoise, or in the lions, or in the child?

At the funeral of another chief with whom I was acquainted, I was told that before he died he had taken a powerful medicine to ensure that he would become a river monster that is named *Itoshi*. His

people expected that in a few days he would emerge through the reed planted in his ear, and would take up his quarters in the hut where he had lived. There his people would feed him on lizards and fish until he was fully grown—evidently if he could come through the reed he must be very small—and then his clansmen would accompany him to the river. Some days later I was informed that the chief had actually appeared in his hut. I wanted very much to see him there eating his lizards and fish, but was told that it was not convenient just then. On my next visit to the village, it was too late to see him. I was informed that his people had already been in procession to the river, where they had consigned him to the depths. He would live in the river thenceforth as an Itoshi. Needless to say, I regretted having missed this sight.

What does all this mean? Is there some conception of the human personality that would reconcile these apparent contradictions? Perhaps, after all, those observers are correct who affirm that the Africans believe in a multiple soul. Or more likely, it seems to me, they conceive the spirit to be capable of multi-presence. This is, indeed, not irrational; for whatever spirit may be, it is not subject to the laws of space and time.

4

Certainly, the Africans live in a strange world—a world which it is very difficult for us to comprehend. We shall never come near to understanding

them unless we fully recognise the degree to which the spiritual attracts and dominates their minds. The veil that is drawn between the seen and the unseen is to the Africans a very thin veil; so diaphanous is it that it can hardly be said to exist. The world of spirit is an intensely real world to them. The community which we can see and count—the men, women and children with whom we converse—is only a part of the actual community. The other members are unseen—at least they do not appear to our eyes every day; their voices are not audible every moment; but they are ever present. The living, and those whom we call the dead, form together a close, interdependent community. We shall never understand the Africans unless we recognise that cardinal fact in their experience.

I have already indicated how the Kasenga people regard their communal divinity, Shimunenga. If we are to call him a god, we see how inaccurate is the old saying *primus in orbe deos fecit timor*, unless we take *timor* in the best sense as meaning awe, reverence, veneration—the numinous emotion. They are quite wrong who think that the Africans experience nothing but shrinking dread in the presence of the spirit world. Shimunenga, and the other ancestral members of the invisible part of the community, are regarded with awe but not with terror. They have power which living men do not possess; they are in contact with the Supreme Being and act as intermediaries between him and the living. Things hidden to the mortal eye are no secret to them. As the heads of the

community, they have its interests at heart. It is true that you must not act contrary to their will; if you do, you must expect punishment. But their favour can be gained, and regained; they are not implacable ghosts, always seeking to hurt the living. The proper feeling towards these divinities is named *mampuba* by the Ba-ila; a word which describes that highly compound emotion we call reverence, and which is a blend of wonder, fear, trust, gratitude and subjection.

You have heard often enough that the African is tortured by a belief in evil spirits—a belief that robs his life of joy and peace. There are such beings in his world, and what I have said would not be complete without a reference to them. These are men and women who have gone into the invisible world with a grievance against their neighbours. Some had been bewitched, others were not given proper burial, others were driven by oppression or ill-treatment to suicide; now they use every opportunity of wreaking vengeance upon the living. They are regarded with unmitigated dread, and many methods are adopted to appease them, to drive them off, to destroy them. It is difficult, and indeed impossible, for us to realise the intensity of this belief in the powers of evil spirits and the terror which it causes. Christianity appeals to the African very largely because it comes as a redemption from his fears.

5

Had I the time, it would be interesting and perhaps profitable, to describe the prayers and

offerings made to the ancestral spirits.¹ I cannot do that now, but I must not leave the subject without dwelling for a moment upon the practical influence of this Spiritism. We demand of religion that it shall influence for good the everyday life of its adherents. Let us recognise that Spiritism exerts a powerful social influence. The ancestral spirits form the chief unifying and controlling force over the living members of the community. To offend them by committing a breach of ancient customary law is sin which will bring punishment in its train. The fact that their bodies lie in the earth and their spirits hover about the villages, makes home and land sacred to the African, and out of that sentiment spring many virtues. We see at once the strength and the weakness of the African communal system—weakness because an intense conservatism is fostered by this devotion to the ancestors. Changes do come about, but slowly and only as they are sanctioned by the ancestors speaking through their mediums and representatives. But if there is weakness, there is also strength—strength born of loyalty.

In chapters that follow, we shall deal with the awareness of God, which is characteristic of the Africans; not until we have studied that subject can you fully appreciate the religious side of the African's life.

Let me, in the meantime, sum up in a few words what we have so far learnt of the Africans. They

¹ They are fully described in Mr Willoughby's book, *The Soul of the Bantu*.

know themselves to be surrounded by ineffable mystery—to be in contact with unseen realities. That they have tried to interpret these mysteries, and that their belief has an effect upon their life, we have seen already. We have seen, too, where they have gone astray. Many are the sad, tragic mistakes into which the Africans have fallen; but we cannot but sympathise with them in their attempts to understand and to order their life in accordance with their convictions. We come to bring them the grace and truth that are in Christ Jesus our Lord. And we see how they have not been left alone to grope their way in darkness; through their past experience God has been preparing them for the better things to come. They have the root of religion in them—are capable of that intense awe which is aroused by the touch of the divine. The world of spirit is a very real world to them. They know the elements of prayer, of sacrifice, of communion with the unseen. They know what it means to have their motives, their doings, controlled by what to them is divine. Their religion has trained them in loyalty to unseen powers.

CHAPTER IV

THE AFRICAN'S AWARENESS OF GOD

(a) IN SOUTH AFRICA

IN previous chapters I endeavoured to show that behind the Africans' creeds and practices there lies an experience—an immediate awareness of Something other than themselves, Something whose character was not yet known, Something or Somebody; and further, that accompanying that awareness there was a feeling of the uncanny, a thrill of awe, a sense of inferiority and dependence. I then went on to say that, men being what they are, they were bound to reason as to the nature of that Power, and to ally themselves with it. When they thought of it as a potency—impersonal power—they sought to control it, they endeavoured to use it, by means of processes which we call magical. I proceeded to demonstrate that Africans believe not only in this potency, but also in psychic beings, intelligent, purposive, personal powers, that is to say, spirits; and that they seek to propitiate and have communion with these beings. To use the ordinary terms, we dealt with magic, animism and ancestor-worship.

We now pass to another subject. To what extent, if any, have the Africans come to believe

that the ineffable Power, whose presence and working they discern in the world, is personal? In other words, to what extent, if any, are the Africans theists?

I

In his article on the Bantu, published in the second volume of the *Encyclopædia of Religion and Ethics* in 1909, Mr Sidney Hartland declared: "The most obscure and difficult question connected with the religion of the Bantu is whether they have any belief in a Supreme God, a Creator, an overruling Providence."

In the twenty years that have elapsed since Mr Hartland penned those words, a considerable amount of evidence has been accumulated, and we are now in a position to give a more certain answer than was possible then. I think that to-day, as the politicians say, our answer would be in the affirmative. Much of the evidence has been set forth in Sir James Frazer's recent book, *The Worship of Nature*, containing the Gifford Lectures, delivered in 1924 and 1925. I had studied the subject for many years before that date, and it was very satisfactory to find my conclusions confirmed by such a great authority as Sir James Frazer.

Previous investigators had given various answers. Some declared that Africans had no concept of a Supreme Being. Others were of opinion that if such a concept was found in any particular tribe it had been acquired from Christian missionaries, or

from Moslems. Others said that if there were such a concept it could be nothing more than a late development of ancestor-worship, that is to say, the primeval ancestor, or other, had been elevated to the position of a Supreme Being.

It may be that certain of these investigators were influenced by considerations of an *a priori* nature. When men start with a theory that religion originated in dream-visions of ghosts, they find it easy to reach Grant Allen's conclusion, that "the concept of a god is nothing more than that of a Dead Man, regarded as a still surviving ghost or spirit, and endowed with increased or supernatural powers and qualities."¹ On the other hand, if you begin with the idea that mankind was originally endowed with a knowledge of God by special revelation, then two things may happen. If you find evidences of a belief in a Supreme Being you may possibly exaggerate its clearness and wealth of content; or if the evidence for such a belief does not appear satisfactory to you, you may say that the originally unclouded revelation has been partially or entirely lost—that Satan, who is the author of polytheism among other peoples, has succeeded in erasing every vestige of theistic belief from the particular people with whom you are dealing. Robert Moffat said that.

We ought not to approach a subject with such preconceived ideas. We should patiently study the facts and then draw our conclusions, no matter what they may be. And when I say "study the facts," I do not mean that we should confine our-

¹ *The Evolution of the Idea of God* (1904), p. 19.

selves to the printed dictionary. You will probably find an equivalent for the word "God" in the dictionary of every African language that has been reduced to writing; but I need hardly warn you against the fallacy of supposing that two words are exactly equivalent because they are found together in a bilingual dictionary. It is not sufficient to dredge dictionaries to find African words for "God." It does not at all follow that such words mean what our word means. We must go on to ascertain what ideas those words stand for, and this may be a very difficult task.

You remember St Paul's words to the Lycaonians: ". . . the living God, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea, and all that in them is: who in the generations gone by suffered all the nations to walk in their own ways. And yet he left not himself without witness, in that he did good, and gave you from heaven rains and fruitful seasons, filling your hearts with food and gladness."

The phenomena of nature, St Paul believed, spoke to men of God, so that they might know something of Him before they received the revelation made in Jesus Christ.

Our study will show that this is true of pagan Africans. Contrary to the teaching of the Herbert Spencer—Grant Allen school, Sir James Frazer comes to the conclusion that African Supreme Beings "in general are not deified ancestors, but simply personifications of the great celestial phenomena, whether the sky, or the rain, or the sun."

In a later chapter I shall quote extensively from Captain Rattray's description of the Ashanti beliefs in a Supreme Being. He is quite certain that their conception "has nothing whatever to do with missionary influence, nor is it to be ascribed to contact with Christians or even, I believe, with Mohammedans." And he goes on to say: "I believe that such a thought, so far from postulating an advanced stage in culture and what we term civilisation, may well be the product of the mind of a primitive people who live face to face with nature, perhaps unclothed, sleeping under the stars, seeing great rivers dry up and yet again become rushing torrents, seeing the lightning from the heavens rending great trees and killing men and beasts, depending upon the rains for their own lives and those of their herds, observing that the very trees and herbs and grass can only live if they are watered from the skies." Captain Rattray says again: "I can see no just cause for attributing what we have come to regard as one of the noblest conceptions of man's mind, to dwellers in, and builders of, cities, and to writers and readers of parchments and books."

I am in agreement with him. There is no *a priori* reason for dismissing as inconceivable that an uncultured people should rise to a relatively lofty conception of a God, a Creator, a Sustainer, of the world in which they live.

On the contrary, there is no reason why an African should not agree with Brian Brooke, the poet of East Africa:—

Oh, no atheist can really be an atheist at heart,
 Who has lived alone with Nature in the bush,
 Who has heard the desert calling, and has seen the night
 depart,
 And has slumbered 'neath that awe-inspiring hush.
 Where the mountains pierce the heavens and the plains
 stretch far and wide,
 Whether desert sand or rich and fertile sod;
 Where the raging, roaring torrents cleave the cliffs on
 either side,
 There is Nature and there surely is a God.

The facts of Nature, that is to say, make their appeal to man.

