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Reviews.

EARLY BELIEFS AND THEIR SOCIAL INFLUENCE. By Edward Westermarck, Ph.D., Hon. LL.D. (Glasgow and Aberdeen). Macmillan & Co., Ltd. 7/6 net. 182 pp.

In this interesting little book, Dr. Westermarck has treated the influence of early religious and magical beliefs and practices on our social relationships and institutions. He tells us that this discourse was for the most part delivered in the form of lectures at the London School of Economics and Political Science, during the Spring of 1931, and that it is based on his books, *The Origin and Development of the Moral Ideas*, *The History of Human Marriage*, *Ritual and Beliefs in Morocco*, etc., etc.

The book is divided into ten chapters. In a work covering only 172 pages, it is impossible to expect anything like an exhaustive treatment of the subjects dealt with. But those aspects which Dr. Westermarck has selected, he has treated fairly fully and all his conclusions are supported by a plentiful array of illustrations.

The first chapter deals with Religion and Magic, the precise meaning to be attached to these terms, the features that connect and distinguish them. Religion is defined as a belief in and a respectful attitude towards a supernatural being, on whom man feels himself dependent, and to whose will he makes an appeal in his worship. "In magic man attempts to influence either natural or supernatural objects or persons by supernatural means which act mechani-

cally." No one will be inclined to question the adequacy of these definitions, especially as Dr. Westermarck himself points out that sociologists may more profitably occupy their time than by continuous quarrelling about the meaning of terms.

In the second chapter Dr. Westermarck considers the political and moral influence of Early Religion. He observes, quite rightly, that "the importance of the religious bond, and, especially, in tribes that have totemism, the totem bond, has been exaggerated by many anthropologists." Religion sometimes does influence nationality, but more frequently it is nationality that influences religion, especially among the more developed races. Islam is a democratic religion, but it has not succeeded in coalescing the Arab, the Turk, the Persian, the Syrian and the Egyptian into one nation or State. Mutual rivalries and jealousies keep them apart notwithstanding their having a common religion. In British India we are witnessing the growth of a nation whose component parts owe allegiance to a variety of religious faiths. Dr. Westermarck considers that the moral influence also of religion has often been greatly exaggerated. He states, "It seems to me to be a fact beyond dispute that the moral consciousness has originated in emotions entirely different from that feeling of uncanniness and mystery which first led to the belief in supernatural beings." One cannot be so sure that religion and morality had entirely different origins. Even if it

were so, even if religion was not the parent of morality, it is obvious that you cannot have a system of morality without a strong background of religious belief. The two have, throughout recorded history, shaped and fashioned each other.

Regarding private property with which the third chapter deals, Dr. Westermarck observes that religious sanction given to ownership is undoubtedly connected with curses pronounced by men, cursing being a frequent method of punishing criminals who cannot be reached in any other way. In the same chapter Charity is also dealt with. After pointing out the high place charity is given in all religious systems, Dr. Westermarck tries to trace the connection between charity and religion. He states that the curses and blessings of the poor partly account for the fact that charity has come to be regarded as a religious duty, containing, as they generally do, the invocation of a god. Besides the belief in the efficacy of curses and blessings, there is the connection between alms-giving and sacrifice.

A belief in the efficacy of curses and blessings, according to Dr. Westermarck, is the foundation of many of our social institutions. He traces hospitality and the right of sanctuary which are so necessary in a wild country to these sources. Regarding hospitality he says in the fourth chapter, if efficacy is ascribed to the blessings of even an ordinary man, the blessings of a stranger are naturally supposed to be still more powerful, for the unknown stranger, like everything unknown and everything strange, arouses a feeling of mysterious awe in superstitious minds. If hospitality owes its origin to the expectation of a blessing from the guest, the right of sanctuary owes its origin to the fear of the curse of the refugee. "It is not only men who have to fear the curses of dissatisfied refugees; gods are also susceptible to curses hurled at them." To the same source, *viz.*, the belief in the efficacy of curses and blessings are traced the subjection of children, and trial by ordeal. A belief in the mystic efficacy of the spoken word is said to be at least partly responsible for the virtues of truth and good faith. These and the notions of justice and criminal law are all fully dealt with in Chapters V and VI. The remaining chapters deal with "Duties to Gods", "Marriage and Sexual Relations", "Marriage Rites" and "The Position of Woman". As a general

remark few will be disposed to quarrel with Dr. Westermarck's observation that men attribute to their gods a variety of human qualities, and their conduct towards them is in many respects determined by considerations similar to those which regulate their conduct towards their fellowmen. But exception must be taken to his statement: "The Vedic gods wore clothes, suffered from constant hunger, and were great drunkards." A sweeping statement of this kind will leave an altogether wrong impression on the mind of the reader.

Dr. Westermarck explains why an atheist is regarded with horror. He says "one of the greatest insults which can be offered a god is to deny his existence" and the reason is "that a person is always most sensitive on his weak points and that the weakest point in a god is his existence." This is only a half truth. Every kind of non-conformist challenges and disturbs our cherished beliefs and hopes. He affronts our understanding and weakens our self-complacency. The atheist and the rebel are penalised more as disturbers of public peace than as offenders against divine or mundane majesty. Dr. Westermarck himself notes in another place, that in early religion it is of the greatest importance that the established cult should be observed.

The last two chapters furnish very interesting reading. Many of our marriage rites, which are observed to-day without meaning or significance are tracked to their humble sources. The bulk of these rites are shown to have originated in magical ideas. Thus the custom of throwing grain or dried fruit at weddings has generally been regarded as a means of securing offspring, in accordance with the principle of sympathetic magic, grain and fruit being sources of fertility. Guns (or fire-works) are fired off at weddings to dispel evil spirits or other evil influences. Old shoes are thrown at the bridal pair in many countries in Europe. Dr. Westermarck thinks that this was meant to serve as an extra magical protection to the parties. The position of inferiority which woman has occupied in all societies and under all religious systems is ascribed to her physiological uncleanness. But it is said to have had its compensations. "The notion that woman is an unclean being charged with mysterious energy has not only been a cause of her degradation, it has also given her a secret power over her husband, and even been a source of rights and privileges."