

or as occasion might arise, he could rid himself, for a time at least, of the evils which surrounded him. And when we come to this doctrine of devils and their expulsion, we arrive at a point which marks a distinct advance in thought. Under the earlier forms the king or earth spirit did good or evil according to humour or caprice ; but with the conception of personal spirits, divided into a good class and a bad, we find men projecting into the supernatural what they experienced in the natural world. Their philosophy, crude as it was, was based on observation, and embodied the results of experience so far as savage man could formulate his experience into a system. When taboos failed to meet the case, men adopted the bolder policy of making war on devils. Nor is the savage singular in the methods adopted to expel evils. When fasts and prayers failed the inhabitants of European cities in the expulsion of the devils of epidemic diseases, they made war upon them in sewers and cellars, and to far better purpose than by the older and more pious method of priestly intercession. A comparison of the methods adopted for the expulsion of evils in Africa, and survivals amongst ourselves, gives one the impression that popular imagination is not yet far removed from the age of Balac, whose only hope lay in having a powerful magician, like the prophet Balaam, to curse his enemies before he joined his forces in battle with theirs.

Taking South Africa—with the practice of which I was long familiar—first, it may be said in a general way that no “commoner” dare interfere with spirits

either good or bad, beyond offering such sacrifices as are sanctioned by custom. Demons may haunt a man, and render his life a burden, but he must submit to their machinations until the case is taken in hand by the proper authorities. A baboon may be the messenger of evil spirits, and perch itself on a tree within easy gunshot, or regale itself in his maize field ; but to pull a trigger at the brute would be worse than suicide. As long as the man remains a solitary sufferer he has little chance of redress. It is assumed he has been guilty of some crime, and that the ancestors have in their wrath sent the demon to torment him. But should his neighbours suffer ; should the baboon from choice or necessity—for men do pluck up courage to scare the brutes—select a fresh field in which to glean its supper, or another man's barn roof for its perch, the case alters its complexion. The magicians now take the matter up seriously. One man may be visited by the ancestors with severe reproof, as being haunted by a demon, but a whole community is another matter. Clearly in that case there is something amiss, and a remedy must be found. To shoot the baboon will not serve the purpose. African spirits are not amenable to powder and lead, as Scottish witches are to powder and silver bullets, and to kill the baboon would only be to enrage the demon and increase the danger. The first thing to do is to discover where the devil has his permanent abode. This is generally a deep pool of water with overhanging banks and dark recesses. There the villagers gather with priests and magicians. Under the direction of their

ghostly counsellors, and secured from harm by their presence, men, women, and children pelt the demon with stones. Drums are beaten and horns blown at intervals, and when all are worked up into a frenzy of excitement, as one after another catches a glimpse of the imp as he tries to avoid the missiles, he takes his flight at a single bound, and the village is free from his influence for a time. Baboons may now be killed and crops protected. While the stone throwing goes on, all present, and especially the women, hurl the most abusive epithets at the object of their fear and vengeance.

There is no periodic purging of devils, nor are more spirits than one expelled at a time. I have noticed frequently a connection between the quantity of grain that could be spared for making beer, and the frequency of gatherings for the purging of evils and other necessary purposes. No large gathering can be held in Africa without feasting and drinking, especially the latter. Like the Scotch factor, anxious to let a barren moor with hardly a feather on it, to an Englishman, as "one of the finest bits o' ground i' the north," and who after the second tumbler of "toddy," suggested a third before closing the bargain, on the ground that "it's dry wark talking," the African finds all public functions, even his devotions, "dry wark," and needs his pombe. If this is not to be had, the assured result is failure.