Perhaps you may think that I am disregarding my own warning not to approach the subject with preconceived notions. What I am giving you, however, is not a preconception of my own; but a foretaste of the conclusions we shall reach, I think, at the close of our study. To the evidence I now turn. It is impossible to consider the beliefs of every African tribe; we must select representative tribes from different parts of the Continent. I begin with South Africa, and choose for examination first of all the beliefs of the Zulus. I select them for several reasons, and not least because Sir James Frazer has not dealt with them in his Gifford Lectures.

2

When Bishop Colenso (who, whatever you may think of his theology, was a true lover of the Africans) went to Natal in 1853, he was astonished to find that the word for God adopted by the

missionaries was *Tixo*, and that this was not a Zulu word at all. It is the word still used in the Zulu Bible. It seems to be a Hottentot word, and to be identical with the latter part of the name Gounja Ticquoa, which Kolben, who wrote in the first half of the eighteenth century, said was the Hottentot name for God. "I am fully satisfied," Kolben wrote, "from a thousand Enquiries I made among the Hottentots, and from a thousand declarations they made to my self, that they believe a Supreme Being, the Creator of Heaven and Earth, and of everything in them; the Arbiter of the World, through whose Omnipotence all Things live and move and have their Being."¹

Now Dr Vanderkemp was a missionary among the Hottentots before he went among the Amaxosa (or Kaffirs), and it is possible that he introduced among the Amaxosa this Hottentot name for God. And since the Amaxosa and the Amázulu are closely akin, it was natural for the name to spread later to the Amazulu when missionaries went among them. This is what Colenso found. He asked whether the Zulus had no name of their own for the Supreme Being. He made extensive inquiries among the Zulus themselves, and arrived definitely at the conclusion that they had the idea of a God, the Creator. He discovered several names for God: Unkulunkulu, Umvelinqangi, Nkosi epezeulu, and so on. He thought these words were too long for common use, and proposed to adopt uDio, the Zuluised form of the Latin word, but he was quite convinced that the Zulus

¹ *The Present State of the Cape of Good Hope* (1731), p. 93.

had a clear and distinct notion of a Supreme Being.

Since the time of Colenso the subject has been one for considerable controversy. It appears that Zulu scholars are not yet agreed about it. Dr Callaway, who afterwards became Bishop of St John's, Kaffraria, devoted to the subject a large section of his famous book, *The Religious System of the Amazulu*. He wrote down verbatim the statements made to him by members of the tribe, and these he printed with an English translation. His investigations led him to disagree with Dr Colenso, who would have been quite ready to use the name Unkulunkulu in the Bible for "God," and only objected to it because of its length. Dr Callaway, on the other hand, declared that "Unkulunkulu is, both on critical and religious grounds, an utterly unfit word with which to translate God."

I do not wish to weary you with any technical discussion, but I should like to examine this famous word with you, if only to show you how difficult it is to arrive at conclusions, and how painstaking scholarly missionaries are in seeking out the real significance of words which they use, or decide not to use, in Christian teaching and worship.

The derivation of the word Unkulunkulu presents no great difficulty. The adjective *kulu* means "great" or "old, ancient," and duplicated as here, it means the "very old, very ancient," or possibly, "the very great." The U prefixed to the adjective is the personal prefix. The whole word signifies, therefore, "The old, old one," or "The great, great one."

The Zulus, like other Africans, have distinct names answering to our "my father," "my grandfather," "my great-grandfather," and so on. If you ask a Zulu what he calls his great-great-great-grandfather, he will answer Ukulu; and if you press him to go still further back he will say that his great-great-great-great-grandfather was Unkulunkulu; that before him again was an anterior Unkulunkulu; and that the first and most ancient of his line was *the* Unkulunkulu—Adam, in fact, the first of living men.

From this, it would appear that Unkulunkulu was a human being. Three names are given to this progenitor of the race: the name Unkulunkulu denotes his antiquity; Umvelinqangi denotes his priority; and Uthlanga designates him as the potential source of being.

We can understand, therefore, why Dr Callaway came to the conclusion that Unkulunkulu could not be used as a rendering for "God."

And yet, the evidence he gives in his book shows that in the minds of some at least of the Zulus Unkulunkulu was more than merely the progenitor of the race. They think of him as Creator. One of Dr Callaway's informants said: "It was said before the arrival of missionaries, if we asked, 'By what were the stones made?' 'They were made by Umvelinqangi.' . . . When we asked, 'By what was the sun made?' they said, 'By Umvelinqangi.'"

There is another, and still more significant fact. In many parts of Africa there is a story of the origin of death, and it is the Creator

who figures therein. This is how the Zulus tell the tale:—

“It is said that he (Unkulunkulu) sent a chameleon; he said to it, ‘Go, chameleon, go and say, Let not men die.’ The chameleon set out; it went slowly, it loitered on the way; and as it went, it ate of the fruit of a tree, which is called Ubukwebezane. At length Unkulunkulu sent a lizard after the chameleon, when it had already set out for some time. The lizard went; it ran and made great haste, for Unkulunkulu had said, ‘Lizard, when you have arrived, say, Let men die.’ So the lizard went, and said: ‘I tell you, It is said, Let men die.’ The lizard came back again to Unkulunkulu, before the chameleon had reached his destination, the chameleon which was sent first; which was sent, and told to go and say, ‘Let not men die.’ At length it arrived and shouted, saying: ‘It is said, Let not men die!’ But men answered, ‘O! we have heard the word of the lizard; it has told us the word, It is said, Let men die. We cannot hear your word. Through the word of the lizard, men will die.’ And so it has come to pass.”

This story, with some difference in its details, is very widely spread in Africa; and elsewhere than in the South it is the Creator who sends the two messengers, one with the promise of life, the other with a message of death. Since the Zulus tell the story of Unkulunkulu, it would seem to indicate that Unkulunkulu is the Creator. If on other grounds we must conclude that Unkulunkulu

is only a man, then it would appear that an action once ascribed to the Creator has been transferred to the first of the Creator's human creatures.

Dr Callaway was certain, I think, that Unkulunkulu was no more than a human being; but the evidence, drawn from many sources, is confused, not to say contradictory.

Some little time ago a suggestion was made by a Roman Catholic missionary, the Rev. W. Wanger, which, if it prove to be sound, would explain the contradictions. He declares that in reality there are two words, spelt exactly alike when written in ordinary characters without accents or tone-marks, but pronounced differently, and with very diverse meaning. There is, first, 'úNkulu-nkúlu, "God, the all-great God in heaven"; and then there is unkúlunkúlu, "the old, old one," the first human being.

According to Father Wanger, then, the long dispute as to the meaning of this famous name would have been avoided if Colenso, Callaway, and others—every one but himself, indeed—had been trained to perceive the accents and tones as they came forth from the mouth of the natives. If he is right, this is another instance of the value of training in phonetics—a training which should be given to every missionary. And further, if he is right, we can reconcile the statements made by Dr Callaway's different informants. They were not all speaking of the same person; some had the Creator in mind; others were speaking of the first human being.

I should not like to accept Father Wanger's

statements in this regard without further confirmation by phonetic experts; but, at the same time, I quite agree with him that the Amazulu do not provide an example of "endemic atheism," but believed, like other Africans, in a Supreme Being.

I base my conviction on what Dr Callaway's informants told him of Inkosi epezulu, "the Lord in heaven," or more literally, "the chief above in the sky."

"We did not hear of him (first) from white men," said one of Dr Callaway's informants. "In summer-time when it thunders we say: 'The king is playing.' This is why I say that the Lord of whom we hear through you we had already heard of before you came. . . . We know that the man who has sinned against him (Inkosi epezulu) is struck by him (*i.e.*, by lightning)."

A very old Zulu told Dr Callaway: "When we were children, it was said: The Lord is in heaven. *Inkosi i pezulu*. . . . We did not hear his name. We heard it said that the Creator of the world is the Lord which is above." Another old man said: "They used to say, 'There is a Lord in heaven.' When it hailed and thundered they said, 'The Lord is arming; He will cause it to hail; put things in order.'" Another Zulu told Dr Callaway: "Prayers used to be offered to him for rain." Utshaka, the greatest of the Zulu kings, was wont to collect black oxen and to pray to the Lord in heaven. "He sang a song and prayed to the Lord of heaven and asked his forefathers to pray for rain to the Lord of heaven, and it rained."

I am bound to say that Dr Callaway did not accept such statements as these as proof that the Zulus ever believed in the existence of God. "It appears," he says, "that in the native mind there is scarcely any notion of Deity, if any at all, wrapt up in their saying about a heavenly chief. When it is applied to God it is simply the result of teaching. Among themselves he is not regarded as the Creator, nor as the Preserver of men; but as a power, it may be nothing more than an earthly chief, a relic of the king-worship of the Egyptians, another form merely of ancestor-worship."

So Dr Callaway; and you will gather from what he says that he was extremely reluctant to admit that the Zulus had any conception of a Supreme Being, apart from the teaching of missionaries.

It is, of course, extremely hazardous for anyone in our position to criticise such a painstaking and learned scholar as Dr Callaway, who gathered his information from very old men who were able to tell him what their fathers and grandfathers had said on this subject. Nevertheless we are to-day in a position to evaluate the evidence from a wider knowledge than was possible in Dr Callaway's time. We know, of course, that the Bantu tribes of Africa comprise a family which had a common origin, just as the Indo-European peoples have. We are therefore entitled to judge the beliefs of one tribe by comparison with the beliefs of other tribes, and if we carry the comparison far enough, we may arrive at some well-grounded notion of the original ideas of the Bantu before they divided into many sections. We are in a better position to

make these comparisons than older scholars were, for in our day the beliefs of the Bantu, and of other Africans, have been recorded as they could not be recorded before. When we address ourselves to this study we may very well find that some Bantu tribes have preserved more fully than others the ancient belief in a Supreme Being; and the clearer ideas of those tribes will then throw light upon the obscurity of the ideas of another tribe.

I believe that such investigation does help us to understand the Zulu conceptions. A study of all that has been written on the subject leads us to believe that the ancient Bantu, and other Africans, conceived the Supreme Being as the personification of celestial forces, especially of the rain, thunder and lightning.

In view of this conclusion we may review what Dr Callaway's informants said of *Nkosi epezulu*, "the Lord in heaven."

They were inclined to differentiate him from Unkulunkulu. Unkulunkulu is of the earth; the Lord is in heaven. I read that to mean that Unkulunkulu is human; but the Lord in heaven is superhuman. The Lord in heaven causes it to hail; the thunder is his play; he sends the lightning. Offences against him are avenged by lightning. In time of drought, a sacrifice was offered to the Lord in heaven, a sacrifice which took the familiar form of black oxen. And prayer was offered, directly or through the mediation of the *amatongo*, or ancestral divinities, for rain. Moreover, on the evidence of one of Dr Callaway's informants, the Lord in heaven was regarded as

the Creator. Unkulunkulu was, as we saw, also spoken of by some men as Creator; but the hint seems to be conveyed that he made things below as the slave of the Lord in heaven, who created the things above.

When we come in the following chapter to deal with the ideas of God held by Central African Bantu, we shall find all these things said in much greater clearness and precision. There, as we shall see, the Supreme Being, unlike the Zulu's Lord in heaven, has a personal name.

The conclusion I reach is that the Zulus had in former days a much clearer conception of God than their descendants possessed. And perhaps it is not difficult to understand why the Zulus of our times have not kept their forefathers' belief in all its fullness. When Bishop Colenso was making his inquiries he was repeatedly told that the people did not know as much as the ancients knew. In one assembly, after the younger men had denied any knowledge, a grizzled greybeard stood up, and in a serious, slow tone said: "When I was a child I heard from old women, stooping with age, that there was a Great Being *pe-zulu* (up in heaven), who bore the names Unkulunkulu and Umvelinqangi; but more than that I know nothing." At another place, Bishop Colenso was told: "Our old men were killed in the wars, and we have forgotten everything." Probably this explains it. The incessant wars waged under Chaka brought in chaos; the old people, the guardians of tribal traditions, were killed off, and so much of the old belief was not handed on.

