

RELIGION AND THE ANTHROPOLOGISTS

E. E. EVANS-PRITCHARD

Professor of Social Anthropology in the University of Oxford

WHEN I was considering what subject to treat in the Aquinas Lecture,¹ which you had so kindly invited me to deliver, in the state of near-despair one reaches on such occasions I went to an Oxford bookshop where a selection of volumes may be bought for sixpence each and bought one at random in the hope that I might derive some guidance from it. *The True History of Joshua Davidson* (1872) was an at-one-time popular work of fiction by a socialist republican, Eliza Lynn Linton, though it was published anonymously. It is a story of Jesus returning to earth in mid-nineteenth-century England and of how he acted in the situation then confronting him. At the end of the book the authoress says that 'if sociology is a scientific truth, then Jesus of Nazareth preached and practised not only in vain, but against unchangeable Law'. This gave me an idea for my address for, though she was speaking of the doctrines of Political Economy current at that time and as she understood them, it appeared to me that it might be of interest to you were I to discuss the attitude of sociologists, and social anthropologists in particular, towards religious faith and practice. It has been for the most part bleakly hostile.

It is scarcely possible to discuss social science in this country without some reference to its French background. We may regard it, if only for convenience, as beginning with Montesquieu in his great book *L'Esprit des Lois* (1748). In it he set out to discover the laws of social life, the necessary conditions of its existence in its various forms, but he did not, in my opinion, think of these laws in a deterministic or mechanical sense. He frequently discusses religion, almost always in a naturalistic way, examining people's beliefs simply as social phenomena and endeavouring to determine only what is their social function; and as far as his personal convictions are concerned he is probably to be regarded as a Deist, although in outward matters he remained a loyal son of the Church, in spite of his satirical writings about some of its features, writings which were placed on the Index. From him the line of development of sociological thought in France runs through Turgot and the Physiocrats to the unfortunate Condorcet. He held that social phenomena are

¹ The Aquinas Lecture, delivered on March 7, 1959, at Blackfriars, Oxford.

just as natural as those of the inorganic and organic sciences and therefore could be, and should be, studied by the same methods and with the same ends in view as such sciences as physics and biology. There are inexorable laws of social life and social development, and these could be discovered and formulated as a kind of social mathematics, in the light of which a new social world could be constructed. Religion would have no place in it, and certainly there would be no priests, charlatans necessary, no doubt, in early phases of development, but charlatans just the same and also the greatest obstacle in the path of further human progress.

However, the second founder of social science was not Condorcet. It was unquestionably Henri de Saint-Simon, though, because he wrote no comprehensive treatise and for other reasons, that title has gone to Comte. Saint-Simon, whose followers may be regarded as the precursors of totalitarian philosophy, heralds of the Fascist, Nazi, and Communist forms of society, was a greater believer in social laws, in progress, in social planning and the regeneration of mankind; and it is hardly necessary to add that he was an anti-clerical and a Deist (of a rather eccentric kind), for almost everybody was at that time who had any pretensions to being a philosopher. Indeed, as Mill remarks in his essay on Bentham, in the more advanced nations of the continent in the second half of the eighteenth century there was scarcely one educated person left who retained any allegiance to the old opinions and institutions. Nevertheless, Saint-Simon realized the necessity of religion in some form or other—'the character of organic epochs is essentially religious'—and he envisaged a secular religion of humanity—man is 'God himself in the finite order'—an idea his followers put into effect—church, dogmas, rituals, pope, and all—with slightly ludicrous results. Even though Saint-Simon wished to reduce Christianity to a system of ethics, the development of his religiosity, set forth in his *Nouveau Christianisme*, published just before his death in 1825, by his followers alienated his sympathizers among the English intellectuals, including J. S. Mill and Thomas Carlyle, who translated the book; and he became regarded as a crank. It also alienated the British workers, on whom the socialist propaganda of the strangely garbed Saint-Simonian missionaries had at first made some impression, for the combination of religiosity with authoritarianism produced, in the words of one of their educated spokesmen, an impression of 'Gothic barbarity and imposture'. So the Saint-Simonian movement in England, as in France, died out, leaving, however, a heresy which had more lasting influence, the Comtian heresy.

