

LECTURE VII.

ARE THERE TRIBES OF ATHEISTS?

IN the first Lecture of this course I stated that some authors had denied that there were any real or sincere atheists, but that I did not see how this view could be successfully maintained. In recent times a very different view has found a large number of advocates. It has been argued that religion, so far from being a universal, is not even a general characteristic of man; that so far from there being no atheists in the world, there are numerous tribes, and even some highly cultivated nations, wholly composed of atheists. The belief to which in ancient times Cicero and Plutarch in well-known passages gave eloquent expression—the belief that wherever men exist they have some form of religion—can no longer be taken for granted; for many now assert, and some have laboured to prove, that there are peoples who have neither religious ideas, nor gods, nor any kind of worship. I

shall now examine this view; but before entering on its direct discussion, a few preliminary remarks seem necessary.

First, then, the question, Are there entire tribes and nations which have no religious beliefs or practices whatever? is a question as to a matter of fact. It ought to be decided, therefore, solely by an appeal to facts. But it is very apt to be decided, and has very often been decided, by the theological or philosophical prepossessions of those who have undertaken to answer it. Men like Büchner, Pouchet, O. Schmidt, show by the very tone in which they pronounce many of the lower tribes of men to be totally devoid of religious sentiments, that they deem this to be a stroke which tells strongly against religion. It is impossible, I think, for an impartial person, even were he on the whole to approve of their conclusion, to read what they have written, and to mark how they have written, on this subject, without perceiving that they have been more animated by dislike of religion than by the love of truth. On the other hand, with many it is a foregone conclusion that religion must be universal; and their reason for affirming it to be universal is, not that the relevant facts prove this, but that the honour of religion seems to them to require it. Now on neither side can this be justified. The truth alone ought to be sought, and it can only be found in the facts. The answer to the

question, Are there peoples without religion? ought, if legitimately obtained, to be taken into account in deciding whether or not man is an essentially religious being; but it is not legitimately obtained if deduced from a foregone conclusion on that subject. Its place is among the premisses of an argument for or against the proposition that religion is rooted in man's very nature, not among corollaries from it.

There need not, perhaps, be great anxiety on either side to arrive at a particular answer. Were it made out that there are some degraded tribes which have no conception of the supernatural, little, it seems to me, would be proved either for or against religion. It would only show that circumstances might be so unfavourable, and the minds of men so inactive, dark, and debased, that the religious principles or tendencies of human nature could not manifest themselves. Of course, if it were adequately proved that atheism is so very widely prevalent as some maintain,—if it were established, in other words, that not only a great number of barbarous and semi-barbarous peoples are devoid of all religion, but that the many millions of Buddhists in China and Japan are strictly and properly atheists,—atheism would have considerable reason for exultation. For, though even that would certainly not prove atheism true or theism false, it would convince unprejudiced minds that

human nature was not constitutionally framed for religion. It would very much weaken, if it did not destroy, the weighty argument for religion which the religious history of man presents. Still we have manifestly no right to reject the view that atheism is thus widely spread, merely because we dislike some of the inferences which would follow from it. We are bound to ask, Is it thus widely spread?—a question which can only be answered by an appeal to facts; and facts ought always to be studied with minds as free as possible from preconceptions.

Not a few of the writers who have recently discussed the subject have been intent on showing that the facts conform to the Darwinian or some other theory of development. They have adapted the facts to their theory, instead of testing their theory by the facts. This is, of course, an unscientific and erroneous mode of procedure. And, it may be added, it is one to which the development theory does not logically require us to have recourse. It is as consistent with even the Darwinian form of the development theory that the origin of religion should be at any one point as at any other. It may have been antecedent to the origin of man, contemporaneous with it, or subsequent to it.¹

I remark, in the second place, that great care and caution require to be exercised before we draw a negative conclusion in a matter of the kind under

¹ See Appendix XXV.

consideration. The question belongs to one of the least advanced of sciences—the science of comparative psychology. The religious characteristics of men are mental peculiarities which can only be successfully studied by those who are accustomed to trace and analyse mental processes. But how few of those who travel among savage peoples have received any instruction in mental science, and how little mental science is there of a kind calculated to serve as a guide to the correct observation and interpretation of intellectual, moral, and religious phenomena! The men who write those books of travels in which distant lands and savage peoples are described, are often more than ordinarily conversant with zoology, botany, and other physical sciences, and they can describe accurately plants, animals, geological and meteorological facts, the bodily peculiarities of human beings, weapons, canoes, &c., but they very seldom give much trustworthy information as to the mental operations of the aborigines with whom they have come into contact. Even such eminent observers of outward nature as Mr Wallace and Mr Bates, for example, were obviously able to make out extremely little as to the inner life of the Amazonian tribes. When a traveller tells us that he found among the natives of some barbarous land no traces of religious belief, we must consider whether or not he had the means and opportunities required