Perhaps, too, we must take another fact into account. It would seem that the theistic part of their creed—if I may call it such—has never stood alone. The Bantu creed is something much less than a pure monotheism. They believe in lesser gods, in the ancestral divinities, and in that impersonal energy which I described in a previous chapter. When we come to speak of West Africa we shall find the tangled undergrowth of fetishism (so called) almost choking the religion associated with the Supreme Being. Old priests have said again and again to Captain Rattray: "Suman (fetishes) spoil the gods." That is to say, they take the attention, and religious service, away from the gods. It is remarkable to have this great truth recognised clearly by pagan Africans. Captain Rattray thinks that if the Ashanti had been left to work out their own salvation, some African Messiah would have arisen to sweep their religion clean of all fetish, thus concentrating religious worship on the Supreme Being whom they recognise. That is to say, the old commandment, "Thou shalt have no other gods before me," would have been declared in the ears of the Ashanti. Actually, of course, it has been left to Christian missionaries to proclaim the one God and to sweep away the rank undergrowth of fetishism. And on the Ivory Coast the prophet Harris came with that message: "There is but one God to worship; destroy your fetishes," and a hundred thousand obeyed.

It is profoundly significant, I think, that as the old priests testified, Africans themselves, pagan

Africans, recognise a lack of harmony in their beliefs—"fetishes spoil the gods."

And not the fetishes only. The prevalence of ancestor-worship also tends to draw the minds of Africans away from the pure worship of the Almighty God of whom they are aware. Now, ancestor-worship develops with the growth of earthly kingship. Where a king assumes rule in the place of many petty chiefs, his ancestral divinities acquire much greater power and influence over the people. I think that may be one reason why the theism of the Zulus degenerated until the Lord in heaven was almost forgotten.

3

I cannot now go into the theology of the other South African peoples at any length.

As for the Basuto-Bechuana tribes who inhabit the central regions of South Africa, the word adopted by missionaries for "God" is Modimo. Robert Moffat declared that this word did not convey to those who heard it the idea of God; indeed, he held that among these people there was an entire absence of theological ideas, or religion. Modimo is not a personal name; the proper pronoun to use with it is not "he" but "it." We see in it the common Bantu root which denotes the ancestral spirit—the ancestor regarded as a divinity. This would seem to indicate that the Basuto and Bechuana had no conception of a Supreme Being other than human. But a mass of evidence has been collected in late years which

convinces me that what we found to be true of the Zulus is true also of these tribes, namely, that behind their cult of ancestors there is a recognition of a Supreme Being, the Creator and Sustainer of the world. For some of the facts upon which this conclusion is based, I must refer you to a chapter in my life of Moffat and to the Rev. J. T. Brown's work, *Among the Bantu Nomads*.

A remarkable fact brought out by Mr Brown is that from their earliest years Bechuana children are taught that the word Modimo is taboo—merely to mention it would cause death to the profane one. It was something like this with the sacred name Jehovah among the Jews. "If," says Mr Brown, "the name Modimo is mentioned in ordinary conversation when reference is made to this being, the people will gaze at the profaner of the name, struck dumb with dread, expecting speedy death as the punishment for such profanity." But while ordinary people may not take the word upon their lips, no such prohibition applies to chiefs; doctors of various kinds, mourners or those on whom sorrow has fallen, or who are lost. Others might not pronounce the name, but they could invoke him silently, as, for instance, by looking upward, or by pointing the forefinger of the right hand at the clouds, after wetting it with spittle. To know what the old Bechuana thought of Modimo it is necessary to ask men and women who are acquainted with the esoteric doctrine handed down from ancient times, and this is what Mr Brown did. He found that Modimo was regarded, before the missionaries came and independently of their

teaching, as the only Creator, Originator of all things: he is Montshi, "the Giver"; Modihi, "the Maker"; Mothei, "the Founder"; Mothlodi, "the Creator." He is remote from mankind, and no common worship was rendered to him. Yet among ancient traditions is preserved a hymn that was addressed to him in the early morning: "O Modimo, come with the roseate hues of the dawn and with this day." Mr Brown tells the tale of an old woman, which shows that on occasion of dire distress individuals would pray to Modimo for help. It was a time of famine, and with her fellow-villagers she went out into the bush to gather certain edible roots. Her companions went to seek water, leaving her alone because she was old and decrepit, and, they said, she would only be a hindrance to them. Deserted in this way, the old woman went on gathering roots. Some of them she prepared for eating, and as she worked she prayed: "Dear God, grant that this food may also be water." Her words might well be translated: "Dear mother-God" (*Modimo wê, mmê*). The other people troubled no more about her, but after some days they came across her again and were surprised to find her well and active. She had never felt thirst, she said; the roots had been both food and drink to her. This ancient story is sufficient to show that at least some of the Bechuana, before the coming of missionaries, conceived Modimo to be a person, and believed that he answered their prayers.

4

Northward of the Zulus, in the region of Delagoa Bay, live the Ba-thonga, another Bantu people. Thanks to the long and indefatigable labours of M. Henri Junod, a Swiss missionary, this tribe is one of the best known to-day.

We find among them, as elsewhere in Africa, the three religious elements: the belief in impersonal potency, which we name dynamism; the belief in spirits and the cult of the dead, which we include under the name of animism; and thirdly, the conception, more or less vague, of a Supreme Being, or Power.

The name given by the Ba-thonga to this Supreme Being or Power is Tilo. It is not a personal name, but signifies the blue sky. The root of the word is that which appears in the Zulu word, *pezulu*—a common Bantu root meaning the space above, sky, heaven. Above the ancestral spirits which the ordinary people know, worship, and call by name, there is this power which for the majority remains ill-defined, and which they express in this word Tilo—"Heaven." In the everyday speech Tilo designates the blue sky, but the word contains a far deeper and more comprehensive meaning.

It is quite certain that the Ba-thonga regarded Heaven as a place—a place much to be desired for the rest to be obtained there. The ancients sang a song: "Oh! how I should love to plait a string and go up to heaven, I would go there and find rest." The word there translated "Heaven" is

Tilo. But Tilo is something more than a place. It is a power which acts and manifests itself in various ways. It is sometimes called *Hosi*, "a lord"—the same word as the Zulu, *Nkosi*—but is generally regarded as impersonal. The Ba-thonga appear to think that Heaven regulates and presides over certain great cosmic phenomena to which men must, willingly or unwillingly, submit, more especially phenomena of a sudden and unexpected nature, and above all, rains, storms, death, convulsions, and the birth of twins. It is Heaven that afflicts children with convulsions. It is Heaven that kills and makes alive. "Heaven loved him" they say of a person who escapes some deadly peril; "Heaven hated him" they say of a person struck by misfortune. Tilo presides in some special way over the birth of twins; indeed, the mother herself is called Tilo; and the twins are named "Children of Tilo." This is not to say that twins are liked by the Ba-thonga; on the contrary their arrival is regarded as a dire misfortune, and in former times one of the two was always put to death. They are in some way a manifestation on earth of the power of Heaven. When lightning threatens a village, people say to a twin: "Help us! You are a child of Heaven. You can therefore cope with Heaven—it will hear you when you speak." Prayer can, then, be offered to Tilo; and Tilo will also, on some occasions, intervene to detect and punish a thief. A diviner possessed of powerful charms—made of the mythical lightning bird—addresses Heaven in these words: "O Heaven, it is thou who hast

eyes which see as well by night as by day; they have stolen my goods, and they deny it! Come and discover them; may they be consumed!" Following on this invocation, it is said, the clouds begin to gather, and towards evening the storm breaks. Lightning strikes the thief in his hut and causes the stolen articles to reappear. One might conclude from this that the Ba-thonga attribute to heaven the power of omniscience, but more especially in respect to the detection of theft.

As M. Junod says, there is something incoherent, vague, and unexpected about these ideas. They stand in strange contrast to the ideas about the ancestral divinities, whose cult is a clear, well-defined religion, with sacrifices and prayers. The Tilo of the Ba-thonga, Mr Junod goes on to say, is hardly a being, though sometimes implored. He believes that the ideas of the people were clearer in old days, and this is also the conviction of elderly natives who were his informants. The idea of heaven is, he concludes, the disfigured remnant of a higher and monotheistic conception, which the primitive Bantu held before their dispersion.¹

Whatever we may think of that conclusion, we cannot but be struck by the resemblance between the Tilo of the Ba-thonga and the Nkosi epezulu of the Amazulu.

We reach the conclusion, so far as the South African tribes are concerned, that they have a conception of God; they are aware of Him; but

¹ *The Life of a South African Tribe*, Vol. II, p. 408.

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they have no personal name for Him; they approach Him in prayer only on rare occasions. The ancestors occupy the centre of their field of vision; the Supreme Being has been thrust to the circumference, and is but little regarded.

CHAPTER V

THE AFRICAN'S AWARENESS OF GOD

(b) IN CENTRAL AFRICA

I

IN Dr Donald Fraser's recent book, *The New Africa*, he tells the story of a real incident in evangelism. Thousands of the young Africans in a certain district had become Christians, but the elders had held aloof. The missionary called these together, about seventy in number, and questioned them as to the reason. "We are too old to understand the new doctrines and the new God," they replied. "But it is not a new God whom we worship," said the missionary. They promised to try to make the first day's journey with him, and he took as the text of that day's preaching: "God is." When he had finished the old men spoke. They told how their fathers, too, named the Creator God, and they gave the evidence that confirmed their faith. At their next meeting the missionary took as his text: "God is in the world to-day, not an absentee God, but living and working." At the next meeting the subject was: "God is good." About God's existence the old men had no doubt; they agreed

that He must be present and active; that God is good was new doctrine to them. The next step was "God is love"—and that was difficult for them to believe. That day the discussion was long and detailed. Then the missionary came to the most difficult theme of all: "He that worships God must be good too." The old men knew what worship was, but they had not associated worship with conduct. In the end they assented to this doctrine; but there were searchings of heart that day—their lives were being related to God.

The missionary knew that no one understands what goodness means except as it is pictured in personality. So he began now to talk of Jesus, the perfect example of goodness. And as the days went on, the old men gave assenting adoration to Christ.

Dr Donald Fraser tells this incident in order to reveal two things: first, that there is a true relation between what we teach and what the heathen fathers believed; and, second, that there is an approach to the African, not through the negations and prohibitions, but through the positive truths of our faith.

All missionaries who know their business go along these lines. They begin with the people as they find them—start from what they already know, and lead them onwards. My own experience confirms Dr Donald Fraser's. It is easy to win assent to the first declaration: "God is"; and it is easy because they know, as certainly as the missionary knows, that God exists. He does not

need to prove the existence of God—he may assume it; nobody will deny it.

2

I am writing now of the peoples of Central Africa—from the Zambezi on the south, to Victoria Nyanza, and beyond, on the north. We have seen that there is reason to believe that the tribes of South Africa had lost something of the faith which their fathers possessed; they believed in God, but had no proper name for Him. We are now to examine the Central tribes, and I think we shall find that many of them, at least, have a conception of God that is relatively clear.