Comte quarrelled with his master, this more or less lunatic

genius ('*nullum magnum ingenium sine mixtura dementiae fuit*'); and the pupil, though not so original a thinker, achieved more fame and exercised a wider influence. Indeed, his strange, paranoiac, figure dominated the social thought of the nineteenth century as Montesquieu had dominated that of the eighteenth century. Some of the most used words in his six volumes of the *Cours de Philosophie Positive* are 'necessary', 'indispensable', and 'inevitable'. There are rigid, inexorable laws of social life, determining the necessary conditions of existence of any society at any point of time and also the evolution of every society through the same phases—the theological, the metaphysical, and the positivist or scientific. Such a philosophy of history was clearly incompatible with traditional Christianity or, indeed, with most systems of religious thought. Nevertheless, Comte, like the Saint-Simonians, was a great admirer of the Catholic Church: Protestantism, Deism, and Metaphysical Humanism he could not abide, no expressions of contempt being too severe for them. But if the Church, with its admirable organization, was the mother of civilization and the promoter of personal freedom, all things, alas, have their day. It had to pass as all things have to pass in the course of historical development by the laws of evolution. Catholicico-feudal institutions were even then in the final stage of demolition by metaphysical propaganda, which, critical, negative and transitory though it was, and however much one despised it, belonged to an inevitable phase of history; and when the work of destruction was finally accomplished there would emerge the new altruistic, pacific, industrial and scientific age. But later Comte, like Saint-Simon before him, realized that there has to be a religion of some sort and set about founding a new one, a secularist church with himself as high priest, 'an incongruous mixture of bad science with eviscerated papistry' as Huxley acidly called it. Or, to quote one of his countrymen, Georges Sorel, one might as well worship the *Bibliothèque Nationale*. In this country the Comtist cult, supported by George Eliot, George Henry Lewes, and Frederick Harrison among others, has survived into the present day, the Reader in Social Anthropology at Oxford till 1935, Dr Marett, having been at one time some sort of Comtist; and a Comtist, or Secularist, church still functions in London and, I believe, in one or two other towns; and is not its hagiographical genealogy framed as a curiosity on the walls of Blackfriars' library in Oxford!

At the end of last century and into the first two decades of the present century there was writing, also in France, a man whom we may regard as the third founder of the science which has grown into what we now call social anthropology, Emile Durkheim. He

also claimed to be a sociological determinist, who in his earliest essay expresses indignation at Montesquieu's laxity in this respect; though he did not always live up to his claims and the laws he sought were functional rather than historical or evolutionary. Religion had, therefore, to be explained in terms of social function. It is not, as the English anthropologists of his time supposed, an illusion: illusions do not survive centuries and they do not constitute the matrix in which have been formed law, the sciences and the arts. It has an objective basis, the society itself; men worship in the gods symbols of their own collectivities. If it follows from this that there can be no transcendent personal God, it also follows that religion must find a place in every society, for it is a product of the action of social life itself. So we find, at the end of his *Les formes élémentaires de la vie religieuse* (1912), Durkheim, like Saint-Simon and Comte before him, envisaging a secular religion reminiscent of the rationalist religions of the French Revolution, and since, he says, there can be no religion without a church, a secularist church dedicated to the noblest aspirations of mankind.

It has always seemed odd to me how these three men combined a deterministic philosophy, a belief in the regeneration of the human race as an inevitable evolutionary process, with an almost fanatical reforming zeal and at times a vituperative indignation towards all who differed from them. Doubtless, like the Marxists, they felt that, though the process was inevitable, it could be hastened by those who were wise enough to discern its direction and honest enough to declare it. It is also curious that they should have combined evolutionary determinism with a Utopian philosophy. It would seem that the evolutionary laws were to cease to operate when conditions of which they approved should have come about; and in this also they resemble Marxist theoreticians. The objective forces that in the past have governed history at that point pass under man's control and then man makes his own history; in Engels' famous aphorism, 'It is the ascent of man from the kingdom of necessity to the kingdom of freedom'.

