

THE BELIEF IN IMMORTALITY.

The Belief in Immortality and the Worship of the Dead. By Prof. J. G. Frazer. Vol. i: The Belief among the Aborigines of Australia, the Torres Straits Islands, New Guinea, and Melanesia. Pp. xxi+495. (London: Macmillan and Co., Ltd., 1913.) Price 10s. net.

THE publication of Prof. Frazer's Gifford lectures has been awaited with interest by students of anthropology and religion. Their subject was one of the first to occupy the author's attention; his paper on primitive burial customs placed the study of the belief in immortality and the worship of the dead in a new light. He has now given us the first instalment of a comprehensive survey of the whole institution. Psychical and ceremonial though it is, the doctrine and cult form an institution as deserving of the name as political government. The belief in some degree of immortality has been practically universal, and is still a "last infirmity of noble mind"; some form of "worship," fear of the ghost or actual veneration of the deified ancestor, has accompanied the belief in the case of the majority of peoples. The author acutely points out, for the consideration of "historians and economists, as well as of moralists and theologians," that the direct consequences of this moral institution have been grave and far-reaching, such as no mere sentiment could have produced, not only in primitive but in civilised history. It has, he says,

"not merely coloured the outlook of the individual upon the world; it has deeply affected the social and political relations of humanity in all ages; for the religious wars and persecutions, which distracted and devastated Europe for ages, were only the civilised equivalents of the battles and murders which the fear of ghosts has instigated amongst almost all races of savages of whom we possess a record. . . . And when we consider further the gratuitous and wasteful destruction of property, as well as of life, which is involved in sacrifices to the dead, we must admit that with all its advantages the belief in immortality has entailed heavy economical losses upon the races—and they are practically all the races of the world—who have indulged in this expensive luxury."

The treatment of the subject is, so far, merely descriptive; it is not even comparative. But the analysis of belief and practice among the aborigines of Australia, the Torres Straits, New Guinea, and Melanesia, which occupies nearly 400 pages of this volume, is a masterly performance. The intention of the author is to pursue this method from the lower to the higher planes of culture. The savage conception of death as unnatural, and due, first to sorcery, and secondly to the operation of ghosts or spirits, is further studied, and shown in its development towards a

recognition of disease and accident as causes. The interesting view of Weismann and Wallace that death in higher organisms may actually be an acquired adaptation is cited in comparison.

There is an extraordinary likeness between the varieties of belief and ceremony, which never degenerates into mechanical sameness. In one case their connection with tabu results in a very sensitive regard for the rights of property; in another, the fear of sorcery leads to a punctilious system of sanitation and scavenging; in several cases the dramatic art finds its beginnings in the ghost-dance and similar propitiatory ceremonial. Incidentally, the author quotes interesting varieties of the belief in the soul, which he assumes, though he does not go further than Tylor's dream-theory, to be the cause of the general belief in survival after death. It is to be hoped that in future volumes the author will treat the cause with the same fullness as he has treated the effect.

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RECENT PSYCHOLOGY AND LOGIC.

- (1) *Elements of Physiological Psychology.* A Treatise of the Activities and Nature of the Mind from the Physical and Experimental Points of View. By Prof. G. T. Ladd and Prof. R. S. Woodworth. (Thoroughly revised and re-written.) Pp. xix+704. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1911.) Price 4 dollars net.
- (2) *Formal Logic: a Scientific and Social Problem.* By Dr. F. C. S. Schiller. Pp. xviii+423. (London: Macmillan and Co., Ltd., 1912.) Price 10s. net.
- (3) *Der Mechanismus des menschlichen Denkens.* By Erich Ruckhaber. (Humboldt-Bibliothek, Heft 2.) Pp. 126. (Brackwede i. W.: Dr. W. Breitenbach, 1911.) Price 2 marks.
- (4) *Religion and Modern Psychology.* By J. Arthur Hill. Pp. vii+200. (London: Wm. Rider and Son, Ltd., 1911.)
- (5) *Is the Mind a Coherer?* By L. G. Sarjant. Pp. 304. (London: George Allen and Co., Ltd., 1912.) Price 6s. net.

THE first two books of those mentioned above are by far the most important of the group. The new, largely re-written edition of (1) Ladd's "Physiological Psychology" will be welcomed by students of psychology. Nearly twenty-five years have passed since the first edition of the book, a period within which the then new branch of experimental psychology has forced its way to the front. Very considerable additions have been made to this book in the section on the physiology of the nervous system. It may be questioned whether such a full study of physiological processes is not better obtained, even by the student of psychology, directly from standard works on physiology. It