There are demons who are not amenable to stone-throwing and abuse. Such methods would only give them further opportunity for mischief by an increased knowledge of village affairs. They in that case could

adapt their methods to the new conditions, and the end of that place would be worse than the first, for they would enter it clean swept of all effectual means of defence. So the Dinka and Bongo expel their devils by guile.* There the exorcist begins by holding a conversation with the demon. He ascertains his name; how long he has been there; where he belongs to; his permanent residence; kinsfolk, acquaintances, and other particulars, all the while disguising his own identity as a devil-doctor. When he ascertains all he wishes to know, he hurries to the woods to collect such medicines as are effectual for the expulsion of demons of the class to which the one in question belongs. After this his course is clear: he sends the evil one beyond the bounds of his diocese by bell, book, and candle, or, to be literal, by horn, calabash, and torch.

The Wazeramas, more tender of heart towards their demons, expelled them by gentler means than a shower of stones or a drastic purge. Suppose a patient is devil-possessed, he is taken out of his hut and propped up against a tree in presence of the assembled villagers. An ancient crone ladles out beer to all who wish a draught. When she has completed her round of the crowd, drums are beaten, horns blown, and all manner of musical instruments played. The demon, captivated by the music, has his senses—"cuteness"—dulled for the time, and at the auspicious moment, when the noise has reached a maddening pitch, the magician entices him to enter a stool, wooden pillow, or any other object that can

* Schweinfurth.

be easily carried about.* This he conveys to a safe place, where he can deal with the demon at will and prevent his re-entering the patient. He, poor beggar, standing on one leg propped against the tree, is either killed outright by noise and excitement, or by a process of reaction obtains sleep, and frequently recovers within a few days or even hours.

When a Galla exorcist is called upon to exercise his powers over the unseen world, against any one of the eighty-eight demons that haunt the tribe,† he kills a goat, the entrails of which he hangs about his neck. Thus arrayed, he carries in one hand a bell, which he rings "to waken the demon," and in the other a whip. After he has capered about for a time ringing his bell, he suddenly raises his whip, with which he gives the patient several sharp cuts. The demon, not liking such treatment, takes to his heels; a final flourish of the whip in the air as the demon flies past completes the process, and the magician goes his way carrying his fee along with him, which is the only guarantee against the demon's return. I recommend this method to European physicians whose accounts are of long standing!

Of all methods employed for the expulsion of evil spirits that found among the Wanika is the gentlest I have met with. There they are treated with the care and consideration with which ladies of quality were treated when they walked abroad a century ago. This method may be illustrated by taking the case of a patient who is devil-possessed, as has been done with the preceding. A mortar filled with water

* J. Thomson.

† Krapf.

is placed at his bedside. Next a gaudily-coloured stick, richly ornamented with beads, bits of glass, and ornaments, is stuck in the ground close at hand. A boy dips a bundle of twigs in the water, with which he sprinkles the head of the patient. The people beat drums, dance, sing, and play as if round a May-pole. The demon loves music, and he loves beads and gewgaws. As the merriment proceeds he thinks people are off their guard, and he looks at the stick. As he looks he becomes fascinated and leans towards it. Finally, he leaves the patient and enters the stick, when it is promptly pulled from the ground by the magician.* What he does with the demon so tenderly treated the historian does not record. He probably mars all his previous kindness by throwing the stick, devil and all, into lake or river.

But the demons of South and East Africa are as water to whisky when compared to those of the West Coast, where their expulsion wholesale, at stated intervals is a necessity of existence. So potent are they for evil that the people of Dahomey, who may in a few weeks thereafter expel them wholesale, sacrifice sheep and goats to them before sowing their crops.† If they neglected this precaution, so powerful are evil spirits, no corn would ripen, even should every demon be expelled before it comes into ear. Along the coast, where large towns have to be purged, the ceremonies are both elaborate and protracted. Rude wicker figures of elephants, tigers, cows, and other animals are made,

* Krapf.

† Winterbotham.

and carefully covered over with cloth. Of these, one is set up before every house door.* Each family needs a figure, and the animals are selected from a supposed connection between them and the spirits of departed ancestors. Old Tiger-face's son would naturally select the animal whose name his father bore when taking part in the great ceremony of expelling devils from the town and from his own fireside. The figures are intended as receptacles or places of temporary retreat for the demons when the process of purgation begins.

