



Prolegomena to the Study of Greek Religion (Classic Reprint)

Jane Ellen Harrison

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Introduction to investigate. Had ritual received its due share of attention, it had not remained so long neglected. I would guard against misapprehension. Literature as a starting-point for investigation, and especially the poems of Homer, I am compelled to disallow; yet literature is really my goal. I have tried to understand primitive rites, not from love of their archaism, nor yet wholly from a single-minded devotion to science, but with the definite hope that I might come to a better understanding of some forms of Greek poetry. Religious convention compelled the tragic poets to draw their plots from traditional mythology, from stories whose religious content and motive were already inH omers days obsolete. A knowledge of, a certain sympathy with, the milieu of this primitive material is one step to the realization of its final form in tragedy. It is then in the temple of literature, if but as a hewer of wood and drawer of water, that I still hope to serve. As the evidence to be set before the reader is necessarily somewhat complex in detail, and the arguments of the successive chapters closely interdependent, it may be well at the outset to state, as simply as may be, the conclusions at which I have arrived, and to summarize briefly the steps of the discussion. In Chapter I. it is established that the Greeks themselves in classical times recognized two forms of ritual, Olympian and Chthonic. It is further seen that the characteristic ritual of Homeric days was of the kind known to them as Olympian. Sacrifice inH omer takes the form of an offering to the god to induce his favour. Its formulary is do ut des. Moreover the sacrificial banquet to which the god is bidden is shared by the worshipper. In sharp contradistinction to this cheerful sacrificial feast, when we examine the supposed festival of Zeus at A thens, theD iasia, we find rites of quite other

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