What was happening in Great Britain in the period from Comte to Durkheim? Saint-Simonism and Comtism here met with other powerful trends of opinion in intellectual, and then in more popular circles, the principal one being utilitarian doctrines from Adam Smith and Bentham to Mill the younger, those doctrines Mrs Linton opposed in her novel to the teachings of Jesus. The Utilitarians were unsparing of religion in any shape or form, especially the morbid Bentham, for whom all priests were simple impostors. Another powerful trend was the theory of evolutionary develop-

ment, first associated with the names Buffon, Lamarck and Erasmus Darwin; and here we may particularly mention Herbert Spencer, not only because he became a leading exponent of evolutionism but also because he may be regarded as the nineteenth-century founder of social science in England, the English Comte, though he would have intensely disliked being so designated. Man, he ceaselessly proclaimed, is subject to invariable laws of development, though these immutable laws are highly complex and most difficult to define. As for religion, it is both untrue and useless; and a basis for morals is much better sought in a scientific study of social life. God, if there is one, is unknowable, and also otiose; but religion is perhaps best explained as the projection of subordination to rulers into propitiation of their doubles after death.

Spencer's dislike of every kind of ecclesiasticism, dogma and ceremony was shared by the social historian Buckle, whose *History of Civilization in England* (1851), little read today, made a great impression on his contemporaries. It is true God exists, but neither he nor human will plays any part in history, which is a record of a sequence of causes and effects of which man is a helpless spectator.

But if Spencer clearly formulated the theory of gradual modification of species or structure, through use or disuse of functions, against the prevailing theory of special creation, and if he extended his evolutionary ideas to include the social or super-organic, it was Darwin and Wallace who in 1858 and following years added the two biological features which caused so great a stir and scandal, the notion of natural selection through the survival of the fittest, an idea which seems to have come to both of them after reading Malthus' *Essay on Population*, and that of the place of man among the primates in the evolutionary process. Both were a further blow to accepted, and it must be added complacent, religious opinion, which reacted violently, uncritically, and even unfairly, suggesting that those who thought like Darwin were not only infidels but were infidels because they wanted to be free from moral restraints. This might not have happened had Darwin at the outset been supported by his fellow scientists, but this was far from being the case. As is well known, Darwin's theories had an enormous influence on sociological thought, as seen, for example, in Bagehot's *Physics and Politics*. As is also well known, Darwin slowly lost his faith, and with it all taste for the arts, during his forty years as a neurotic invalid. As for Wallace, he threw himself into a variety of movements, some sensible, others not—spiritualism, socialism, phrenology, anti-vaccination, anti-colonialism and pacifism.

Another influence which was beginning to make itself felt in the

first half of the nineteenth century was biblical criticism, making its first impact on the lay intellectual world in Strauss' *Leben Jesu* (1835), translated into English by George Eliot, and the writings of Christian Baur; and it gathered momentum as the century advanced, making a further impact in Renan's *Vie de Jésus* (1863) and causing much tribulation among the faithful. Many apparent absurdities in the Scriptures had, of course, been ridiculed by the eighteenth-century Deists—Voltaire, Diderot and others—but now for the first time the Bible was subjected to total, minute, and often devastating literary criticism which was too scholarly to be lightly dismissed as simple prejudice.

In the eyes of orthodox Bible Christians this was bad enough, but worse was to come. Following the success of comparative philology, comparative mythology and comparative religion (a science of religion) began to turn the pagan gods and goddesses, and by implication those of the higher religions as well, into sun and moon and stars and to treat all religious beliefs and rites as phenomena of the same order and, again by implication, of the same validity. This pointed to a relativism in which Christianity was not the one true faith but just one religion among others, all equally false. The famous Max Müller, it is true, trod warily—the Bishop of Gloucester had already condemned attempts 'to put into competition the sacred books of India and the Holy Scriptures'. Not so some of the others, who represent an intellectual movement culminating in Sir James Frazer.