At 3 A.M. a tempest of noise begins simultaneously in all parts of the town. Drums beat, bugles bray, horns roar, bells tingle, whistles screech. Everything which can be made to emit sound is brought into requisition and kept going till the owner is exhausted, or the instrument gives way, a frequent occurrence. This pandemonium of noise continues till high noon. At that hour floors are swept, dusty corners turned out, the ashes of the previous day's fires carefully collected, and everything where a demon could lurk removed and placed inside the wicker figure at the door. The images are then carried in tumultuous procession to the river and tossed into the water with beat of drum. The demons dare not return; they are now beyond the boundaries of the town, and but for untoward accidents men might live in peace for an indefinite time. But as ill-luck will have it, the next tribe may be expelling their own devils, and these, turned out of comfortable quarters, may enter the newly

* Waddell.

purged territory and finding it unoccupied, take up their abode there till once more carried to the river and so cast out. Illustrations of this might be multiplied indefinitely, but what has been given may be taken as characteristic of a particular phase of thought.

Now this belongs to an early and very rude state of society—to the time before man had differentiated clearly between the natural and supernatural, and when he still believed himself to have power over the unseen world. The condition has continued among peoples far removed from the flowing current of civilisation, and who had not invented the art of writing. It has survived through the hunting, pastoral, and agricultural stages of progress among rude peoples, and seems to persist wherever man is unable to record his thoughts in symbols readily understood by his fellows. But although this peculiar belief in man's powers over the world of spirits persists in barbarous countries, to use a common expression, we should hardly be prepared for its persistency in Christian times in Europe, and among the most highly educated communities in civilised lands. Few peoples have enjoyed greater educational advantages, so far as the bulk of the peasantry is concerned, than the Scotch, and still we find among them, even at the present day, many persons who believe in man's power to call the devil at will. That such faith should be found universal among savages is consistent with all we know of the progress of human thought ; that Christian communities should continue, generation after generation,

through millenniums of years, to believe in the power of their religious teachers on the one hand, and of their wizards and witches on the other, to control demons and influence nature, is one of those curious phenomena which show how narrow are the limits which divide savage man from civilised, and make us pause to ask, how much of truth, absolute truth, we, any of us, know concerning ourselves, and the mysterious, unsatisfied yearnings of our souls for a fuller, truer, and clearer knowledge of the unseen.

Not more than a century ago it was no uncommon thing to appeal to priest or presbyter to visit this village or that to "lay the devil," and the curious thing is, that men of education and experience of the world went through the mummeries supposed to have that effect. A priest of the Braes of Lochaber "laid" the devil about what is now Spean Bridge, and the Reformed faith proceeded no farther up the glen of the Spean. A successor of his, however, doubted whether he had but half laid him in Inveroy, the next district to Spean Bridge, the inhabitants of which, according to the worthy father, did justice neither to God nor man. This "laying" of the devil was rendered necessary through his being "raised" by persons who had that power being in league with him, and without whose aid he "could not leave his hole." How this was done I have failed to discover with certainty. The "laying" was by bell, book and candle, or within Reformation times "by prayer and the exercise of the power of prayer," a phrase as difficult of interpretation as any African oracle of them all. Prayer one

can understand, but what is the "power of prayer" as applied to the "laying" of the devil? As to the "raising" of his majesty, one old man told me the following incident, for the truth of which he vouched on personal knowledge, "for," said he, "it happened when I was a good bit o' a callant." I give his own words as nearly as I can remember.

