

This historic book may have numerous typos, missing text or index. Purchasers can download a free scanned copy of the original book (without typos) from the publisher. 1869. Not illustrated. Excerpt: ... CHAPTER XIII. WONDER, KNOWLEDGE, BELIEF, AND CRITICISM. From the Miracle Plays the transition is easy to the whole subject of such belief in the extra-natural as existed in the age of Chaucer; allied as that is, by obvious psychological links to the religious faith of the time. We have already seen, in glimpses, that the century was one of transition in this respect and in collateral respects. The didactic was taking the place of the romantic spirit; the critical, the place of the believing spirit. We cannot affirm that the dogmatic tendency, imperilled in the religious reformation which was initiated in the time of Chaucer, was then dying out; but it was shifting its ground from that of (may I call it) institutionalised miracle, in the visible Church, to that of miracle in a book, judged by the individual soul. The theme is a very large one, and under its shelter we will group a great number of related topics. I. The atmosphere of wonder in which the minds of men moved in the middle ages we can, of course, realize but imperfectly. We are apt to speak of childlike wonder, when wondering moods are in question; but the nonchalance of children in presence of great spectacles is far more noticeable than their occasional excitability. There is, however, something to the purpose, if illustration were needed, in the eagerness, both of action and of receptivity, that belongs to the mind of early adolescence, when some fancy and some culture exist in connexion with a vivid temperament. Probably a boy of fourteen believes in Aladdin's lamp, or Sinbad's roc, quite as much as the ordinary Englishman of Chaucer's time believed in fairies or the bronze horse of Tartary. As to witches and magic, in spite of our loud, large phrases, the best of us can scarcely be said to disbel...

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