It was in such a climate of Comtism, utilitarianism, Biblical criticism, and the beginnings of comparative religion that social anthropology, as we now understand it, came into being. It was a product, as were ultimately all the others, of eighteenth-century rationalist philosophy, and more particularly of the stream of thought from Hobbes and Locke, through Hume and the Scottish moral philosophers, sceptics and Deists. Its founders were such men as McLennan, Lubbock, Tylor, and, later, Frazer, all great believers in laws of social evolution and in the necessary interdependence of institutions, and all, if one may judge from their writings and from what information one otherwise has about them, agnostics and hostile to religion. Consequently, when they discussed it they tried to explain it away by some theory of psychological or sociological causation, explanations which now seem to us remarkable for their triviality but which were widely accepted at the time. Spiritual Being for Tylor was an illusion, a sort of hallucination brought about by the reflection of immature minds on such phenomena as death, dreams and trance. Religion was also an illusion to Frazer. All are

familiar with *The Golden Bough* (1890), in which he sets forth his paradigm of phases of thought through which all peoples pass—magic, religion, and finally science; and you will recollect how in his preface to that book he compares Christian beliefs to venerable walls mantled over with ivy and mosses (venerable but about to be demolished by the battery of the comparative method) and how at the end of it he stands on the shores of Lake Nemi, where once the sacred pagan kings held sway, and listens to the church bells of Rome ringing the Angelus (one religion goes and another comes, and seen from the point of view of rationalism and science they are all much alike, all children of fancy). The purpose of *The Golden Bough* was to discredit revealed religion by showing how one or other of its essential features, e.g. the resurrection of a man-god, are analogous to what we find in pagan religions. The same purpose is only too evident in the writings of Salomon Reinach, a French small-model Frazer—the Mass is a survival of a savage totemic feast, Christ was a mock-king in an annual burlesque, and so forth.

All the leading sociologists and anthropologists contemporaneous with, or since, Frazer were agnostics and positivists—Westermarck, Hobhouse, Haddon, Rivers, Seligman, Radcliffe-Brown and Malinowski; and if they discussed religion they treated it as superstition for which some scientific explanation was required and could be supplied. Almost all the leading anthropologists of my own generation would, I believe, hold that religious faith is total illusion, a curious phenomenon soon to become extinct and to be explained in such terms as 'compensation' and 'projection' or by some sociological interpretation on the lines of maintenance of social solidarity. It has been, and is, the same in America. Morgan, the founder of social anthropology in that country, refused to have anything to do with religion and he particularly abhorred ritualistic religion (he was quite shocked by what he saw going on in St Barnabas' church when he visited Oxford. Needless to say, he detested the Roman Church). Among the last generation of distinguished American anthropologists there was not one, as far as I know, who gave assent to any creed, unless agnosticism be accounted one, or who regarded all religious belief as other than illusion; and I do not know of a single person among the prominent sociologists and anthropologists of America at the present time who adheres to any faith. Religion is superstition to be explained by anthropologists, not something an anthropologist, or indeed any rational person, could himself believe in.

I do not discuss the situation in other countries, for the influences which have chiefly shaped social anthropology in England have

either been a native product or have come from France and America. It may, however, be remarked that such sociological writings in other countries as have left their mark on our thinking have been mainly anti-religious in tone. For Marx, as everyone knows, religion was a futile ideological superstructure maintained by, and for, class privilege. Religion, Engels tells us, was one of the means employed by the bourgeoisie to keep the 'lower orders' in their place—'*Die Religion muss dem Volk erhalten werden*' ('religion must be kept alive for the people')—but, he adds, 'no religious tenets will ever suffice to prop up a tottering society'. For Freud it was comparable to obsessional neurosis, the product of wish-fulfilment and the father-complex: does he not call his book on religion *The Future of an Illusion* (1928)? And for Jung, it has little more than a therapeutic value, if I understand him rightly. The best-known Italian sociologist, Vilfredo Pareto, never ceases in his *Trattato di Sociologia generale* (1916) sneering at all and every theological dogma; and though the German sociologist Max Weber cannot be described as being hostile to religion his personal position was negative, or, as he puts it, he was neither anti-religious nor irreligious but 'religiously absolutely unmusical'.