Many names for the Supreme Being are to be met with in this area, but three are more notable than others on account of the number of tribes that use them. Along the western coast of Bantu Africa, and extending a long way inland, the name Nyambe, or some dialectical variation of it, prevails. On the east, and again extending a long way inland, you find the name Mulungu, or some variation of it. And in between these two you encounter the name Leza, in various forms—Lesa, Redza, and so on. The name Nyambe figures in about forty of the Bantu languages and dialects that have been recorded; Mulungu in about fifty; and Leza in some fifteen widely spread languages. There are other names, of course: there is Katonda, or Kazoba, among the Baganda; Ruhanga among the Banyoro, and so on.

Let us turn first to Leza, which is the name with

which I am most familiar, because it is the one given to the Supreme Being by the people among whom I worked most of my time—the Ba-ila of Northern Rhodesia.

3

We do not know the derivation of the word, and I believe it to be useless to speculate as to its origin. Like many other words, it has provided a happy hunting-ground for the fantastic etymologist. Mr Dan Crawford, for example, would have us believe that the Africans he knew not only have "the genuine idea of God, but . . . they have the identical name Moses used." Those are his words.¹ If you ask him how he arrives at this astonishing conclusion, he will reply: Take the word LE-ZA, throw away the second syllable; turn the first round, making LE into EL, and there you are: the Hebrew name for God. Q.E.D.

A disciple of Mr Dan Crawford—Dugald Campbell—derives the name Leza from the verb *lela*, "to nurse, to cherish." Then he informs us that the Hebrew El Shaddai means "The God of the breast," *i.e.*, the great mother nurse; so that El Shaddai "is nothing more or less than the Lesa or Leza of the Bantus of Central Africa."²

Father Torrend, who wrote a Comparative Grammar of Bantu Languages, offers another derivation, which is hardly less fantastic. The words *U le za* mean in Ila "he is coming," and

¹ *Back to the Long Grass*, p. 152.

² *In the Heart of Bantuland*, p. 246.

this, says Father Torrend, is the meaning of the divine name Leza: "he is coming"—the coming one.

I would warn you to be on your guard against these vagaries. It is not by such etymologising that we shall reach a knowledge of what the Africans mean when they speak the name Leza. We must associate intimately with the people, hear what they say about the Supreme Being, study their folk-tales into which he is introduced, listen to their prayers, and watch any ceremonies that may be performed.

There is, I think, one sure way of ascertaining what Africans think about Leza. Dr Farnell, one of our best authorities on the religion of the Greeks, says: "The epithets whereby a Greek divinity was addressed in prayer and official hymns give the best clue to the ideas of ancient worship." When, for example, Zeus was addressed by such titles as *kelainephes*, "cloud-wrapped," *asteropetes*, "the lightener," *terpikeraunos*, "delighting in thunder," these epithets tell us some at least of the ideas held in regard to him. He was worshipped under the surname of Thunderbolt. Spots which had been struck by lightning were regularly fenced in and dedicated to Zeus, the Descender, that is, to the god who came down in the flash from heaven. Greek thought advanced step by step to the conception of a Supreme God, the Heavenly Father, the beneficent Creator and Preserver of the universe; but originally Zeus was no more than a personification of the sky. The Athenians meant no more than this, perhaps, when they

prayed in time of drought: "Rain, rain, O dear Zeus, on the cornlands of the Athenians and the plains."

Now the Africans are accustomed to give similar epithets to men and animals. The Ila word *tembaula* means "to extol a person by repeating his praise-titles." When I entered a village, for example, the people would *tembaula* me by calling aloud: *Shalumamba!* "the warrior"; *Chitutamano!* "the silent, cunning spirit"; *Mukumbwanzala!* "the one stirred to pity by the sight of hunger"; *Mulumia-Namusa!* "the husband of the Mother of Kindness," i.e., Mrs Smith. You could not be ignorant of what the people thought about you!

When a person sees a dove spreading its wings in a certain way, he spits on the ground as an offering to the bird, and *tembaulas* it: *Chinakatuetue chisangila-ku-balombe-ku-bashimbi-ndukubankuba, nsangila!* Which means: "O Chinakatuetue, giver of happiness to men, to girls not so much, make me happy!"

Now the point of all this is that invocations addressed to Leza take much the same form as these praise-titles given to men and animals. Those titles express what the people think—or at least what they wish to be thought to think—about you and the dove. Even so the epithets addressed to Leza, the Supreme Being, are an epitome of the theology of the people.

Let me tell you some of these titles.

Chilenga is a word derived from the verb *kulenga*, "to make," to be the first to do some-

thing; not necessarily to produce something out of nothing, to create, but certainly to produce something that did not exist before. When I began to make bricks, the people learnt my name for them, and thereafter they would sometimes refer to me as the person *nguakalenga shitina*—"who was the first to make bricks here." By applying this name Chilenga to Leza they mean that the Supreme Being made things and instituted the tribal customs.

Lubumba, "the Moulder," is a title made from the common Bantu root, *kubumba*, "to mould, to shape." The word describes the action of a woman who takes a lump of clay and shapes it into a pot; the action of a boy who models toy-oxen out of clay. So Lubumba has moulded and shaped the visible world.

Another epithet is Shakapanga, which is formed from the verb *kupanga*, "to put things together in an orderly fashion, to plan and carry out a plan, to construct things." The name designates the Architect of the Universe.

If we ask, What things does Leza make? the answer is "all." Necessarily the universe is smaller to the African than to ourselves—his knowledge of the world is very limited. But everything that is in the universe as he knows it, he says owes its origin to Leza. I was sitting one day in my study with an old pagan friend. A beautiful wild-cat skin was lying on the floor. He took it in his hands, and said to me with enthusiasm and reverence: "Who but Chilenga could colour a skin like that? Yes, only he, who

is above! And all these things, He only!" And as he said it he swept his arms abroad to indicate the world in general.

Another name given to the Supreme Being is Mutalabala, which means, He who is eternal, age-lasting, He who is everywhere and at all times.

Other epithets are these: Muninde, "the Guardian"; Chaba, "the Giver"; Luvhuna-baumba, "Deliverer of those in trouble"; Shintemwe, "the Compassionate"; Shichenchemenwa, "the Good-natured one."

Now, I think you will see at once what use a missionary can make of such names as these. Scores, perhaps hundreds of times, I have entered villages in Central Africa where the Gospel had not been proclaimed previously. How is one to begin? What point of contact can one establish with the people in order to win them for Christ? You cannot begin with the Bible—they know nothing of it. It is futile to start by demonstrating to them the sinfulness of their life; mere denunciation of evil customs is more likely than not to arouse resentment. There must be a basis for your preaching—some common ground which you and the people occupy, some jumping-off place, something about which you agree. Well, you can always find it here in their awareness of God. You begin by making friends with them, by showing interest in their affairs, by doing some act of kindness such as doctoring the sick. Then in the evening you take your place in a group sitting around the fire under the stars. You join in their conversation, you listen to the tales they tell, and

then you ask a question: "By what names do you *tembaula* Leza in this part of the world? What praise-titles do you invoke him by?" And presently you are all talking eagerly about God. If they are hesitant, you say: "In the last village I visited they name Leza, the Moulder—Lubumba; do you know that name?" That will set them talking. In a few minutes they will run off many of the names I have already mentioned; and perhaps will tell you a name or two which you had not heard before. There you begin; the people provide a text for your sermon. Starting from what they know, you can lead them on to what they do not know. That God is, they will readily allow. But as you go on, you soon find how little they understand of the character of God. That He is great and powerful is no news to them; but that he is good, that He is love, and that He demands goodness in us—these things they do not know in any effective sense, though they have some inkling of them.

Let us look at the limitation of their knowledge. In the first place, they are not sure as to the personality of God. We need not wonder that this is so. Many highly cultivated, civilised Europeans, who recognise the working of some mighty power in the universe, cannot believe that the Power is a personal God. I touched on this subject in a previous chapter, and quoted what Herbert Spencer said of "the one absolute certainty that we are in the presence of an infinite and eternal energy from which all things proceed." The Africans have that certainty, too, and I have no doubt that many of them believe that Power to

be personal. They speak of Leza as "he" and not as "it." But if we examine what the people in their everyday speech say of Leza, we can see that not all of them are certain that Leza is a person.

I quoted in a previous chapter the refrain of an invocation addressed to Leza in the rain-making ceremony: "Come to us with a continued rain, O Leza, fall." When it rains, they say *Wawa Leza*, "Leza falls." They have the common Bantu word for rain, which is *imvula*, but more often they speak of rain as "Leza."

When we say "it rains, it blows," we are using what the grammarians call a prop-word—"it." They tell us that that little monosyllable "it" remains in such phrases as evidence of an ancient belief that the sky fell in the form of rain. The Greeks used at one time to speak of Zeus raining; "and still Zeus rained unceasingly," says Homer. Later on the Greeks dropped the name Zeus and said simply "it rains." The Ba-ila have the ancient Greek idiom. Where we say "it rains," they say "Leza falls, or rains." Instead of saying "it is hot," they say "Leza surpasses himself." "Leza blows" they say of the wind; when it lightens, they say "Leza is fierce." "That-which-is-split-by-Leza" is the name of a tree or other object struck by lightning. When you wish to call down a curse upon your enemy, you say: "May Leza split you;" that is to say: "May the lightning strike you!"

I have already referred to the dependence of the Africans upon the rain falling in its season. Drought spells for them dire disaster—to a far

greater extent than it spells disaster for ourselves. Their very existence is threatened if sufficient rain does not fall to make the crops grow. When one realises the part played by rain in the life of a people who cannot in time of need have recourse to imported food, one appreciates to the full that word of St Paul to the Lycaonians: God "left not himself without witness, in that he did good, and gave you from heaven rains and fruitful seasons, filling your hearts with food and gladness." Undoubtedly many of the Africans look beyond the rain to the Giver of the rain, and regard him as a person who is moved by compassion for their needs; but others think only of the rain, and do not distinguish it from its sender. They personalise the elements in some measure. Some of the names they give to Leza might be used simply of the sky and clouds and thunderstorms and rains, and not of a Person who controls them. For example, when they speak of Shakatabwa, "the Faller," of Mangwe, "the Flooder," you see at once that they have the rains in mind. Even such epithets as "the Giver," "the Compassionate," "the Guardian" are not conclusive proof that God is regarded as a person; they might well be bestowed upon the rain which falls on the evil and the good, on the just and the unjust.

We see, then, in these epithets how these Africans have personified the powers of Nature. But I have no doubt that many of them have gone beyond personification, and have arrived at the conception of a God who is personal. There are here, of course, two distinct stages of thought. To

personify simply means that you speak of the thunder, or the sun, for example, as "he" and not as "it." You then get a special god whose activities are confined strictly to one sphere—to that of thundering, or to that of giving light and warmth. If you pray to him, or offer sacrifices to him, it is only to avert disaster—the damage that may be wrought by a thunderbolt; you would not ask his help in case of ordinary sickness, for that would fall outside his sphere of operations. But a personal god is different from a personification of any one of the elements, or of all of them. He exercises a wider influence. If he began as thunder, he comes to control the clouds, to feed his people, to watch over their interests; and so finally he becomes the father of men.

This is undoubtedly how many of the African people have come to regard Leza.

They have their myths, and crude as these may appear to our more cultured taste, they do testify to the fact that Leza is looked upon as personal.

Here is one of these myths.

Long ago, when Leza caused men to descend to earth, he gave them grain and told them to take good care of it. They sowed and reaped an abundant harvest. They gathered it into their garners, and began to eat. But the food was so abundant that they contracted extravagant habits; they were not content with a single meal eaten in the evening; no, they took to eating also in the daytime. But the grain was so abundant still that their gluttony made little impression upon their stores—the grain-bins were still full to over-

flowing. Then the foolish people said: "We have eaten and eaten till we are full, and yet there is plenty. What is the use of all this food? Let us burn it." They all agreed forthwith to burn the grain—all, that is to say, except one man, who was wise enough to conceal his stores. Very soon they began to feel hungry; famine came upon them. They scattered in search of something wherewith to fill their empty stomachs. Then Leza, in his pity, gave them wild fruit and said: "Here are fruits, you foolish people; I gave you great quantities of grain, and after you had eaten your fill, you burnt what was left. Now you will have to live on roots and bulbs and berries."

