

# RELIGION & MYTH

James Macdonald



# RELIGION AND MYTH

BY

REV. JAMES MACDONALD

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TO

MY FRIEND

THE REV. JAMES STEWART, M. D.

OF LOVEDALE

IN

ADMIRATION OF HIS SERVICES IN THE CAUSE

OF AFRICAN MISSIONARY WORK

AND CIVILIZATION

**Religion And Myth By James Macdonald.**

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Nor is this all. The traffic that is carried on with drink as the medium of barter has far reaching effects beyond the moral deterioration of the native races. For rum a man will part with all he possesses, and the tribe where the trade is introduced is speedily reduced to beggary. This puts an end to profits, for there is nothing to exchange for our commodities. Where there was a roaring trade and men congratulated themselves on the advent of prosperous times, the fountains of supply suddenly dry up, and the only evidence of European influence left is moral ruin—this and a few blackened brick walls. It is the old nursery fable of the goose that laid the golden egg, only in Africa it is no fable but stern fact.

But ruin apart, and admitting trade to be carried on in the most approved manner with useful goods and ornamental articles, is savage man likely to be improved by it to the extent the advocates of this exclusive gospel of commerce seem to expect? There is a distinct limit to the influence the glitter of beads and even cotton loincloths have. The former please only till they become common; the latter, though an undoubted improvement upon bark cloth, is but an indifferent substitute for a comfortable skin garment, while it is less durable. As to industry prospering to a large extent under present conditions, every man who knows Africa knows that is impossible. To suppose that there is a moral virtue in European garments, or in elaborate clothing of any kind, as compared with a scanty covering of bark cloth or skin, is to make the same mistake as was made by the Government of the good King George, when they concluded there must be a connection between loyalty and breeches, and so put the Highlanders in trews by Act of Parliament.

So far as our knowledge of African peoples goes, the kind and amount of clothing worn does not seem to have any influence on public morals. The Waganda clothe from head to foot, and put a man to death if he walks about naked in a public place, but their morality is very low, and offences against the Seventh Commandment are common everywhere<sup>1</sup>. The Boris go almost naked, and they are in no way noted for immodesty, but rather the opposite. The Gowane are exceptionally well clad, but this does not prevent their having a custom that a girl may not marry till she has borne a child. The paternity of this child is not inquired into. That is her own affair, and the husband has nothing to do with it. The child is sold as a slave. Among the Dyoor, with their scanty aprons, hardly equal to fig leaves, domestic affection is very marked, and the Bongo, who wear little clothing beyond a tail hanging down behind, limit their men to a maximum of three wives, a rare virtue in Africa.

It seems then that the gospel of cloth is not likely to raise the African to a perceptibly higher level than he is at present, if it be not accompanied by other influences more real and lasting, even if these cannot be measured out in fathoms or weighed by pounds avoirdupois.

<sup>1</sup> Felkin