to arrive at the truth in the matter ; whether or not he was sufficiently master of the tribal language to converse easily in it ; whether or not he had so thoroughly gained the confidence of those whose religious beliefs he sought to ascertain that they were quite open and unreserved in communicating to him their most secret and most sacred thoughts and feelings ; whether or not his inquiries were of a really intelligent kind ; how far these inquiries extended ; how far the impression which he derived from his intercourse with some individuals might have been modified if he had had more intercourse with other individuals of the same community ; whether he knew much, little, or nothing of their songs and traditions, &c. A foreigner is very rarely a competent and impartial judge. It is so even with respect to civilised peoples, and must be still more so with respect to barbarous peoples. After years of residence in England, a Frenchman's book on English life is apt to be on many points amusingly absurd. What must, then, the liabilities to error be in the case of countries rarely or never visited before, and which the traveller merely hurries through, knowing imperfectly or not at all the languages spoken ? In savage countries the stranger is generally an object of dislike, or at least of distrust. Disinterested curiosity is what an uncivilised man cannot understand, and to question him is often of itself

sufficient to render him suspicious and evasive. He is, in general, specially averse to being questioned about his religious beliefs. It doubtless seems to him a sort of profanation to converse regarding them with one whom he perceives to despise them, and a humiliation to give expression to his vague feelings and incoherent convictions on such matters before one whom he cannot but feel to be intellectually above him. If the questioner be a missionary seeking to propagate the principles of his own faith, of course the barbarian is all the more likely to take refuge in silence and feigned ignorance.

In confirmation of these remarks, I may quote the following sentences from the valuable work of Mr Tylor on 'Primitive Culture.' He says: "Even with much time, and care, and knowledge of language, it is not always easy to elicit from savages the details of their theology. They try to hide from the prying and contemptuous foreigner their worship of gods who seem to shrink, like their worshippers, before the white man and his mightier Deity. Mr Sproat's experience in Vancouver's Island is an apt example of this state of things. He says: 'I was two years among the Ahts, with my mind constantly directed towards the subject of their religious beliefs, before I could discover that they possessed any ideas as to an overruling power or a future state of existence. The traders

on the coast, and other persons well acquainted with the people, told me that they had no such ideas, and this opinion was confirmed by conversation with many of the less intelligent savages; but at last I succeeded in getting a satisfactory clue.' It then appeared that the Ahts had all the time been hiding a whole characteristic system of religious doctrines as to souls and their migrations, the spirits who do good and ill to men, and the great gods above all. Thus, even where no positive proof of religious ideas among any particular tribe has reached us, we should distrust its denial by observers whose acquaintance with the tribe in question has not been intimate as well as kindly."

I would remark, in the third place, that we must beware of denying that a rude and feebly developed religion is religion at all. We must not expect too much. Many who have affirmed that such and such peoples were destitute of religion have done so because these peoples did not believe in one supreme God, or had no proper conception of a Creator or Moral Governor. They have identified religion with theism, and represented as destitute of religion tribes whose doctrines fell so far short of their own that they thought them unworthy to be designated religious. As the early Christians were called atheists because they disowned the gods of pagan Rome, so several heathen tribes have been called atheists by those who could find

among them no traces of belief in the one true God ; or if not called atheists they have been said to have no religion but merely superstitions. Testimony of this kind, however, is quite worthless when the point to be decided is whether religion is universal or not. Superstition, as understood by the writers referred to, just means false religion, and the presence of false religion is as good evidence of the existence of religion as the presence of true religion. The distinction between religion and superstition is a very important one in its proper place, but it has no relevancy here, and the employment of it in this connection is a sure sign of confusion of thought. We have no right to identify religion with particular phases of religion. We have no right to pronounce a low or bad religion no religion at all. We have no right to include in our definition of religion the belief in one Supreme Being, in the creation of the world, in the immortality of the soul, or a regulated outward worship, or a priesthood, &c. We are inquiring whether or not religion in some form is everywhere to be discovered ; and in order to arrive at a correct answer, we must not ignore or discard any form of it, however humble or ignoble, however undeveloped or degenerate.

We must be content with a minimum definition, —with the definition which comprehends all phenomena admitted to be religious. Perhaps if we say

that religion is man's belief in a being or beings mightier than himself, and inaccessible to his senses, but not indifferent to his sentiments and actions, with the feelings and practices which flow from such belief, we have a definition of the kind required — one excluding nothing which can be called religion, and including nothing which is only partially present in religion. It is in this its widest sense that we have to understand religion when we discuss whether or not there are peoples destitute of religion.

Of the recent writers who have undertaken to show that there are peoples wholly without religious ideas, feelings, or practices, Sir John Lubbock is, so far as I am aware, entitled to the credit of having bestowed most care on the argument. He has certainly written with more knowledge and in a more scientific spirit than Büchner, Pouchet, O. Schmidt, or Moritz Wagner. He has brought together a much larger number of apparent facts than any one else on the same side has done. He has presented them in a manner to which, so far as tone and temper are concerned, no objection can be fairly taken. If he err, as I think he does, it is only his science which is at fault. I shall follow, therefore, his statement of the argument against the universality of religion, as presented in the last edition of his 'Prehistoric Times,' and examine it paragraph by paragraph, as there

seems to be no other way of satisfactorily dealing with it.

Sir John Lubbock writes, then, thus: "According to Spix and Martius, Bates, and Wallace, some of the Brazilian Indians were entirely without religion. Burmeister confirms this statement, and in the list of the principal tribes of the valley of the Amazons, published by the Hakluyt Society, the Chuncos are stated 'to have no religion whatever,' and we are told that the Curetus 'have no idea of a Supreme Being.' The Tupinambas of Brazil had no religion. The South American Indians of the Gran Chaco are said by the missionaries to have 'no religious or idolatrous belief or worship whatever; neither do they possess any idea of a God, or of a Supreme Being. They make no distinction between right and wrong, and have therefore neither fear nor hope of any present or future punishment or reward, nor any mysterious terror of some supernatural power, whom they might seek to assuage by sacrifices or superstitious rites.' Bates tells us 'that some of the Indian tribes on the Upper Amazons have no idea of a Supreme Being, and consequently have no word to express it in their own languages.' Azara also makes the same statement as regards many of the South American tribes visited by him."