The old man who related this tale to me said that it explained the unthrifty habits of his people. "We still act in this manner," he said; "some of us waste the good grain—they make beer of it, and in other ways destroy it; and then when it is all done they must go out into the forest in search of the wild fruits that Leza gives us."

In this myth, Leza is evidently other than the sun and the rain which cause fruits and grain to ripen; in his solicitude for the well-being of the people whom he has placed on earth, he shows some feeling; he provides for their wants, is grieved at their foolishness, and takes steps to repair the damage they have done to themselves.

There is a favourite story of Chikambwe, the Blue-Jay—a bird which is said to fly aloft with a loud cry. Blue-Jay, it is said, went to court the daughter of Leza, the Supreme Being. At first Leza refused to give his child unless Blue-Jay

would consent to remain in the sky, which he did not want to do. Afterwards, however, Leza gave way and allowed him to take her to earth, but only on condition that he fed her on the meat of small antelope; she was on no account to eat zebra, nor the flesh of any other large beast. Chikambwe, the Blue-Jay, had another wife who resented the coming of the younger woman, and out of her jealousy deceived her rival, giving her zebra meat for small venison. After eating it, the daughter of Leza died. Leza had been watching from the sky. Presently he gathered a small cloud; then he opened his mouth and roared *ndi . . . ndi . . . ndi . . .*. Then he descended, swept open the grave in which his child was buried, and carried her off to the sky. Nor did Chikambwe, the Blue-Jay, escape divine vengeance. Leza carried him off too, and midway between earth and sky Leza thrust him down. Only a few small bones fell upon the earth—the remains of the guilty Chikambwe. And ever since then, it is said, the Blue-Jay flies aloft with a loud cry, and falls to earth as small bones.

I think that that story shows Leza to be rather more than a mere personification of the sky. The lightning is the opening of his mouth; his sweeping descent is that of the wind, or rain, or thunderbolt; his voice is the thunder. But he has some relationship with men; he speaks in the imperative; he imposes a prohibition; he punishes Chikambwe, holding him responsible for his wife's death. He is very human in his affection for his child, and in his desire for revenge.

I do not want to exaggerate the extent to which the Africans recognise the personality of the Supreme Being. No doubt many of them think of him as no more than a Power—an infinite energy from which all things proceed. But from my examination of the data which I have collected, and from the innumerable conversations I have had with the people, I arrive at the conclusion that some at any rate look upon Leza as a Person.

And what do they think as to the character of that Power or Person—is he, or it, benevolent? It is not altogether easy to answer that question. They name him Chaba, “the Giver”; Luvhuna-baumba, “Deliverer of those in trouble.” These epithets have an evident reference to the rains from heaven and the fruitful seasons, whereby their hearts are filled with food and gladness. And perhaps if these things were all that they experienced, they might be more sure than they are of the goodness of God. But there are the other things: there is famine, and sorrow, and disease and death; and these, for the Africans as for others, obscure the goodness of God. The inexorability of life, the certainty that trouble is the fate of all human beings, the hopelessness of trying to avoid it—these facts weigh heavily upon their spirits. One of their proverbs runs thus: *Tangala kabotu, mwana shimatwangangu, mapule adizile*. It is addressed to a person who is immoderately cheerful. “Be careful in your joysomeness; troubles are about you.” Or again: *Notangala Leza udikubwene*—“When you are filled with joy, God sees you.” In such a saying Leza appears as fate, the

unconquerable and jealous powers of the universe. Leza sees you happy, and that may be your destruction by some swift disaster. A person who is bereft of all his children is named *mulabile-Leza*: "one upon whom God has looked."

There is an epithet applied to the Supreme Being which, I think, expresses one of their deepest thoughts about him. That epithet is *Ushatwakwe*: "The Master, the Owner, of his things." He is the Master, the Owner, the ordainer of the destiny of all his creatures. An old man explained it to me in this way. White men in Africa give their labourers a contract ticket upon which each day they work is marked off. Before a man's time is up he cannot leave his master's employ; as soon as it expires, he must go. So, said this old man, so is it with us all; we cannot depart this life till (as the soldiers put it) our number is up; and then we must. *Leza wakombola mungo wakwe* is another common saying. "God has snapped off his pumpkin." It is said when a person dies.

I think there is evidence to show that the Africans have desired to exonerate God from the blame of sending death into the world. I quoted before the tale of the Two Messengers—the Hare and the Chameleon; or, as the Zulus have it, the Lizard and the Chameleon. According to this ancient and widely known myth, the original intention of the Creator was that men should live for ever; had it not been for the dilatoriness of the first messenger, the leaden-footed Chameleon, that intention would have been realised. And to this

day, Africans hate the Chameleon, because it is its fault that men die. There are other myths of the same tenor. It would seem that the Africans wished very much to believe that God was benevolent. But the facts have been too much for them. They have not succeeded in proving to themselves the goodness of God.

The Ba-ila tell a legend in which Leza appears under his epithet Shikakunamo: "the Besetting One"—the One you cannot shake off. In very ancient times, they say, an old, old woman was the victim of his besetting. He slew her mother and father while she was yet a child; and in the course of the years all her relations perished at his hand. Surely, said she, I shall keep those who sit on my thighs; but no, even these, the children of her children, were taken from her, and she was left alone, alone. Then came into her heart the desperate resolution to seek out the Besetting One, and to demand the reason of it all. Somewhere up there in the sky must be his dwelling—if only she could reach it. She made several vain efforts to construct a tower of wood that would reach to the sky, and upon which she should mount up to God. But the tower always fell before it was high enough. She had to give it up, but she would not surrender her determination to seek God that she might ask, Why? Far away upon the horizon she could see where earth and sky met, and she thought that if she could but reach that spot she would find a way to God. She set out, and as she passed from country to country, people asked her: "Old woman, where are you going all alone?"

And she replied: "I am seeking Leza." "Seeking Leza! What for?" She told them, and they said to her: "You are bereft of friends and kindred. In what do you differ from others? Shikakunamo sits on the back of every one of us, and we cannot shake him off!" The old woman never obtained her desire—never found God to ask that poignant, Why? And from that day to this, say the Africans, no man or woman has solved the riddle of this painful earth.

God is; God is Creator; God may be a Person; it is hard to believe that God is good. Thus may be summed up the African's thought of God, so far as we have gone.

There is one other thing to be said—something that can be said more certainly of some Africans than of others. Dr Donald Fraser began by preaching to the group of old men: "God is"; then he went on to his next text: "God is in the world to-day, not an absentee God, but living and working." The old men agreed that God must be present and active; but that is precisely what many Africans would deny. God made things at the beginning; He may control the great cosmical forces, rain, lightning, thunder; He has ordained the destiny of all creatures; but they would not admit that He can come into immediate relationship with individual men in the affairs of everyday life. To some Africans the Supreme Being stands only as the explanation of every thing and every event which is otherwise inexplicable. The Wapare people of Tanganyika name Him Kiumbe; they say he is the Creator of all things, but "we know

nothing more about Him. He does not trouble Himself about us, and we do not trouble ourselves about Him." Others say that He is so good and kind that he never sends trouble or distress, and therefore men have no need to fear and propitiate Him.

I have spoken several times about the cult of the ancestral spirits. These were once men who lived here below; they are acquainted intimately with human life from within; they may not be visible now, but they are not distant, and they retain their understanding of men's needs. They have power also. Holding such convictions, it is natural that the Africans should seek the help of their ancestors in time of need. They also believe that these spirits can act as intermediaries between them and the far-distant Creator. The ancestors therefore receive the worship, such as it is, of living men.

While this is true generally, it is also true that direct approach to the Supreme Being is not unknown among Africans. Some go to him as a last resort, when the help they expected from the ancestral spirits is not forthcoming. Among the Ba-ila, for example, men and women desirous of children will offer prayer to Leza when their petitions to the ancestors have proved vain. As I described in a previous chapter, the Ba-ila, in common with other Bantu, will pray to Leza for rain.

But it remains true that the belief in God is not an effective force in the African's life, so far as the ordinary activities are concerned. That God should take cognisance of our every thought and

action is quite a foreign idea to them. Among all the epithets applied to Him, the name Judge does not appear. They have little, or no, conception of sin as an offence against God.

In my researches into the beliefs and practices of the Ba-ila, I came across only one recognised sin against God. That was the murder of a member of the community—to kill an outsider was on a different footing. When such a murder is committed, certain cattle are offered in sacrifice to the communal divinity—an ancestor—as a propitiation, for he is offended by the killing of one of his people. The ancestor is responsible to the Supreme Being for the lives of the community, and he therefore takes the shade of the ox killed in sacrifice, and offers it to Leza as a propitiation. The old man who told me about this went through the actions of the divinity in approaching Leza with the offering in his hands.

4

Leaving aside the other widely known names which I mentioned, Nyambe and Mulungu, for an adequate consideration of them would occupy too much space, I will conclude this chapter by offering some remarks upon the theology of the Baganda.

We can hardly consider the Baganda as typical Bantu. Undoubtedly they retain many Bantu characteristics, but their social organisation and religion have beyond question been greatly modi-

fied through the infiltration of alien immigrants from the North.

They have always been a religious people, says Canon Roscoe, whose book, *The Baganda*, is a classic. The objects of their veneration and worship were fourfold: gods (*balubare*), fetishes (*mayembe*), amulets (*nsiriba*), and ghosts (*mizimu*). That is to say, their religion presents the features of dynamism, animism, and theism which we have seen to characterise other Africans. I need not dwell upon the dynamism and animism, but must say something about the polytheistic system which differs from what we find commonly among the Bantu. The gods fall into two classes: the national gods, the maintenance of whose worship was a matter of the State; and the private and clan gods. The principal gods, says Mr Roscoe, appear to have been human beings, deified, invested with supernatural powers. He gives a list of forty of them.

Of the national gods, Mukasa held the highest rank. He was a benign god, having nothing to do with war, but seeking to heal the bodies and minds of men. His wife, Nalwanga, was also reckoned as a goddess. His brother, Kibuka, was the war-god, the Baganda Mars. Wanga, his grandfather, was believed to be the oldest of the gods. Mukasa's father, Musisi, was held to be responsible for earthquakes. There was also a god of plague, a god of the chase, a god of death, a goddess of hunger.

We feel in regard to this elaborate system, in which, as in the Greek mythology, gods and

goddesses preside over various departments of life and death, that we are outside the main stream of Bantu thought, though the Bechuana also had their subsidiary gods, such as Cosa, the god of destiny; Nape, the god of divination. More typical of the Bantu is Katonda, whom the Baganda regarded as the Supreme God, the Creator. He received little honour or attention, although he was believed to have created all things, including the inferior deities. He never came to earth, never took any active part in ruling the world: all mundane affairs he left in the hands of Mukasa and the other gods. The Creator did his work long ago: he is not to be disturbed now—such was the thought of the Baganda.

Could we deal with the tribes who neighbour the Baganda—the Banyoro and others—we should find other names for the Supreme Being; but generally they had, before Christian missionaries came among them, reached a conclusion like that of the Baganda: God is; but God is absent from the world of men.