In general, therefore, it may be said that sociologists and anthropologists have been either indifferent or, more often, hostile to religion, though in different ways, for the Catholic agnosticism, if it may be so called, of men like Saint-Simon and Comte was in many ways a different brand of agnosticism from that of men who had a Protestant background like Spencer and Tylor or the Jewish agnosticism of Durkheim and Lévy-Bruhl.

There were, of course, a few who retained their faith, and in the battle some of these earnest souls got shot by their own side to the benefit of their adversaries. I do not see how Abbé Loisy could have been other than excommunicated, but I think Renan was harshly treated and that it was being over-cautious to have made difficulties for the great Semitic scholar, the Dominican Père Lagrange. It is an old and wise maxim of the Church: *in necessariis unitas, in dubiis libertas, in omnibus caritas*. Protestant scholars were even more vulnerable, for their churches were more committed to defend the Book on which the Reformation was based. Sir Charles Lyell, who regarded himself as a Theist, was denounced because his *Principles of Geology* (1830) seemed to discredit the Pentateuchal accounts of the Creation and the Deluge. What an outcry was raised in the Anglican communion when the courageous Cornishman Bishop Colenso of Natal announced that he was not prepared to accept and did not think that any clergyman should be asked to accept, and

furthermore that he was not prepared to teach the Zulus of Natal what appeared to him to be impossible, and therefore incredible, happenings recorded in the books of the Old Testament, especially in Deuteronomy; a challenge for which he was excommunicated by the Bishop of Cape Town in 1863. The founder in this country of comparative philology, comparative mythology, and comparative religion, Max Müller, was also a casualty, though a minor one. He was a staunch Protestant ('the Protestants are better Christians than the Romans') and a devout one, but one of the reasons he was not elected to the Chair of Sanskrit at Oxford in 1860 was that it was said his teaching was subversive of the Christian faith—'unsettling'. Furthermore, he was a German. Then, to give a final example, in the Presbyterian communion, Robertson Smith, one of the most notable biblical scholars and anthropologists of the nineteenth century, was charged before his synod with heresy, his chief offence having been to have written what today would appear to most people a moderate and sensible article on the Bible in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* in which he made certain critical remarks about the dating, order, and composition of the books of the Old Testament, and although he was not convicted of heresy he was deprived of his Chair of Hebrew at Aberdeen in 1881 for causing a scandal.

On the whole, it may be said that the criticisms levelled at the teaching of the Churches from all sides were most damaging. The Catholics suffered least and the Anglicans most. The Catholic Church counted for too little in England at this time, and being familiar with different modes, or levels, of interpretation of the Bible, it was less committed to a fundamentalist position. Furthermore, an attack on Papistical superstition, however commendable in itself, entailed the dubious company of Anglican divines, the 'state-appointed teachers of rectitude', as Spencer called them, members of a Church which was, in Huxley's words, 'pretty much a preparatory school for Papistry'. It is no mere chance that some of the most influential critics came from dissenting or extreme evangelical homes—Spencer, Darwin, Huxley, Tylor, and the economist Harriet Martineau, are examples—and we may believe that their animosity to revealed religion was not inspired solely by love of truth but was also a reaction to the dreariness of their religious upbringing, and also that their hatred of ecclesiasticism and sacerdotalism was a protest against Tory interests and pride of class as well as against the State Church to which privilege was allied. The non-conformist conscience was more sensitive to social conditions than the Church conscience. It was the 'dissenting vermin that crawl about in dirty alleys' who most felt the needs of the poor. It was the

little preachers of the chapels, not the squarsons, who sympathized with the Felix Holts. It must be remembered too that these men were excluded from the universities till 1871, a further grievance to be set against the Church. (In spite of Oxford being the home of reaction, Herbert Spencer was mortified to find that his books were text-books there, whereas that undenominational home of enlightenment, University College, London, would not even have them in its library.) The 'Establishment', as we have now learnt to call them, the few cultured, well-connected, influential and rich who really understand affairs and can control them with urbanity from behind the scenes (I am not certain who they now are, though it appears that the Warden of my college is an *ex officio* member) deplored these Non-conformists, if perhaps not as much as those whom that anecdotal writer Mr Montagu Williams, Q.C., calls 'men of Eastern origin' or 'very polished gentlemen as far as grease went'.