These are Sir John Lubbock's instances from South American tribes. But I find that they are

all either erroneous or insufficiently established. Gerland ('*Anthropologische Beiträge*,' i. 283) has correctly pointed out that the passage of Spix and Martius to which Sir J. Lubbock refers, instead of saying that the Brazilian Indians were entirely without religion, tells us that, although engrossed in the present, they had a certain reverence for the moon and particular stars, believed in a Principle of Evil, had priests who professed to have intercourse with demons, and highly honoured certain animals which they supposed to be messengers from the dead. This is a very different story indeed. I do not doubt that, "in the list of the principal tribes of the valley of the Amazons, published by the Hakluyt Society, the Chuncos are stated 'to have no religion whatever,' and we are told that the Curetus have no idea of a Supreme Being ;'" but what proof is there that these statements are not unwarranted? It will never do to believe such statements—sweeping negatives—merely because they happen to be printed. The assertion that the Tupinambas of Brazil had no religion is not to be received. It is unsupported by any positive evidence; contradicted by the testimony of Stade, for example, who was nine months a prisoner among them; and inconsistent with the fact that several later writers have described the religion of the Tupi race. Tupan, the thunder-god, was the chief deity. The mis-

sionaries cited by Lubbock have obviously painted the Indians of the Gran Chaco in too sombre colours. Instead of making no distinction between right and wrong, the Indians of the Gran Chaco appear to be among the best of the American tribes. For example, they do not torture the prisoners whom they take in war, and treat kindly the captive women and children. About their mental life little is known, however, as they are irreconcilably hostile to their civilised neighbours, have no villages, and live very much on horseback. As to the assertion of Mr Bates, it rests on too narrow a conception of what religion is, which, as I have already said, must not be identified with belief in one Supreme Being, or in a Creator properly so called. Further, it greatly needs confirmation, being contrary to the facts and testimonies collected by J. G. Müller and by Waitz. It is inexplicable that Sir John Lubbock should have ignored as he does researches so well known and highly appreciated by students of the natural history of man. Then we should not only have been told that Don Felix de Azara denies religion to many of the American tribes visited by him, but also that he describes the religious beliefs and practices of the very tribes which he denies to have religion. This must strike every one who reads his work; and Valckenaer, D'Orbigny, and Tylor have called attention to it. His statement

that the tribes he visited had no religion needs no other contradiction than his own. I am glad to perceive that Lubbock does not include, as Locke and various writers have done, the Caribs among peoples without a religion, for they are known to have worshipped a god of the moon, of the sun, of the wind, of the sea, and a number of evil spirits, with Mabocha as their chief. But I think he might have told us that Humboldt, whose travels in South America were so extensive, whose explorations were so varied, scientific, and successful, and who was certainly uninfluenced by traditional theological beliefs, found no tribes and peoples without a religion; and that Prince Max von Neuwied, in all his many and wide wanderings in Brazil, tells us that he had found no tribes of which the members did not give manifest signs of religious feelings.¹

Sir J. Lubbock thus proceeds: "Father Baergert, who lived as a missionary among the Indians of California for seventeen years, affirms that 'idols, temples, religious worship or ceremonies, were unknown to them, and that they neither believed in the true and only God, nor adored false deities;' and M. de Perouse also says that 'they had no knowledge of a God or of a future state.' Colden, who had ample means of judging, assures us that the celebrated 'five nations' of

¹ See Appendix XXVI.

Canada 'had no public worship nor any word for God;' and Hearne, who lived amongst the North American Indians for years, and was perfectly acquainted with their habits and language, says the same of some tribes on Hudson's Bay."

Now to the assertion of Father Baegert we may oppose a most interesting account of the faith of the Californians left by Father Boscana, one of the earliest missionaries to Upper California. Mr Bancroft, whose researches have been most laborious and extensive, informs us that "the Californian tribes, taken as a whole, are pretty uniform in the main features of their theogonic beliefs. They seem, without exception, to have had a hazy conception of a lofty, almost supreme being; for the most part referred to as a Great Man, the Old Man Above, the One Above; attributing to him, however, as is usual in such cases, nothing but the vaguest and most negative functions and qualities. The real practical power that most interested them, who had most to do with them and they with him, was a demon, or body of demons, of a tolerably pronounced character" (iii. 158). The view adopted by Sir J. Lubbock regarding the Californians is irreconcilable also with the series of testimonies adduced by Waitz. Then the negative reports of Colden (1755) and of Hearne (1769-1772) are not to be allowed to outweigh the contrary reports of numerous other

witnesses no less credible. Further, we are not justified in concluding that a people has no religion because it has "no public worship nor any word for God." It is clearly proved that the Canadian Indians believed in supernatural beings, and, in fact, in legions of spirits. The sorcery prevalent among them may be viewed as a perverted form of worship. The Koniagas even believe in a chief deity, the Thlinkets in a creator of all beings and things, the Haidahs suppose the great solar spirit to be the Creator and Supreme Ruler, &c. &c. Belief in a former of the universe is, in fact, the rule among the North American Indians. The exceptions are few and doubtful.¹