CHAPTER VI

THE AFRICAN'S AWARENESS OF GOD (c) IN WEST AFRICA

I

WE pass from the Bantu of South and Central Africa, to the Negroes of West Africa. No hard and fast line can be drawn between these two sections of the African race. Fundamentally, Bantu and Negroes are the same people, the distinction between them being not racial but linguistic. There are, it is true, certain cultural differences between them—between, say, the Basuto and the Yoruba. There are differences also in religion: the Negroes make much more use of material symbols than, at least, the southern Bantu do; and the Negroes show, like the Baganda, a much greater development of belief in lesser gods subsidiary to the Supreme Being than do the more typical Bantu. But any one who comes to a study of the Negroes after a prolonged acquaintance with the Bantu, will, I think, be struck more by the likenesses than by the dissimilarities between the two peoples.

The subject of our study, then, is the Negroes; that is to say, the indigenous tribes, of non-Bantu

speech, who inhabit Nigeria, French West Africa, the Gold Coast, Togoland, Sierra Leone, and Liberia. They are very numerous, and it is manifestly impossible to deal with them all within the limits of a single chapter. I must choose a typical tribe for mention, and I propose to choose the Ashanti, who live in the hinterland of Gold Coast Colony.

I select these people because we are fortunate in possessing a first-rate description of their religion in the books written by Captain R. S. Rattray—the hero, one may justly entitle him, of the Golden Stool. He is a very able investigator, and of considerable experience. He knows the language, and is entirely sympathetic with the people. As Government anthropologist, he has enjoyed excellent opportunities of studying them, and, what is very important in this connection, cannot be suspected of entering upon his investigation with preconceptions of a theological kind such as missionaries are often said to harbour. His books—especially his *Ashanti*, published in 1923, and his *Religion and Art in Ashanti*, published in 1921—touch the highest level in anthropological research.

2

The religion of the West African Negro has sometimes been described as "Fetichism." Miss Kingsley, for example, in her famous book, *Travels in West Africa*, devoted five chapters to "Fetichism," and dealt in them with all kinds of

things, from the belief in a Supreme Being to witchcraft. The word comes to us from the Portuguese, through the French: *feitico* originally meant in Portuguese a charm, and because the early travellers on the West Coast were impressed by the number of images—uncouth images, for the most part, carved out of wood—which they saw on every hand, they leapt to the conclusion that the religion of the people consisted in an adoration of these images, which they named fetishes. The word “fetishism” was adopted in our vocabulary largely through the influence of Professor Tylor, who defined it thus in his great book, *Primitive Culture*: “the doctrine of spirits embodied in, or attached to, or conveying influence through, certain material objects.” The Ashanti, like other Negroes, undoubtedly believe that the spiritual is expressed largely through the material. Images and other objects play a great part in their religion; but it would be a great mistake to suppose that they worship these objects. A wooden image has no virtue at all in their minds apart from the spirit that temporarily takes up its dwelling within it; when the spirit leaves it, the image is no more than any other block of wood. That is to say, the material object is not the essential thing in their religious belief and practice. To label their religion “Fetishism” is to fix attention upon the accidental element in it, and tends to obscure what is fundamental. The word has acquired a derogatory, contemptuous signification, and does not really represent Negro religion, some features of which are of a beautiful and noble order.

Captain Rattray is therefore, I think, right in criticising our common use of the words "fetish," "fetishism"—he would like us to abandon them entirely, or at most to restrict the word "fetish" to the charms, the amulets, and talismans which the Negroes, in common with the Bantu, use.

The Ashanti have a scale of religious values. There are, first, the *suman*, the charms, or as Captain Rattray allows us to call them, the fetishes; then there are the ancestral spirits, the *samanfo*; then the *obosom*, the lesser or subsidiary gods; and finally, above all, the Supreme Being, Nyame.

Before we deal with the Ashanti belief in a Supreme Being, let us examine briefly these other parts of their creed.

First of all, the *suman*. These are generally in the form of necklaces, leglets, or armlets, worn on the body. They are composed of many different kinds of strings and small receptacles such as horns and shells; bits of lion and leopard skin, tortoise bones, parrot feathers, beads, pebbles; and sometimes articles of foreign origin, rusty needles, bits of red flannel, and so on. These things are not worn as ornaments, but for the purpose of protection, or for conveying virtue. If, for example, you wear one particular charm, nobody will be able to do you harm; another will frustrate evil intentions of your enemy; a third will enable you to see what is invisible to other people; another is used in detecting witches; and yet another will drive away evilly disposed disem-

bodied human spirits. This last is one of the most famous of Ashanti fetishes; it is named *gyabom*, and in old days a human sacrifice was occasionally made upon it. A child would be taken, its body cut open and laid face downwards upon the fetish, which thus became saturated with human blood. What was the purpose of this sacrifice? Was it in the nature of a gift to the spirit supposed to inhabit the *gyabom*; or was it intended to strengthen the power of the fetish? We have no answer to those questions. What is evident is that the *suman* possesses virtue; by means of it the owner can do things he could not do apart from it; can escape from harm which otherwise he could not avoid. Whence comes that virtue?

The power, or virtue, in a *suman* is named *tumi*. It is not inherent in the *suman*, but is imparted to it. Various taboos are associated with the *suman*, and if the taboo is not observed, the power vanishes, for it is sensitive and delicate. "After a chance word, or an apparently harmless action, the spirit flies, leaving to the poor possessor . . . a perfectly empty and useless object." For example, the owner of a certain *suman* must never speak, nor hear, the word for "wind." If this prohibition is broken, the virtue departs, and only returns when the owner has made a sacrifice to the offended spirit.

This seems to show that the virtue of a *suman* is dependent upon some spirit; and, indeed, Captain Rattray says this is so. But it is not the spirit of one who was once a man; nor is it a god. It is generally the spirit of some plant or tree;

sometimes the power is imparted by fairies or forest monsters. Yet it seems that not always is the power to be called spirit; it is rather that impersonal energy of which I have spoken in previous chapters. It would seem that the Ashanti have advanced on that primitive conception of all-pervading energy; have transformed it in some measure into the spirits of trees and plants; yet some remnant of the older idea remains, and Captain Rattray speaks therefore of the "*mana*, the potency, the power of a charm."

Leaving this very obscure subject, we pass to another feature of the Ashanti religion. Like the Bantu, the Ashanti people, as indeed all Negroes, believe in the survival of the human personality after death. The ancestral spirit becomes the object of something like worship. The dead are ever near the living—they are constantly in the thoughts of the living. "The older Ashanti men and women never partake of food or drink without putting a morsel of the one or a few drops of the other on the ground for the *samanfo* (the ancestral spirits). When an Ashanti, or one of his clansmen, recovers from an illness, he will say, *Me da samanfo ase*, 'I thank the spirits.'"

We have all heard of the Golden Stool, which is regarded by the Ashanti as containing the *sunsum*, or soul, of their nation. Individual Ashantis have stools which are supposed to be the repositories of their owner's souls. Miniature fetters are placed round the central support of the stool "to chain down the soul to it." When a wise ruler of the Ashantis dies, his stool becomes a shrine into

which his spirit may be called to enter again on certain special occasions, in order that the spirit may receive gifts of food and drink, and so be induced to continue to use its new and greater spiritual power in the interests of the people over whom it formerly ruled. As described by Captain Rattray (who perhaps is the only European who has ever witnessed them), these periodical ceremonies and sacrifices are impressive, and are distinguished by the utter reverence with which they are conducted. The spirit grandfathers are addressed as if they were actually present—and present they are in the belief of the worshippers.

Let us now pass on. We will for the moment leave aside the lesser gods and come to the Supreme Being. I have mentioned the charms and the ancestral spirits chiefly because I wanted you to note the similarity of the Negro to the Bantu beliefs; and we shall now find that in regard to the Supreme Being, the Negroes do not differ materially, except in one respect, from the Bantu.

Sir A. B. Ellis asserted that the Supreme Being of the Ashantis was "really a god borrowed from Europeans, and only thinly disguised"; that no sacrifice was offered to him; that he had no priests; that no form of worship was established for him. Captain Rattray denies this altogether, and states categorically: "I am convinced that the conception, in the Ashanti mind, of a Supreme Being, has nothing whatever to do with missionary influence, nor is it to be ascribed to contact with Christians, or even, I believe, with Mohammedans." And he goes on to show, as we shall see presently,

that as a matter of fact the Supreme Being is worshipped by the Ashantis. Captain Rattray failed to notice that, in a later book, Sir A. B. Ellis retracted his opinion and acknowledged, as the result of further study, that the conception of a Supreme Being had been reached by the Ashantis apart from foreign influence. This recantation leaves us without any doubt on the subject: we may accept with confidence what Captain Rattray reports concerning the Ashanti belief.

3

The Ashantis name the Supreme Being Onyame, or Onyankopon. What those names mean precisely, I do not know. I am struck by the resemblance of the name Onyame to Nyambe, which is the name given to the Supreme Being by many of the western Bantu. Whether that resemblance is more than accidental, I cannot tell you. Onyame has his praise-titles just as Leza has. They call him Amosu, "Giver of rain"; Amovua, "Giver of sunshine"; Teterboensu, "Wide-spreading Creator of water"; Tyaduanpon, which seems to mean "Stretched-out Roof," *i.e.*, the overarching sky. There is another name, reported by Rattray, which may be the same as the one just quoted from Ellis: Tweaduanpon. Rattray says it means: "Who alone is great." The Supreme Being is also hailed as the Creator: Odomankoma.

These names indicate, you will observe, that Onyame is, like Leza, closely associated with the

sky, the sun, and the rain. The Ba-ila call the rainbow *buta bwa Leza*, "Leza's bow"; and the Ashantis call it "the bow of Onyame."

In Ashanti, ancient stone implements have been found, coming down from the time when the inhabitants were unacquainted with the use of metals. Some of the people recognise these to be what they are, of human workmanship, but generally they are supposed to be of divine origin, and are called Nyame's axes, or Nyame's hoes. These stone celts are supposed to fall from the sky during thunderstorms, and to bury themselves in the earth. One night when Captain Rattray was staying in a native village, there was a tornado, and a small tree about fifteen yards from his camp-bed was split from top to bottom by lightning. He went to examine it early next morning, and found it cleft as by a blunt wedge or axe; the electric current had left the tree about a foot from the ground, and had entered the ground, making a hole. One of the villagers told him that God's axe had struck the tree, and had passed underground to the river, where no doubt it would some day be found.

In Ashanti any stream or pool that dries up in the hot season is known by the title of *dan 'Nyame*, that is to say, "water that relies upon God," *i.e.*, the rain from the sky.

These facts are sufficient to show that Onyame is very closely associated with the celestial phenomena. He is everywhere: "if you wish to tell anything to the Supreme Being," say the Ashanti, "tell it to the winds."

He is considered, says Captain Rattray, to be too remote to be concerned very directly in person with the affairs of men. He has delegated his powers to his lieutenants, the lesser gods, whom we shall describe presently. We should therefore expect not to find temples or altars erected to the Supreme Being, nor any worship directed to him. But as a matter of fact, "it is hardly an exaggeration to say that every compound in Ashanti contains an altar to the Sky God." Captain Rattray gives, in one of his books, a picture of one of these altars. It consists of a tall forked branch of a tree standing erect in front of a house. The tree is of a particular kind, which is named '*Nyame dua*, "God's tree." Enclosed in the prongs is a basin, or pot, which contains one of the neolithic celts to which I have referred. And into this receptacle, offerings are placed to the Supreme Being. "I do not suppose," says Captain Rattray, "that a day passes among any of the old folk upon which some little offering is not cast upon the roof of the hut, or placed on the altar beside the door, to 'the great God of the Sky,' who is 'of all the earth, the King and Elder.'"