The melancholic Huxley proved to be the most formidable foe of the State Church. The tactics of this agnostic—he invented the word—for whom, as for Spencer, Tylor and Darwin, all religion began with and is rooted in ghost-worship and all creeds childish, were to challenge some, taken literally, scientifically unacceptable Bible story, such as the Noachian Flood story, and then, having routed his opponents on his own chosen field, to point out that if this story was not historically true there was no reason why one should accept any other Old Testament stories, the authority for all being alike, and, if this were so, then what happens to Christian theology, which must stand or fall with the historical trustworthiness of the Jewish scriptures? This does not follow, but some defenders of the Book played into his hands—Gladstone in particular—by accepting that it did.

It is difficult not to sympathize with the Huxleys rather than with the Wilberforces (the 'Soapy Sams'). It was monstrous that men of science should be attacked, even vilified, for expressing opinions on matters within their own province by men ignorant of these matters. Moreover, there was some truth in Huxley's contention that all Protestantism had ever achieved was to have replaced the infallibility of the Church by the infallibility of the Bible, and some justice in his complaint that those who proclaimed the right of private judgment wished to deny it to him. Moreover, the Bible had become a fetish and the quoting of scriptural texts a nuisance. Dickens is scarcely making a caricature of Jonas Chuzzlewit when he makes him complain of his father's temerariousness in living to over seventy: 'Where's his religion, I should like to know, when he goes flying in the face of the Bible like that!' Also, the State Church

had long been in a deplorable condition, as Methodism bears witness, and it had furthermore become identified with the class interests of the land-owners—Dr Arnold regarded it as the private preserve of the Tory aristocracy—and of the industrialists, so that anyone in revolt against the Mr Bounderbeys of the time and the appalling conditions of the poor found himself almost inevitably against the endowed and established Church which only too often, when not silent, found some sanctimonious excuse for exploitation (pauperism was due to idleness, improvidence and vice) or was satisfied with moral exhortations and the chill recompense of the hereafter; so it is not surprising that behind the earnestness of the critics they could not entirely conceal their pleasure at her exegetical discomfitures. Anyway, as Huxley very sensibly used to point out, it was no use blaming the scientists, social or otherwise, for deterioration of the Faith. The harm, if such it was, which so many religious people claimed was being done by their inquiries and comments had been done long ago by the Christians themselves and by sceptical philosophers. Why blame the geologists, the anthropologists, and the biblical scholars when the dykes had been breached centuries before?

Nor should we withdraw our sympathy merely because most of the critics were crashing bores, smug and full of intellectual conceit. What could today seem more dreary than the Mills, Spencer, Buckle, Galton, John Morley and the rest of them? But their opponents, the long-winded Gladstones, were equally tedious. Indeed, I must confess that I find the whole period when these controversies were at their height exceedingly tedious: its interminable wars against the weak—Zulus, Ashanti, Benin, Afghans, Burmese, Egyptians, Sudanese and Boers—H. M. Stanley, Lord Randolph Churchill in South Africa, the Prince at Baden Baden . . . and for good measure, though of an earlier vintage, Dr Arnold at Rugby.

The critics are rather to be blamed, if at all, for allowing indignation, not unmixed with malice, to cloud their scientific judgment. A biologist does not attack some form of animal life, nor does an astronomer denounce the planetary system. Why therefore should those who held, and hold, that religion is just one social institution among others and that all institutions are just as much natural systems, or parts of them, as organisms and celestial bodies, feel called upon to undermine it? This point was well made by Benjamin Kidd in his at one time well-known book *Social Evolution* (1894). If, he said, social scientists were to inquire unemotionally into the social function of a phenomenon so universal and so persistent they would discover that the vitality of societies, even their existence, is bound up with religion, and that it is precisely through religious systems

that social evolution, or progress, has been brought about, for it is the most significant of evolutionary forces, the chief agent in natural selection. History shows us that the socially most efficient peoples were, and are, the most religious, and we may therefore draw the conclusion that 'through the operation of the law of natural selection the race must grow ever more and more religious'. This was the pragmatist position taken up, much later, by the social anthropologist Dr R. R. Marett: 'Religion is all along vital to man as a striving and progressive being'. It was a commonplace of the period. We find it in Sorel, Croce, and many, many others. If what they said is true, it was absurd to describe the higher forms of religion, as Grant Allen did, as so much 'grotesque fungoid growth'.