Sir J. Lubbock, passing from North America to Polynesia and Australasia, thus continues: "In the 'Voyage de l'Astrolabe' it is stated that the natives of the Samoan and Solomon Islands in the Pacific had no religion; and in the 'Voyage of the Novara' the same is said of the Caroline Islanders. The Samoans 'have neither moraes, nor temples, nor altars, nor offerings, and consequently none of the sanguinary rites observed at the other groups. In consequence of this, the Samoans were considered an impious race; and their impiety became proverbial with the people of Rarotonga, for, when upbraiding a person who neglected the worship of the gods, they would call

¹ See Appendix XXVII.

him 'a godless Samoan.' On Damood Island, between Australia and New Guinea, Jukes could find no 'traces of any religious belief or observance.' Duradawan, a sepoy, who lived some time with the Andaman Islanders, maintained that they had no religion, and Dr Mouatt believes his statements to be correct. Some of the Australian tribes, also, are said to have no religion. In the Pellew Islands Wilson found no religious buildings, nor any sign of religion. Mr Wallace, who had excellent opportunities for judging, and whose merits as an observer no one can question, tells us that, among the people of Wanumbai, in the Aru Islands, he could find no trace of a religion; adding, however, that he was but a short time among them."

It is very strange that Sir John should continue through three editions of his work to represent the Samoan Islanders as destitute of religious beliefs. Williams, in the passage quoted, says nothing of the kind, but, what is very different indeed, that they were considered impious and called godless by their neighbours, because they did not worship in the same manner as they did. They were called "godless" by the people of Rarotonga, just as the early Christians were called godless by the pagan Romans. Williams merely cites the Rarotongan proverb, but Sir John asks us to endorse it. That is impossible, especially since the Rev

George Turner has given us, in his 'Nineteen Years in Polynesia' (1861), a valuable and elaborate account of the Samoan religion. That the natives of the Samoan Islands should ever have been stated to have no religion, shows only how little credit ought to be attached to general statements of the kind, when not founded on close and careful examination. The treachery and ferocity of the Solomon Islanders have prevented Europeans acquiring much acquaintance with their characters, but that they are not without religious beliefs is proved by their having idols, sometimes ten or more feet high, to which they make offerings of food. Gerland, one of the leading ethnologists of Germany, has shown that the inhabitants of the Caroline Islands are not destitute of religious conceptions. Jukes was but a short time in Damood Island, one of the Torres Islands, and Meinicke has described the religious beliefs prevalent in these islands. That "Duradawan, a sepoy, who lived some time with the Andaman Islanders, maintained that they had no religion," by no means proves that they have none. A far more intelligent man, Father Mersenne, so well known as the friend of Descartes, spent most of his life in Paris, and yet affirmed that there were sixty thousand atheists in that city. Dr Mouatt had no intimate or lengthened intercourse with the Andaman Islanders. Sir J. Lubbock does

injustice to Captain Wilson, who believed himself to have ascertained that the Pellew Islanders had some notions of a religion, and certainly believed in a future life. It is improbable that the Wainumbai are without religion, since it appears from the testimonies of Kolff, of Wallace himself, &c., that the other Aru Islanders are not. Gabelentz, in his work on the 'Melanesian Languages,' has shown that words for God, Spirit, &c., are very widely diffused over the Australasian and Polynesian areas. Our author perhaps deserves commendation for not having spoken more copiously and confidently about the Australian tribes. Most writers who maintain that the atheism of ignorance is man's original condition, lay great emphasis on the alleged absence of religion among the natives of Australia. But in doing so they rest on what is only alleged and not real. In proof, I may quote from Mr Tylor, who is admitted to be second to no one in this country as an ethnologist. He says: "It is not unusual for the very writer who declares in general terms the absence of religious phenomena among some savage people, himself to give evidence that shows his expressions to be misleading. Thus Dr Lang not only declares that the aborigines of Australia have no idea of a supreme divinity, creator, and judge—no object of worship, no idol, temple, or sacrifice, but that, 'in short, they have nothing

whatever of the character of religion, or of religious observance, to distinguish them from the beasts that perish.' More than one writer has since made use of this telling statement, but without referring to certain details which occur in the very same book. From these it appears that a disease like smallpox, which sometimes attacks the natives, is ascribed by them 'to the influence of Budyah, an evil spirit who delights in mischief;' that when the natives rob a wild bees' hive, they generally leave a little of the honey for Buddai; that at certain biennial gatherings of the Queensland tribes, young girls are slain in sacrifice to propitiate some evil divinity; and that, lastly, according to the evidence of the Rev. W. Ridley, 'whenever he has conversed with the aborigines, he found them to have definite traditions concerning supernatural beings,—Baiaame, whose voice they hear in thunder; Turramullan, the chief of demons, who is the author of disease, mischief, and wisdom, and appears in the form of a serpent at their great assemblies,' &c. By the concurring testimony of a crowd of observers, it is known that the natives of Australia were at their discovery, and have since remained, a race with minds saturated with the most vivid belief in souls, demons, and deities."¹

Sir John Lubbock next seeks proofs of his thesis

¹ See Appendix XXVIII.

in India. "The Yenadies and the Villees, according to Dr Short, are entirely without any belief in a future state; and again, Hooker tells us that the Lepchas of Northern India have no religion."

