



Primitive Secret Societies: A Study in Early Politics and Religion (Classic Reprint)

By Hutton Webster

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Recent years have witnessed great accretions to our knowledge of the initiation ceremonies and secret societies found among many savage and barbarous communities throughout the world. The data bearing upon these matters, collected by the patient efforts of scholarly investigators in Australia, Melanesia, Africa, and North America, are of singular interest to the student of primitive sociology and religion. The present work represents an effort, necessarily provisional in the light of existing information, to arrive at the significance of the materials so laboriously and so carefully collected. Starting with no preconceived notions of the subject, the author has endeavored to shape his theories in accordance with his facts and in many instances by abstaining from generalization, to let his facts carry their own significance to the reader's mind. In the final chapter, which is to be regarded as an appendix, the wide diffusion of initiatory rites and secret organizations has been indicated. The bibliography supplied in this connection, though not exhaustive, probably notices nearly everything of importance so far published.

The scope of the work precluded any attempt to supply a detailed examination of the various secret societies. Moreover, the evidence for the men's house (Chap. I) and for the age-classificatory system (Chap. VI) has been presented only in barest outline.

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