The picture shows a man standing beside the altar; he is one of the priests who are dedicated to Onyame for life. They are given official names, such as '*Nyame boa me*, "God help me"; '*Fa ma Nyame*, "Take it and give to God"; '*Nyame asem*, "God's word"; '*Nyame adom*, "God's favour." They have their hair cut in a peculiar manner, the head being shaved save for a patch on the sides and down the middle. They are also distinguished by

lines of white clay drawn on the forehead, cheek, shoulders, upper arms, and chest. Moreover, they wear gold and silver ornaments, in the form of crescent moons, which have embossed upon them the sun, the moon, and the stars.

These priests are attached to temples—beautifully designed buildings erected to Onyame in remote corners of the older palaces.

Besides the daily offerings I have mentioned, there are special occasions when worship is offered to the Supreme Being. Saturday is the day sacred to Onyame. On one Saturday in the year the priests cook yams. These are mashed, and the chief places a spoonful on the altar and offers a prayer: "My God, Nyankopon, I pray you for life and I pray you for strength." A sheep is also killed, and its blood is allowed to fall upon the ground. Pieces of the meat are threaded upon skewers which protrude from the prongs—we might call them the horns—of the altar; and as this is done, the chief says: "Here is a sheep I kill for you, take and eat, and give me health and strength." After this ceremony the chief must sleep for eight nights in the temple. At the end of this time two white fowls are killed; their flesh is put on the skewers of the altar, and their blood and feathers are smeared over the sacred pole which supports the receptacle.

A priest of one of the lesser gods may at any time, it seems, tell the chief or any other person that he must offer a sacrifice to Onyame.

An expectant mother, in the sixth or seventh month, gives her husband a fowl and some eggs,

and tells him to offer them to his *ntoro*, or familiar spirit, in order to ensure that her child may be born successfully. He retires to the corner of his sleeping-room, severs the head of the fowl with a knife, and allows some of the blood to fall upon the floor. While doing this, he prays to his *ntoro*. Then he takes some mashed yam that has been cooked by his wife, and places it in his *kuduo*—the brass bowl, of beautiful workmanship, which is a highly treasured heirloom in the family. Some person takes the fowl and plucks it at the foot of the altar to the Supreme Being which stands outside the house. After being plucked and singed over a fire, the body of the fowl is brought back to the husband, who cuts it up. One piece is taken away, roasted, and brought back. The husband then takes a leaf of a certain plant and some salt, puts them between his lips, and blows them out, and offers his prayer: "O Supreme God, Onyame, upon whom men lean and do not fall, O my *ntoro*, O my breath, O my *obosom* (my lesser god), allow this infant to come forth peacefully." Three times he does this, renewing the leaf and salt each time. Afterwards he and his wife, and any of his children, eat a little of the roasted fowl that has been offered in sacrifice.

There are several notable features about this sacrifice. The man offers it, you will observe, without the assistance of a priest: he enjoys direct access to the Supreme Being. But he does not pray to the Supreme Being alone; he addresses in one prayer the Supreme Being, his familiar spirit, his breath or soul, and his *obosom*, or lesser god.

We must ask presently why he does this. The blowing or spitting out from the lips is a sacred act which I noted also among the Ba-ila.

The talking drums of the Ashanti have become famous since Captain Rattray revealed the secret of the process by which messages are sent over long distances by their means. There is something sacred about these drums. The drummers are known as *Odomankoma 'kyerema*, literally, "the Creator's drummers." In making a drum, rites of a religious character are regarded as essential. And on every occasion upon which a drummer is about to drum for the first time on a particular day, a little religious ceremony takes place. The drummer fills a cup with palm-wine, or other spirituous liquor, and pours some drops upon the edges of the drums, while he offers a prayer. 'Tis a strange prayer in our ears, for he addresses the spirits of the trees from which drums are made. Then at the end, he rises from earth to sky: "O Supreme Being, Nyankopon, Tweaduanpon, upon whom men lean and do not fall, accept this wine and drink!"

Another occasion when offerings and prayers are made to the Supreme Being by the Ashantis is at the coming by a girl to the state of puberty—the state of *bara*, they call it. On learning from the girl what has happened, the mother announces the fact to the villagers, and the old women come out to sing songs appropriate to the occasion. The mother then spills a little wine upon the ground, and offers a prayer. "Supreme Sky God, Nyankonpon, who is alone great, upon whom men lean and do

not fall, receive this wine and drink. Earth Goddess, whose day of worship is a Thursday, receive this wine and drink. Spirit of our ancestors, receive this wine and drink. This child whom God has given to me, to-day the *bara* state has come upon her. O mother who dwells in the land of ghosts, do not come and take her away, and do not have permitted her to come to womanhood only to die."

Here again, you will observe, the prayer is offered not to the Supreme Being alone, but also to lesser gods and the ancestral spirits.

4

You will have noticed some things in which the West African Negroes differ from the Bantu, with whom we were concerned in previous chapters. For example, so far as I know, the Bantu do not erect temples to the Supreme Being, nor do they offer him wine to drink. The Negroes are like the Bantu in their apparent desire to exonerate God from the responsibility of death. Captain Rattray tells us that the goat is regarded as hateful to the Supreme Being, and is taboo to his priests, and one reason for this is the same reason as the Bantu have for hating the chameleon.

In the beginning of things, when sky and earth had come into existence, but as yet there were no men upon earth, a great rain fell, and soon after it had ceased a great chain was let down from heaven to earth with seven men hanging on it.

These men had been created by Onyame, or Onyankopon, and he let them down to earth by means of this chain. Not long afterwards, Onyame sent a goat to deliver this message to the seven men: "There is something that is called Death; it will one day kill some of you; but though you die, you will not perish utterly, but you will come to me here in heaven." The goat went on his way, but presently saw a bush which seemed to him good to eat; so he lingered there and began to browse. When God saw that the goat delayed, he sent a sheep to deliver the same message. But the sheep perverted his words and said to the men: "When you once die, you perish, and have no place to go to." Afterwards the goat sauntered leisurely in and said: "God sends me to you to say you will die, but that will not be the end of you, for you will go to him." But the men said: "No, goat, God did not say that to you. What the sheep first reported, by that we shall abide." The story ends with the melancholy reflection that "if only the goat had made good speed with her message, man would have died but returned after death; but the sheep made better speed with the contrary message, so man returns no more."¹

In another story of the sheep and goat, the beginning is different. It is said that long ago men were happy, for God dwelt among them and talked with them face to face. These blissful days,

¹ Quoted from J. G. Christaller by Sir J. G. Frazer, *The Folklore of the Old Testament*, Vol. I, pp. 58, 59; and in *The Worship of Nature*, Vol. I, pp. 105, 106. It is not mentioned by Rattray.

however, did not last for ever. One unlucky day it chanced that some women were pounding a mash with pestles in a mortar, while God stood by looking on. For some reason they were annoyed by the presence of the Deity, and told him to be off; and as he did not take himself off fast enough to please them, they beat him with their pestles. Then God retired altogether from the world, and left it to the direction of the fetishes; and still to this day people say: "Ah, if it had not been for that old woman, how happy we should be!" It was after this that God, still solicitous for the people he had made, sent the goat with the promise of immortality—but what with women and sheep, well, men are where they are!

5

I have referred several times to the Ashanti name *obosom*, "the lesser gods," and I must now recount the myth which tells of their origin. This, says Captain Rattray, gives in simple and childish form the very basis of Ashanti theological beliefs. Onyame, it is said, had several sons; and he decided to send them down to the earth in order that they might both receive benefits from men and confer benefits upon men. These sons bore names which are now names of rivers and lakes. There are, for instance, Tano, Bosomtwe, Bea, Opo. These are at once rivers or lakes, and the lesser gods—the sons of the Supreme Being. In a greater or less degree all rivers and lakes in

Ashanti are looked upon as containing the power or spirit of the divine Creator; they are therefore bearers of a great life-giving force. The greatest of these lesser gods is Tano, who has his headquarters near the source of the water of that name, the spiritual part of which he really is. There Tano has his temple, an elaborate and well-constructed building, and connected with it are several priests. Captain Rattray was allowed to enter this temple. What struck him most about it was the entire absence of the *suman*, or charms, that usually adorn the walls of Ashanti temples. Nor did the priests wear any charms. When asked the reason for this, the old priest answered that Tano came from Onyame, and needs no help from the ordinary *suman*. And he added: "*Suman* spoil the gods, but I cannot stop most priests using them."

In addition to these lesser gods, who are the sons of the Supreme Being, the Ashantis give a place in their pantheon to Old Mother Earth—Asase Ya. No temple or altar is erected to her, but her power is none the less universally acknowledged. Thursday was held sacred to her. Some thirty years ago any native who tilled the ground on that day was punished by death, and still to-day the Ashanti farmer will not till or break the ground on Thursday. On certain occasions an offering of food is sometimes thrown on the ground to the Earth Spirit. As might be expected, one such occasion is when the farmer begins to till his land. He wrings the neck of a fowl and lets the blood drip on the earth, while he prays thus: "Grand-

father So-and-so, you once came and hoed here, and then you left it to me. You also Earth, Asase Ya, on whose soil I am going to hoe, the yearly cycle has come round, and I am going to cultivate; when I work, let a fruitful year come upon me; do not let the knife cut me, do not let a tree break and fall upon me, do not let a snake bite me."

This cult of the Earth is widely spread among the Negroes of West Africa, and is not unknown among the Bantu. The Baganda, for instance, used to worship an earth-god whom they called Kitaka; offerings and requests were made to him in order that the land might yield abundant crops.¹

The Ashantis have many gods. "It is not, however," says Captain Rattray, "the Sky and the Earth deities who are in Ashanti held to be the prime factors in shaping and influencing the actions and destinies of mankind. These great unseen powers are generally too remote or perhaps too mighty to be concerned very intimately with the individual clan, much less with the individual member of that clan, and the predominant influences in the Ashanti religion are neither 'Saturday Sky-God' nor 'Thursday Earth-Goddess,' nor even the hundreds of gods (*obosom*) with which it is true the land is filled, but are the *samanfo*, the spirits of the departed forbears of the clan. They are the real landowners, who, though long departed, still continue to take a lively interest in the land from which they had their

¹ J. Roscoe, *The Baganda*, pp 312, 313.

origin, or which they once owned." This we have seen to be true also of the Bantu.

It seems strange to us Christian people that men should trust and worship a host of lesser spirits, human and non-human, and not give all their service to the one Supreme God whose existence they acknowledge. Captain Rattray once put the question to an old pagan priest, why they did not repose all their trust upon Onyame? He replied as follows: "We in Ashanti dare not worship the Sky-God alone, or the Earth-Goddess alone, or any one spirit. We have to protect ourselves against, and use when we can, the spirits of all things in the Sky and upon Earth. You go to the forest, see some wild animal, fire at it, kill it, and find you have killed a man. You dismiss your servant, but later you find you miss him. You take your cutlass to hack at what you think is a branch, and find you have cut your own arm. There are people who can transform themselves into leopards; the grass-land people are especially good at turning into hyenas. There are witches who can make you wither and die. There are trees which fall upon and kill you. There are rivers which drown you. If I see four or five Europeans, I do not make much of one alone, and ignore the rest, lest they, too, may have power and hate me."

That is how the old priest spoke; and in so speaking he voiced the universal sentiment of the African peoples. This world is so full of mysterious and possibly malignant powers, you never know whence the next blow may come that falls upon

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you. It is therefore the height of wisdom to be on good terms with all spiritual agencies—to acknowledge their presence; to greet them; to pray to them; to make them little offerings to secure their goodwill.