The point made by Kidd was obvious, and even that dour rationalist hypochondriac Herbert Spencer had to admit at the end of his life that a religious system of some sort is a constituent of every society which has made any progress in civilization and may be a necessary one; and we have already noted the efforts of the Saint-Simonians and Comtists to found secular religions, attempts Kidd considered to be futile because all religions are ultra-rational and based upon beliefs in the supernatural. So were the rationalists' batteries turned on themselves.

Nevertheless, the pragmatic defence of religion could also be an embarrassment, for, though it might seem to be effective as a counter-attack, it was also an avowal of the irrelevancy of the truth or otherwise of theology; and no one is going to accept a religious faith merely because a sociologist says it is socially useful. An even greater embarrassment were the desperate efforts to save the ship by jettisoning its entire cargo. Overboard went prophecies, miracles, dogma, theology, ritual, tradition, clericalism, and the supernatural, everything which Matthew Arnold regarded as unnecessary accretions of folkloristic elements and their derivatives, the products of men's imagination, of their mythopoeic tendencies, of their fascination with thaumaturgic arts—in a word the *aberglaube* of Christianity. Out of what was left Christianity was to be recast. This substitute religion was to be based upon a code of conduct suitable for Victorian gentlemen, a basis suffused with emotion and solid enough to support the slender abstraction, 'the Eternal Power, not ourselves, which makes for righteousness'. The sanction behind right conduct would simply be that it makes for happiness. When a man does right he feels good. Whatever else this reconstruction may have amounted to, it was not the Christian religion of the past, whether Catholic or Protestant, and it was unlikely to appeal to what were sometimes called 'the lapsed masses'.

However, though some social scientists, like Kidd, had second thoughts about religion, in general the battle of the Bible continued as a desultory engagement into the present century, and if it could not be said that either side won a complete victory, it could be said that there appeared to be very little left of the Bible. Bits and pieces of the Old Testament were strewn everywhere, Deuteronomy having been more or less demolished. Nor had the Gospels escaped the barrage, nor even the Acts and the Epistles. Those who sought to retire behind allegorical interpretations, what Huxley called the flight to allegory to escape absurdity, often added to the confusion.

So many who had been brought up on strict Bible Christianity were thrown into disarray, and the period ends with cries of dismay or of despairing hope: 'Vague half-believers of our casual creeds', 'ignorant armies clash by night', 'I falter where I firmly trod', and so forth.

Looking back, we may sometimes wonder what all the fuss was about. No one today is troubled by Jonah and the whale or Lot's wife or the Gadarene swine, about which Gladstone and Huxley had so memorable a debate; no one cares how many mother-goddesses are brought to light or how many sacred kings are killed; and it incommodes no one that there are many resemblances between Christian rituals and primitive rituals. This is partly because the Churches have ceased to defend positions which it was neither required nor expedient to defend and indeed have learnt to thank the scientists for having rid them of encumbrances: 'Such a release of religion from the bonds of imperfect science is all to the good', says Whitehead with much good sense. But it is also because the successors to these scientists are more or less indifferent, feeling that as religion no longer dominates thought as it used to do, even in the popular fiction of the time, there is little motive for attacking it. The earlier generation argued unceasingly about religious matters because they cared strongly about them, and although they argued about such topics as Lot's wife and the Gadarene swine, which do not appear to us today to have the importance they attached to them, they realized that more fundamental issues were at stake. Even those who were hostile to Christianity could not escape the religious climate of the time. To be hostile is at least a kind of tribute. But by the end of the century the climate had changed. The Canadian naturalist and Darwin's faithful admirer, Romanes (who endowed a famous lecture at Oxford), was regarded as slightly odd when, after having written under a nom-de-plume an attack on religion in 1876, he rather apologetically said that he had come to see 'that faith is intellectually justifiable', adding, however, and