Now the former of these statements, even if true, is not relevant. Belief in a future state is not to be identified with religion. The ancient Hebrews have often been accused of ignorance of a future life, but no one has ever said that they were without any religion. Then, the account of Dr Hooker's testimony regarding the Lepchas is most inadequate and misleading. Here are Dr Hooker's words from his *Himalayan Journals*: "The Lepchas profess no religion, though acknowledging the existence of good and bad spirits. To the good they pay no heed. 'Why should we?' they say: 'the good spirits do us no harm; the evil spirits, who dwell in every rock, grove, and mountain, are constantly at mischief, and to them we must pray, for they hurt us.' Every tribe has a priest-doctor; he neither knows nor attempts to practise the healing art, but he is a pure exorcist, all bodily ailments being deemed the operation of devils, who are cast out by prayers and invocations. Still they acknowledge the Lamas to be very holy men, and were the latter only moderately active, they would soon convert all the Lepchas" (i. 135). It was absurd and self-contradictory in Dr Hooker to begin these lines with the words, "The

Lepchas profess no religion." These words should clearly not have been there, and Sir J. Lubbock would then not have been able to improve them into "the Lepchas of Northern India have no religion." It is clear from Hooker's own words that such is very far from being the case. Substantially his account is in perfect agreement with that contained in Colonel Dalton's 'Descriptive Ethnology of Bengal, compiled from Official Documents.' Colonel Dalton, chiefly on the authority of Dr A. Campbell (see Note in the Journal of the Asiatic Society, Bengal, 1840), informs us that the Lepchas are mostly Buddhists, and have priests, who are educated partly at home and partly in the great monasteries of Thibet. All testimony regarding the Lepchas agrees in representing them as a physically handsome, constitutionally timid and peaceable, morally affectionate, and religiously susceptible people.

I pass on to what Sir John has to say of Africa, so far as the subject in hand is concerned. "Captain Grant could find 'no distinct form of religion' in some of the comparatively civilised tribes visited by him. According to Burchell, the Bachapins (Caffres) had no form of worship or religion. They thought 'that everything made itself, and that trees and herbs grew by their own will.' They had no belief in a good deity, but some vague idea of an evil being. Indeed the first idea of God is almost

always as an evil spirit. Speaking of the Foulahs of Wassoulo, in Central Africa, Caillié states: 'I tried to discover whether they had any religion of their own—whether they worshipped fetishes, or the sun, moon, or stars—but I could never perceive any religious ceremony among them.' Again, he says of the Bambaras, that, 'like the people of Was-soulo, they have no religion,—adding, however, that they have great faith in charms. Burton also states that some of the tribes in the lake districts of Central Africa 'admit neither God, nor angel, nor devil.' Speaking of Hottentots, Le Vaillant says: 'Je n'y ai vu aucune trace de religion, rien qui approche même de l'idée d'un être vengeur et rémunérateur. J'ai vécu assez longtemps avec eux, chez eux au sein de leurs déserts paisibles; j'ai fait, avec ces braves humains, des voyages dans des régions fort éloignées; nulle part je n'ai rencontré rien qui ressemble à la religion.' Livingstone mentions that on one occasion, after talking to a Bushman for some time, as he supposed, about the Deity, he found that the savage thought that he was speaking about Sekomi, the principal chief of the district."

This passage is as incorrect as those which precede it. Captain Grant, in his walk across Africa, could not be expected to acquire an intimate knowledge of the tribes he visited, and his not finding a "distinct form of religion" among some of these

tribes can be no proof of their not possessing even the rudiments of religion. The lower forms of religion are occasionally very indistinct. What Burchell affirms of the want of religion in a particular Caffre tribe, is more than counterbalanced by the fact that the Caffre tribes in general are well known to have religious beliefs and rites; while, even according to the account of Burchell, the tribe mentioned had a vague idea of an evil being. The Foulahs are mostly Mohammedans, and what Caillié says about the absence of religion among them can only be true of individuals over a limited area, and in exceptionally unfavourable circumstances. The warmest of Mr Burton's friends will hardly include among his merits caution and moderation either of judgment or statement. Le Vaillant's estimate of the Hottentots is inconsistent with the testimonies of many other travellers. The story about Livingstone and the Bushman probably illustrates merely the difficulty of conversational intercourse between a Scotchman and a Bushman. It should at least have been remembered that Livingstone has written in regard to the peoples of South Africa, "There is no need for beginning to tell even the most degraded of these people of the existence of a God, or of a future state—the facts being universally admitted. . . . On questioning intelligent men among the Backwains as to their former knowledge of good and

evil, of God, and of a future state, they have scouted the idea of any of them ever having been without a tolerably clear conception on all these subjects." Sir John Lubbock has done well not to endorse Sir Samuel Baker's statements as to tribes without religion visited by him in Central Africa. Their inaccuracy was generally detected as soon as published. Other travellers had discovered and described what Sir Samuel fancied did not exist. Professor O. Schmidt refers us to "the Niam-Niam, that highly interesting dwarf-people of Central Africa," as an example of a people "without a word for God." It so happens that the Niam-Niam are *not* a dwarf-people, and *have* a word for God. Prof. Schmidt should have known something about Schweinfurth's book before appealing to it.

