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*The Universality of Religion.*—By E. WASHBURN HOPKINS,  
Professor in Yale University, New Haven, Conn.

It is now a full century since the German scholar Meiners said that anyone who writes on the history of religion should first define religion. Sir John Lubbock has been repeatedly cited as authority for the statement that there are tribes and races which have no religion, but though Lubbock's theme was indeed the non-universality of religion, he yet says again and again that such and such a tribe has no religion in the proper sense of the word, or that it has only what might be called religion. In other words, the result of Lubbock's investigation was simply the proof that Lubbock's idea of religion was not universal. On the other hand, E. B. Tylor showed that religion as defined by himself was universal. It is not difficult to show that Lubbock's general statement, as usually interpreted, is incorrect. Only by making an artificial distinction between religion and superstition can we predicate the irreligion of any social group. Everywhere man has language and religion of some sort. Reduced to its lowest terms, religion still contains two elements, the credo and the action induced thereby, belief and cult. The belief may be of the vaguest, the cult no more than an act of fear based on belief; but, as there is no cult without belief (at least among savages), so there is no religious belief without a corresponding activity.<sup>1</sup> This activity, again, must be correlated with the supposed demands of the object of belief, and thus to be religious is, in short, to square human life with superhuman life, belief always being implied.

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<sup>1</sup> Otherwise the belief is not religious. For example, the intellectual conviction on the part of a member of tribe A that tribe B has gods becomes religious only when the member of tribe A is brought under the influence of those gods, and the individual reacts to the new stimulus. For the same reason, even within one social group, a divinity recognized as existent but not as active is really withdrawn from the religion of the believer. Thus the god Brahman forms no part of ordinary Hindu religion. The Hindus frankly say that Brahman's sole business was to create. Having created, his work is done and the believer takes no further interest in him, as he is powerless to affect man's weal. It is not denied that Brahman exists, but the Hindu feels that he can ignore this god and does so. He believes in him, but only as he believes in America.

But though I have here made superhuman synonymous with spiritual, as is usually done, there remains the question whether belief in the spiritual is really belief in the superhuman, and if not, whether a belief in spiritual beings ought to be held as equivalent to a belief in superhuman beings. In 1885, Gruppe promulgated the view that man was by nature irreligious, and that all religion, like printing, has spread out from one or two centers, the chief center being the Semitic cradle of all religions. Over a world hitherto destitute thereof, religious notions spread on the one hand, into India, the farther East, and eventually into America; and on the other, into Greece and Europe, originally starting from a drunken Semite. This Semite first of all got drunk and being drunk imagined himself a god. Intoxication was the first religious rite. Some ethnologists who believe that sub-Arctic man came without religion to the South have rather favored this idea, but in the light of what we know to-day in regard to savage religions, Gruppe's theory seems to be too crude for serious discussion. According to Lubbock, "If superstitious fear and the consciousness that other beings inhabit the world be religion, then there is no race without religion." But do superstitious fear and the belief in "other beings" imply a belief in the superhuman?

This is an important question, for it is this fear and belief which are often exploited as constituting an argument in favor of universal innate religious ideas, though there is of course no universality of religion in a theistic or deistic sense any more than in the Christian sense.<sup>1</sup>

To come now to the chief point of this paper: There are tribes credited with no other religious ideas than a belief in ghosts. This appears to be true of some of the South Americans, and practically the cult of many tribes in India is merely a

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<sup>1</sup> Andrew Lang and Sayce (in his recent *Gifford Lectures*) have both apparently reverted to Dr. Whateley's idea that savages have a demoralized culture, and they rather leave their readers to prove that man was not a primitive deist with a general tendency to progress downward. But the burden of proof rests with him who asserts that this is the probable explanation of Australian or Patagonian superstition. There is, as Professor Toy has said, no reason to assume that man's religion was usually in inverse proportion to his culture. That the lowest savages had first of all the lowest kind of religion, must be taken for granted as the general law, even though there are special historical cases of spiritual downfall from a former higher estate.