CHAPTER VII

THE STRENGTH AND WEAKNESS OF AFRICAN RELIGION

I

IN the course of centuries the continent of Africa has been discovered and explored. Now we are engaged upon another enterprise, not less arduous and absorbing: the discovery and exploration of the African's soul. Surprises await us in this field, even as they awaited us in the former. Our forefathers imagined that the continent would prove to be little more than a waste, howling wilderness; we now know it to be one of the wealthiest quarters of the globe, if not the wealthiest, in its economic resources. We do not yet know all the content of the African's soul, but we know enough to be sure that it is infinitely rich in its possibilities. It used to be said that Africans had no religion, but plenty of superstition. Some writers who admitted the presence of rudimentary religion supposed it to consist of no more than a mass of entangled fears and irrational taboos. They talked obscurely of Satanism, devil-worship, fetishism. We are as yet very far from a complete understanding of African faith and practice, but we can confidently assert that these are much more respectable than used to be thought. We have

discovered the indubitable fact that the African is eminently a religious person.

What is there of strength and what of weakness in his faith?

Throughout these pages I have sought to write in appreciative terms. I have been much more anxious to find what is good than what is bad in African religion. It might be said that I have passed lightly over those elements in it which cannot be regarded as other than false and bad, and have laid stress upon and even exaggerated the nobler elements. I have not consciously drawn a distorted picture, but I plead guilty to dwelling chiefly upon what is highest and best. In this I have only tried to do what I would wish an African to do if he were describing the popular religion of our own people. It would be quite possible for me, as for him, to throw all the emphasis upon the least satisfactory sides of the subject. If there is any good in African religion (and there is), I want my readers to see it. But it would not be right either for our hypothetical African visitor or for myself to be blind to the other side of things. If in any respect African religion is lacking in real worth, is indeed deleterious, inimical to their life and progress, let us state what we find, frankly, but always in a spirit of true sympathy.

In seeking to estimate the value of any religion, we may ask at least three questions about it: Does it kindle and nourish the highest emotions? Does it rest upon a rational basis which our trained intelligence approves? Does it issue in noble living?

We demand an affirmative answer to these questions when we examine the religion which a European or American professes. I think we should apply the same criteria to the African's religion. Religion should be a full-orbed system, taking into itself the emotional, rational, and practical elements of human nature. Any species of it that appeals merely to the emotions is a flabby, sentimental thing; one that appeals only to the reason and lacks the warmth and driving power derived from emotion, is no more than a barren philosophy; and a religion that appeals only to the practical side of our being, to the exclusion of feeling and of strenuous pursuit of ultimate truth, very easily develops into a pitiful pharisaism, and is really not religion in the true sense of the word. The value of a religion depends upon the degree to which it satisfies all our needs, emotional, rational, and practical. Let us then apply these tests to the three elements which compose the African's faith.

2

I have described what I call Dynamism: the belief in a kind of mystical energy; the practices associated with this belief; the emotions evoked by it. What value do Africans find in this element of their religion?

An African warrior, like some others, may be afraid of being afraid; so, to strengthen his courage, to give him confidence and to ensure that he shall not fail in the test of battle, he secures from

a medicine man certain talismans which convey to him, for that special purpose, some of the all-pervasive energies that are wrapped up in them. They give to him a loftiness of spirit that carries him through the ordeal. Wearing his precious talismans, he charges into the enemy's ranks fully confident of playing the man. From our superior scientific point of view we may question the intrinsic value of the warrior's talisman, but we cannot deny its subjective operation upon his conduct. He feels himself to be a stronger and braver man because of it.

Mr Frank Worthington, formerly Secretary of Native Affairs in Northern Rhodesia, tells of an African messenger who was ordered by him to go unarmed and arrest a "witch doctor" of whom the whole community stood in dread. The man was by no means a coward, but he shrank from the task. Seeing his dark face pale with apprehension, Mr Worthington picked an object off his office table—a paper-weight, I think it was—and said firmly and authoritatively: "Clap this medicine under your arm and hold it tight, and I guarantee that so long as you keep it there all the sorcery of this renowned doctor will avail nothing against you." That was a powerful suggestion, and the man's mind accepted it. Holding the innocent paper-weight, and assuring himself that it was there by pressing it between his arm and his body, he went off and accomplished a dangerous errand which otherwise he would not have dared to attempt.

Dynamism thus evokes certain emotions which

are admirable and useful: that is its value in this regard. On the other hand, it ministers also to some of the lowest emotions of human nature, those which lie at the root of sorcery and witchcraft, such as jealousy and malice. For the all-pervading mystical energy can be tapped and put to use for evil purposes as well as for noble purposes. By virtue of them, a man may from a distance encompass the death of his fellows. The horrors of witchcraft are to be placed to the discredit of the belief in Dynamism.

Three axioms of primitive mentality form the basis of this form of belief. They are: (1) that like acts upon like, and produces like; (2) that the part acts upon the whole; and (3) that the desire of a man's heart produces the effect that is expressed in his words. These are the ways in which the mystic powers work. It is evident to our more logical minds that these axioms rest upon a wrong-headed kind of reasoning.

Take the first: that like acts upon like, and produces like. Here is the tuberous root of a shrub. Its peculiar shape suggests to the African that it is a manifestation of the mystical energies in their particular quality as a swelling-producer. Because it bulges, is swollen, it will cause to swell and grow. He therefore makes a decoction from the root and administers it to his child in order to make it grow big. When, again, Africans want rain, some of them slaughter a black ox with the idea that the blackness of its hide will produce something like itself—black, rain-bearing clouds. We say, and are justified in saying, that all the

black oxen in the world, even if killed at the same time, could not possibly bring a rain-cloud upon the horizon. We deny that these axioms have any rational basis.

Dynamism is also an ethic which can be summed up in one word: taboo. Anything is taboo, not when it is prohibited by the chief or by the chief's council, or by the law of God; but when its result automatically follows upon the performance. You do or say something which, as it were, springs back and punishes you. It is an ethic that has many excellent social effects in protecting life and property.

As I showed in a previous chapter, the weakness of this dynamistic morality is shown when Africans are brought into contact with Europeans. The education which they are receiving inevitably saps this form of belief and practice: it cannot withstand elementary scientific knowledge. Its rational basis is too slender. The sophisticated young African realises that many of the taboos that restricted the actions of his fathers are devoid of real foundation. Unless the restraint of an enlightened conscience replaces the old dynamistic controls, the youth falls into the danger of becoming morally an anarchist.

3

Africans are very sure that a human being is compact of a physical body that perishes, and a part that survives death. We shall never come near to understanding them unless we fully

recognise the degree to which the spirit world attracts and dominates their minds. The realm of the spirit is very real and very present to them. The community which we can see and count, the men and women and children with whom we can converse daily, is only a part, a small part, of the actual African community. The living and those whom we call the dead form together a close interdependent fellowship. This is one of the cardinal points in African experience.

They are quite wrong who imagine that Africans feel nothing but a shrinking terror in regard to the near presence of the unseen. It is true that in their belief there are evil spirits who seek to molest and harm the living. But that is by no means all. There are good spirits as well as bad, and to these good spirits prayers are offered in full confidence that they can help and bless. In communion with their departed, who have not gone to some far distant bourne but are always near, Africans find strength and comfort.

Their belief provides the strongest social bond they know. The whole tribal system rests upon it—is held together by it. Their attachment to their land reposes upon the conviction that it is still the abode of their ancestors, whose bodies were buried in the soil and whose spirits hover about it even yet. The strong hold which the tribal customs have upon them is chiefly due to the fact that these were handed down to them by revered forbears, who will be offended by any breach of customary usage. Here is to be found the root of the intense conservatism of the Africans.

There is therefore both strength and weakness in this element of their religion. Like their Dynamism, it is assailed by the innovations which accompany the advent of European civilisation. The tribe is held together not only by association of its living members under the control of their chiefs, but even more by association with the unseen members who in a very real degree are the guardians of the tribal morality. Anything that tends to separate the living from the dead is inimical to the social structure. In these days, thousands of Africans leave their homes for long periods to work for Europeans. They who go are absent not only from their tangible fellow-tribesmen; they depart also from the presence of the ancestors, for these remain attached to their homes. They do not travel. The man on a European mine or plantation is therefore cut off from the restraints which the presence of his ancestors exercises on his conduct, and almost inevitably deterioration sets in. Almost everywhere this element of African religion is in process of decay. Unless something stronger is put in its place, the future is full of peril for the Africans.

4

Not all Africans but perhaps most of them had, independently of Muhammadan or Christian influence, reached the conviction that this world owes its existence to a Creator. They are not all sure that the Creator is a Person, and many of those who seem to be sure on this point do not think of Him as a God who is present and active in all

human affairs. They are not convinced that He is good; that God is Love is a strange and almost incredible doctrine to many of them. Their theism (if theism is the word) lacks what was most characteristic in the conviction of the prophets of Israel: that God was not only One, but One to whom ethical distinctions were very real and who was always on the side of the good. As a general rule Africans do not associate morality with their belief in God; men are not more honest, truthful, and virtuous because of their awareness of His existence. The Creator rules in the cosmical sphere and is the Supreme Arbiter of human destiny, but he does not bring men into judgment now or hereafter. He does not mind whether a man is good or bad.

The African believes, however vaguely, in God, and in the survival of human personality after death. He seeks communion with the unseen. He practises prayer; he is ready to be guided by powers outside himself; he can, and does, give up to the service of his divinities things which are valuable to himself. He is, in brief, religious. He dwells in the twilight, it is true, but he has the capacity of being led forward into the light of day. Will his ancestral faith withstand the shock of contact with the materialism of Western civilisation? I see no hope for him apart from the acceptance of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, both by the African himself and by the people who are bringing the weight of their influence upon him.

My task is now completed. I began by saying

that religion has its roots in an experience—in a sense of ineffable mystery. Men seek to discover the Power which they intuitively discern to be at work in this universe. In doing this they are obedient to an irresistible impulse within their hearts—an impulse which has been implanted within us by God. God seeks man—man seeks God: these are the two facts—or rather the two sides of one great fact—upon which religion is based. That men have erred in their searching is only too manifest to us; but the significant thing is not that they have erred in their seeking, but that they have sought. When, with utterest sympathy, we watch their strivings after God, with all their failures and with their little successes, we must ask ourselves, Why did God veil himself, so that the universal human cry rises, Thou art a God that hideth thyself? You know perhaps the poem in which Mr Edwin Markham has tried to give an answer to that riddle :—

When, in the dim beginning of the years,
 God mixed in man the raptures and the tears,
 And scattered through his brain the starry stuff,
 He said, "Behold! Yet this is not enough,

"For I must test his spirit to make sure
 That he can dare the vision and endure.
 I will withdraw My face,
 Veil Me in shadow for a certain space,
 And leave behind only a broken clue,
 A crevice where the glory glimmers through,
 Some whisper from the sky,
 Some footprint in the road to track Me by.

“ I will leave man to make the fateful guess,
Will leave him torn between the no and yes,
Leave him unresting till he rests in Me,
Drawn upward by the choice that makes him free—
Leave him in tragic loneliness to choose,
With all in life to win or all to lose.”

So Mr Markham tries to answer the truly perplexing problem. All we can say is that it has pleased God to make of one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth . . . that they should seek God, if haply they might feel after him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us. And that is not the final word. He has revealed himself in Christ Jesus, and it is our duty and our privilege to lead into the full light of day those of our brethren who are groping in the dim twilight, so that they with us may taste the joy of knowing God as the Father of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

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