The next case adduced by our author is very instructive. He writes: "Speaking of the Esquimaux, Ross says, 'Ervick, being the senior of the first party that came on board, was judged to be the most proper person to question on the subject of religion. I directed Sacheuse to ask him if he had any knowledge of a Supreme Being; but after trying every word used in his own language to express it, he¹ could not make him understand what he meant. It was distinctly ascertained that he did not worship the sun, moon, stars, or any

¹ See Appendix XXIX.

image or living creature. When asked what the sun or moon was for, he said to give light. He had no knowledge or idea how he came into being, or of a future state ; but said that when he died he would be put into the ground. Having fully ascertained that he had no idea of a beneficent Supreme Being, I proceeded, through Sacheuse, to inquire if he believed in an evil spirit ; but he could not be made to understand what it meant. . . . He was positive that in this incantation he did not receive assistance from anything, nor could he be made to understand what a good or an evil spirit meant.'”

Now, I ask, is it reasonable to conclude from the fact that a single Esquimaux, when questioned by Captain Ross, through an interpreter who could only speak a different dialect from that of the person questioned, did not give evidence of possessing any definite ideas regarding a Divine Being, that there are Esquimaux peoples without any religious opinions or sentiments? The Esquimaux peoples are known to have a tolerably developed religion. They suppose the world to be ruled by various supernatural beings, who are overruled by a supreme being. To certain men, called “angakok,” there is supposed to be granted a certain control over the ordinary deities for purposes of good.¹

Sir John Lubbock thus concludes his argument :
“In some cases travellers have arrived at their

¹ See Appendix XXX.

views very much to their own astonishment. Thus Father Dobritzhoffer says: 'Theologians agree in denying that any man in possession of his reason can, without a crime, remain ignorant of God for any length of time. This opinion I warmly defended in the University of Cordoba, where I finished the four years' course of theology begun at Gratz, in Styria. But what was my astonishment when, on removing from thence to a colony of Abipones, I found that the whole language of these savages does not contain a single word which expresses God or a divinity. To instruct them in religion, it was necessary to borrow the Spanish word for God, and insert into the catechism "Dios ecnam coogerik," "God the creator of things." We have already observed a case of this kind in Kolben, who, in spite of the assertions of the natives themselves, felt quite sure that certain dances must be of a religious character, 'let the Hottentots say what they will.' Again, Mr Matthews, who went out to act as missionary among the Fuegians, but was soon obliged to abandon the hopeless task, observed only one act 'which could be supposed devotional.' He sometimes, we are told, 'heard a great howling or lamentation about sunrise in the morning; and upon asking Jemmy Button what occasioned the outcry, he could obtain no satisfactory answer: the boy only saying, "People very sad, cry very much."' This appears

so natural and sufficient an explanation, that why the outcry should be supposed devotional, I must confess myself unable to see. Once more, Dr Hooker states that the Khasias, an Indian tribe, had no religion. Colonel Yule, on the contrary, says that they have ; but he admits that breaking hens' eggs is 'the principal part of their religious practice.' But if most travellers have expected to find a religion everywhere, and have been convinced, almost against their will, that the reverse is the case, it is quite possible that there may have been others who have too hastily denied the existence of a religion among the tribes they visited. However this may be, those who assert that even the lowest savages believe in a Supreme Deity, affirm that which is directly contrary to the evidence. The direct testimony of travellers on this point is indirectly corroborated by their other statements. How, for instance, can a people who are unable to count their own fingers, possibly raise their mind so far as to admit even the rudiments of a religion ?”

On this paragraph I have to make the following remarks. Father Dobritzoffer went out to the Abipones, expecting to find among them a knowledge of God, and not finding even a word to designate God, he concluded that they had no religion. He expected, that is to say, far too much ; and not finding it, he concluded that there

was nothing whatever in the way of religion to find. Missionaries have erred thus very often. They have identified religion with true religion; and when they could not discover the latter, they have denied the existence of the former. From the want of a word for God in a language, it cannot be fairly inferred that those who use the language have no belief in gods, no religious notions or feelings. The Australians have no word for tree, or fish, or bird, but they are certainly not ignorant of trees, fishes, and birds. This is not all, for Dobritzhoffer, too, disproves his own assertion. He tells us how the Abipones paid a certain reverence to the stars, and, in particular, how they associated the Pleiades with a chief deity—a highest spiritual agent; how they believed in evil spirits, in sorcery, &c. As to Kolben and the Hottentots, I do not understand on what grounds Sir John Lubbock suppresses the fact that Kolben informs us that the Hottentots of his time had a firm faith in a supreme power, which they termed Gounya Tequoa, or the god of all gods, although they paid him no adoration; and that they had an evil deity, called Toutouka, whom they supposed to be the author of all mischief in the universe, and to whom they offered sacrifices in order to appease his ill-temper. That the Hottentots worship the moon is quite certain, apart from Kolben's testimony; and Sir John Lubbock had no right whatever to set