fear-service of ghosts, that is, not kobolds, gnomes, tree-spirits, but the spirits of departed human beings. The almost monotheistic belief attributed to some of the Wild Tribes of India resolves itself, on closer examination, into an apotheosis of the maternal ancestor with a more active sub-cult of deities that revert to the human stage. Now in so far as the religion of such a tribe is really based on ghosts, malevolent or benevolent, it is not superhuman, because every man is potentially a ghost and every god is only man in a different sphere of activity. There is, in other words, in mere ghost-belief no acknowledgment of anything which is not eventually human, no belief in a spiritual power other than that of man (and beast). The savage whose whole religious creed consists in the belief that his drowned grandfather, for example, is still alive and liable to help or annoy him, does not really believe in any power higher than man himself. He believes only in spirits as forms of human life (or animal life). We must then credit him with a belief in spiritual powers, but we may not imply that this belief involves also a belief in some power not man's, not human, a power not ourselves, "other beings" in the sense implied by this phase.<sup>1</sup> If the savage merely believes his father's ghost to be still alive and tries to feed it or drive it away, then he simply believes in his father, or, for the next generation, in himself, as existing after death. In and for itself, this is only a philosophy of existence, a religion, if one chooses to call it so, but with no implication of a superhuman power in the world.

On the other hand, there is some ground to question whether we can absolutely trust all the modern reports and studies in comparative religion. At least it is questionable whether reports, however honest, are unbiassed when the observer records all religious phenomena as "due to ghost-worship" without further discussion. I have in mind various little papers of much interest describing religious cults in some out-of-the-way place in India and the frequent assertion (without evidence to support it) that the cult originated in the worship of ghosts, though now it is directed to the sun or other objects of nature. Some of these assertions may be correct, for it is quite possible for a ghost to become sun, moon, or star, but it is slightly disconcerting to discover that as an illustration of the evolution of

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<sup>1</sup> It is curious that this expression of Lubbock reproduces exactly the Hindu notion of *itarajana*, "other beings," viz. demons, chief of whom, however, is the ghost Kubera.

ghost-worship the specimen offered is simply assumed to be such. For my own part, I think that most savages believe in many more powers than those of ghosts (for, to them, all is animate or animately endowed), but that these powers are really material, powers inseparable from matter as light from flame. The ghost-theory, moreover, is certainly true in so far as it asserts that in some cases the only much-respected deities are of human origin. The savage often shrinks from sundry little powers, while acknowledging as the sole great powers maternal or paternal ancestors. Ghosts and material force, that is force accepted as inherent in forms of matter, without any belief in superhuman and extra-material powers, may constitute the whole object of religious regard. In such a case it can scarcely be said that the savage has any notion of a spiritual power which in origin stands apart from man or matter. Even the disease-devil is in the first instance only the implicate of the disease or rather it is the disease itself, and hence is material and not spiritual. Religion then cannot be said to be universal if the term is used as connoting a belief in purely spiritual powers (of non-human and non-material origin). In its lowest form religion is an active acknowledgment of any power. For this reason the living chief or dangerous wild animal is recognized as an object of worship, and for this reason the dead chief and the whirlwind; but a spiritual power disconnected from man and matter is not recognized. The dead chief is only a sublimated man. In the last analysis the only form of religion which can be said to be universal is that based upon a power supposed to be inherent in or derived from the human or material world. The greater the distance from this world the less the power. Hence the abolition of worship of older ghosts or only a formal acknowledgment of their former prowess, while the real religion of the savage is averted from the creative but dim grandmother or great-great-grandfather ghosts and concerns itself with the powers that are more immediate. Hence, too, the indifference toward the most dreaded powers till they actually manifest themselves materially. Even in the modern half-civilized Punjab, for example, the shrine of the small-pox goddess is quite deserted until small-pox actually rages in the vicinity. There is no attempt even then to propitiate a spirit, only to get rid of an obnoxious material power regarded as present and potent in disease.