humbly, 'I as yet have not that real inward assurance'. It was no longer thought remarkable that a scientist should say that he was an agnostic, but rather that he should say that he was not, as Lord Kelvin occasioned surprise by doing in 1900; and the scientist was in this matter not peculiar but representative of the intellectual society of the time, for it was no longer thought to be daring in such circles to be an agnostic. Indeed, as Engels, with his attractive, if heavy, irony, remarks, writing round about 1880, the introduction and spread of salad oil in England had been accompanied by the spread of continental scepticism, till agnosticism, if not yet considered quite 'the thing' was at least more respectable than the more extreme forms of Dissent (he had much contempt for the scientific man who, instead of calling himself plainly a materialist, 'translates his ignorance into Greek and calls it agnosticism'). People increasingly ceased to know even what they were indifferent about, and even to declare oneself an agnostic seemed to be a rather pointless commitment. One might almost have said with Dickens' Mr Tigg, 'I don't even believe that I don't believe, curse me if I do!'

Once it became accepted that the controversies of the past for the most part lacked both significance and substance, and once also a climate of indifference prevailed, it is understandable that a spirit of mutual tolerance should bring to an end disputations between the religious and the natural scientists. But this was only possible because fundamentally there never were any real grounds for dispute between what natural science teaches about the nature of the physical world and what the Churches teach about faith and morals. After all, there cannot be a stronger assertion of natural law than belief in miracles. But this is not the case between the claims of social scientists, or very many of them, and those of the Churches. Here then there is still conflict, and there is bound to be, for, as Mrs Lynd's character saw, sociological determinism and the teachings of Jesus are irreconcilable.

I have tried to give you a sketch of the historical development leading up to the present-day situation to show how social anthropology has been the product of minds which, with very few exceptions, regarded all religion as outmoded superstition, suited no doubt to a pre-scientific age and historically justified, like classes in the eyes of the Marxists, for a given period, but now useless, even without ethical value, and worse than useless because it stood in the way of a rational regeneration of mankind and social progress. It was taken for granted that the theological interpretation of phenomena had been ousted from one department of nature after another and that scientific investigations had only to be extended into social life

for its exclusion from the world of reality to be complete. All that would be left to theology then would be some vague metaphysical conceptions. This was the theme of Tyndall's Presidential Address to the British Association for the Advancement of Science at Belfast in 1874; and Huxley stated the matter succinctly in 1892: 'As natural knowledge has widened, supernatural knowledge has shrunk and has grown vague and questionable; and the historical evolution of humanity is being more and more accompanied by a co-ordinate elimination of the supernatural from the occupation of men's thoughts'.

I have attempted no more than to present a fragment of a chapter of the history of certain ideas. Such as I have described it has been the attitude of anthropologists towards religion. I do not discuss it beyond saying that I believe we shall not hear much more of sociological laws as they have been conceived of by so many writers of the past, and indeed of the not so distant past, and that that will be much to the benefit of anthropology; though if the anthropologists of my own generation take the same view they have yet to say so. Moreover, and of course, if the past claims of sociology and anthropology cannot in this respect, as I think, be sustained this would prove nothing with regard to any religion except that it is not contradicted by the conclusions of these particular branches of knowledge. It would merely answer the question posed by Joshua Davidson's biographer. Nor would it mean that the believers among anthropologists would be more or fewer than they have been and are, for the study of anthropology probably affects faith little either one way or the other.

I have only to add that the position today in Great Britain is much what it has been in the past, save in one particular. The majority of anthropologists are indifferent, if not hostile, to religion—atheists, agnostics, or just nothing—and a minority are Christians. The particular is that of the Christians a considerable proportion are Catholics. In fact the situation is more or less that on the one side are the indifferents and on the other side the Catholics with, as far as I am aware, little in between. Here again, I believe there is nothing in the nature of anthropology which has brought about this situation, for it would seem to be a general tendency in the intellectual life of our times—a realization, as Comte long ago most clearly saw, that Protestantism shades into Deism and Deism into agnosticism, and that the choice is between all or nothing, a choice which allows of no compromise between a Church which has stood its ground and made no concessions, and no religion at all.