Kolben's testimony aside. The Fuegians are not known to have any well-defined notions of religion, but they have superstitions and conjurors. We require to wait for information as to what their beliefs really are. Mr Darwin and Mr Matthews seem to have been both dependent on the Jemmy Button mentioned by Sir John Lubbock in their inquiries regarding the religious sentiments of the Fuegians. I must confess I cannot consider Jemmy's explanation of the facts described by Mr Matthews as quite so satisfactory as Sir John thinks it. That people should cry very much when they are sad is natural enough; but the peculiarity of the case is the crying at a particular time, is the assembling to howl or lament at sunrise. No amount of sadness, it seems to me, can account for that; while, of course, a little religious belief would. Then, as to the Khasias, the testimony of Dr Hooker is again misrepresented precisely as in the case of the Lepchas, while nothing is adduced to disprove that of Colonel Yule. The Khasias recognise the existence of a Supreme Being, although they only worship the inferior spirits, who are supposed to inhabit the mountains, glens, and heaths. They offer libations to the gods before drinking. "Breaking hens' eggs" is their method of taking auguries—and perhaps one not more ridiculous than those practised by the ancient Greeks and Romans.¹

¹ See Appendix XXXI.

I have now laid before you the evidence which Sir John Lubbock has been able to bring forward in support of the position that there are many peoples and tribes wholly destitute of religion. He has shown more industry in the collection of facts favourable to the conclusion which he draws than any other ethnologist or anthropologist, so far as I know, and for his industry he certainly deserves commendation; but it is impossible to credit him with having carefully and critically ascertained what are to be regarded as facts and what not. I do not charge him with having allowed any theological prepossessions to bias his judgments as to the facts. I gladly acknowledge that he displays nothing of the utterly unscientific and anti-religious bitterness which characterises what some have written on this subject. I look at his proposition and proof purely from an anthropological point of view, and I find that the proposition is not made out, that the proof is wholly unsatisfactory—for the so-called facts which constitute the proof are not really facts. But “how,” he asks, “can a people who are unable to count their own fingers, possibly raise their minds so far as to admit even the rudiments of a religion?” I answer, first, by asking, Is it then quite certain that there are peoples unable to count their own fingers? I know that the statement has become a commonplace among anthropologists, but I do

not find that there is much evidence produced for it. The Australians, according to Sir John Lubbock, cannot count above three, and have no word for any higher number. Yet one of his own vocabularies shows how they count far above three. Thus *tres*, their word for three, thrice repeated is nine, which shows that these Australians can not only count above three but can count by multiplying threes. The evidence on which anthropologists have concluded that the Australians cannot count above three would prove that Englishmen cannot count thirteen and upwards, since thirteen, fourteen, &c., are only three and ten, four and ten, &c., put together. But, further, whether the Australians can or can not count their own fingers, it is certain that they have the rudiments of a religion; and we are bound to accept what is fact whether we can account for it or not, whether we can reconcile it with some other fact or not.

I do not venture to maintain that there are no tribes, no peoples, wholly destitute of religion, wholly without any sense of dependence on invisible powers. It may be that there are. I only say that, so far as I can judge, it has not been made out that there is any such tribe, any such people; and the examination of Sir John Lubbock's instances, far from leading me to his conclusion, leaves me with the conviction that, if

there be any such peoples they must be very few indeed.

But I must not overlook that an attack on the universality of religion, or at least on the universality of belief in a God, has been made from another side. The very marvellous system of thought called Buddhism, which originated in India about five hundred years before the advent of Christ, has spread over a greater area of the earth, and gained more adherents than even Christianity, and by peaceful means—by the power of persuasion—not by force of arms, not by persecution. Disregarding all distinctions of class, nation, and race, and enforcing no social laws or theories, but concentrating its whole energy on showing the way to eternal deliverance from evil, it has propagated itself in a much more remarkable manner than Mohammedanism. Although driven out of India—Nepaul excepted—after having flourished there for centuries, its devoted missionaries have spread it over Ceylon and Burmah, China and Japan, Tartary and Thibet. But Buddhism, we are told, is a system of atheism; and the three hundred millions of people by whom it is embraced, ignore in the most absolute manner the notion not only of a future state but of a deity. “There is not the slightest trace of a belief in God in all Buddhism,” says M. Barthélemy Saint-Hilaire; and many others speak as strongly.

A very little examination, however, shows that such statements are stronger than they ought to be, and that they cannot but mislead unless they are explained and limited. In this religion which is characterised as atheistic, gods are represented as appearing on numerous occasions. In the legend of Buddha the gods of the Hindu pantheon are familiar personages, and never is a shadow of doubt thrown on their existence. "It is not enough to say," writes Saint-Hilaire, "that Buddha does not believe in God. He ignores Him in such a complete manner, that he does not even care about denying His existence ; he does not care about trying to abolish Him ; he neither mentions such a being in order to explain the origin or the anterior existence of man and his present life, nor for the purpose of conjecturing his future state and his eventual freedom. Buddha has no acquaintance whatsoever with God, and, quite given up to his own heroic sorrows and sympathies, he has never cast his eyes so far or so high." Now, if by God be meant the true God, this is what no one will either deny or be surprised at ; but every account of Buddhism, M. Saint-Hilaire's included, and all the literature of Buddhism yet made known to the European world, agree in showing that Buddha has always been supposed by the millions of his followers to have been familiar with gods, and heavens, and hells, innumerable. You will not

read long in almost any Buddhist book without meeting with gods. The Lalitavistara introduces us to Buddha before his incarnation. "The scene is laid in heaven. Surrounded and adored by those that are adored, the future Buddha announces that the time has come for him to assume a mortal body, and recalls to the assembled gods the precepts of the law. When in the bosom of his mother Mâyâ Devi he receives the homage of Brahma, of Çakra the master of the gods, of the four kings of the inferior gods, of the four goddesses, and of a multitude of deities. When he enters into the world the divine child is received by Indra the king of the gods, and Brahma the lord of creatures. When arrived at manhood, and hesitating to break the bonds which attached him to the world, it is the god Hridéra—the god of modesty—who encourages him and reminds him that the hour of his mission has come. Before he can become Buddha he has to be tempted by Mara, the god of the love of sin and of death, and to struggle against the hosts of hell commanded by their chief." And so on, and so on. Everywhere gods, even in what M. Saint-Hilaire himself regards as one of the most ancient and authentic records of primitive Buddhism. But all these legends, he says, are "extravagances." Well, there is no doubt about that, but they are extravagances of religious belief. And the very absurdity and

naïveté of them testifies to the energy of the belief. In spite of its absurdities, and by its very absurdities even, the Buddhistic legend testifies that Buddhists believe in gods. But an atheism which includes a belief in gods is an atheism of a very strange kind, or rather a system which everywhere avows the existence and action of gods is not usually, and can only very improperly be, called atheism.

But, it will be said, Brahma, Indra, and all the other deities recognised in Buddhism, will disappear with the universe itself. They are not regarded as truly gods, because they are not regarded as eternal. They have come out of nothingness and will go back to nothingness. Now observe that if we are to reason in this way, if we are to call every system atheistic which implies atheism, we must come to the conclusion that there is no religion in the world except where a consistent theism prevails; that all forms of polytheism and of pantheism are simply varieties of atheism. For polytheism and pantheism are both essentially self-contradictory, and must logically pass over either into atheism or theism. There is no consistent, independent, middle term between these two. What is not the one, ought, logically considered, to be the other.

All the Greek gods and goddesses were believed by their worshippers to have been born, or, at least,

to have had an origin; there was admitted to have been a time when they were not, and it was felt that there might be a time when they would not be. Whence had they come? Their worshippers did not clearly put and resolutely face the question, but the question existed, and it could only be answered in an atheistic or in a theistic manner. If they came out of nothing, or were the products of chance, or the effects of eternal matter and its inherent powers, then what underlay this polytheism was atheism. If, on the other hand, these gods were the creatures of a self-existent, eternal Mind, what underlay the polytheism was theism. But if theism had been clearly apprehended it would have been seen at once that there was no evidence for the polytheism at all; that it was a system of fictions and fancies which dishonoured the one all-sufficient God. And what is true in this respect of Greek polytheism is true of all polytheism. In so far as it falls short of theism it involves atheism. It is not, however, on this account to be called atheism. It is to be described as what it is, not as what it involves.

Then, all pantheism involves atheism. An impersonal reason, an impersonal God, is not, if you insist on self-consistency, on logical definiteness and thoroughness, a reason, a god at all. A reason which is unconscious and which belongs to no one subject, a God who has no existence in himself,

who has no proper self, is not logically distinguishable from what is not reason, from what is not God. But in describing a system we have no right to represent it as being what we hold it ought logically to have been. Pantheism may, like polytheism, be logically bound either to rise to theism or to sink to atheism, but it is, for all that, neither theism nor atheism.

Hence I maintain that although Buddhism should be logically resolvable into atheism, although its fundamental principles should be shown logically to involve atheism, Buddhists are not to be described as atheists. Even millions of men may stultify themselves and accept a creed the fundamental principles of which involve monstrous consequences which few, if any, of its adherents deduce from them. It is clear and certain that the adherents of Buddhism are, as a rule, not atheists in any sense which shows that the human heart can dispense with belief in Divine agency. Their Buddhism does not prevent their believing in many gods, and this at once puts them on a level with polytheists. Besides, Buddha is regarded by them as a god. When Saint-Hilaire denies that they have deified Buddha, he maintains a position which is contradicted by every Buddhist writing and by every Buddhist believer in the world, unless he means that they have not invested him with all the attributes of the true

God, which is what no one, of course, ever thought of asserting that they had done. It is incontestable, indeed, that they suppose Buddha to have been once, or rather to have been often, a man, and even to have been a rat, a frog, a crow, a hare, and many other creatures; but it is as incontestable that they suppose him not only to have been four times Mahu-Brahma, the supreme god of the Hindus, but in becoming Buddha, to have raised himself higher than the highest gods, and to have attained omnipotence, omniscience, and other divine attributes. We cannot say that they do not believe him to have been a god because they believe him to have been born, while we admit that the Greeks believed Jupiter to have been a god, although they also believed him to have been born; we cannot say that they did not believe him to have been a god, because they believe him to have gone into Nirvana, even granting Nirvana to be non-existence, while we admit that the ancient Germans believed Odin to be a god, although they also believed that he would be devoured by the wolf Fenris.

An impartial examination of the relevant facts, it appears to me, shows that religion is virtually universal. The world has been so framed, and the mind so constituted, that man, even in his lowest estate, and over all the world, gives evidence of possessing religious perceptions and emotions.

However beclouded with ignorance, sensuousness, and passion his nature may be, certain rays from a higher world reach his soul. However degraded and perverted it may be, there remains a something within it which the material and the sensuous cannot satisfy, and which testifies that God is the true home of the Spirit.¹

¹ See Appendix XXXII.