"It's a long time since, but I mind it as if it were yesterday. The boys were having a wild night. Two old men had just finished wi' a pickle malt for the new year like, and there was plenty going. About the middle of the night, at the turn as you would say, one of the young men began to curse and swear awful. He called on the devil, and said he might come and take him. Some o' them were a wee sober, and bade him keep quiet, but he gaed worse, and defied a' the devils in hell, and said he would like to smell their brimstone. That moment there was an awful flash of lightning, and a woman, said no to be canny, or the likes o' her, came down the chimney and stood afore him. She stood facing him, and said: 'Ye want to see the devil: he may be here sooner nor ye think.' Sorry a word more did she say when the house was filled wi' burning brimstone, and something going up and down in a blue flame on the crook"—[i.e., the chain for hanging pots over the fire]. "Then it made a noise such as the like was never heard, and gaed out o' sight. The gun-barrels in the house were twisted and broken, and the next day the smell o' brimstone was strong on their clothes. None of them could ever tell right how it happened, but there's nae doubt about it.

It's as true as gospel." And then the old man proceeded to detail other experiences of his youth, and to bemoan the scepticism of the age, which was sure to bring the curse of God down upon the world. This was not an ignorant man, but one fairly well informed; a man who knew his Bible, and could correct preachers on points of Calvinistic theology. I knew him well, and he represented current opinion among middle-aged and old people in parts of the Highlands about twenty years ago. How the devil was "laid" in this case my informant did not remember, but he was fully informed how it was done in other cases, and believed as firmly as he did in his own existence that the art "was known to many of the godly in olden times."

There is a woman of my acquaintance in Reay who can "do things." Some years ago she asked a coach-driver for a "sail" in his vehicle. He refused. "Very well," said Annie; "I will be in Thurso before you." A mile farther on one of his horses fell stone dead, and he had the mortification of seeing the witch pass with an air of triumph. The owner has never refused her a "sail" since then.

A former minister of the parish of Reay in Caithness, a Mr. Pope, was a man of more than local reputation. He came to the parish when the people were largely pagan, and being a man of herculean strength, used gentle physical persuasion by means of an oaken cudgel, known as the "bailiff," to bring his parishioners to church. His feats of strength, and especially his having first thrashed, and then driven before him to church, a local character re-

garded with dread as a giant in strength and a tiger in temper, gave him an extraordinary influence over his unruly flock. Supernatural powers were freely attributed to him, and this for reasons of his own he may have encouraged. Among other powers he possessed he was regarded as being able to "lay the devil" at will. It so happened that the people of Strathy, in the neighbouring parish, "raised" the fiend but could not get him "laid" again. In dire extremity they went to Mr. Pope, and on some pretext induced him to visit Strathy. When nearing the place "he got the smell of the fiend," and knew why they had sent for him. He was excessively angry, but having gone so far he proceeded to the place, and so effectually did he dispose of their troublesome visitor, that, as I was told last summer, "the devil has never since been raised in the district."

Did the scope of our inquiry permit, illustrations of the same practice of expelling the devil could be drawn from the usages of the Teutonic peoples of Europe. This is represented by such practices as are observed among the Finns of Eastern Russia. There on the last day of the year a band of young girls march through the streets and stop at each house corner, which they beat with wands they carry for the purpose. As they beat each house they say, in chorus, "We are driving Satan out of the village." After they have in this manner visited all the houses, they march in procession to the river, singing as they go, and when they arrive there throw their wands, devils and all, into the water to float away down stream. "At Brunnen, in Switzerland, the boys

go about in procession on Twelfth Night, carrying torches and lanterns, and making a great noise with horns, cowbells, and whips. This is said to frighten away two female spirits of the wood—Strudeli and Strätteli.”* These are but illustrations of the simpler forms of a custom observed by all the peoples of Europe; a custom which in many cases became grafted on to the services of the Christian Church,† no man can tell how, but which clearly carry us back to an age when the peoples of Europe were, by painful experience, groping their way towards a knowledge of truth, as the Central African of to-day is undoubtedly doing. For what are all religions but a searching after truth; the expression of man’s desire to attain to a true and final knowledge of causes, and his own relation to these?

* Usener, quoted by J. G. Frazer.

† In Ross-shire there is a common custom when drinking from a roadside spring to tie a bit of rag to a branch or tuft of grass. This I have heard explained as an offering to the spirit of the spring, while others say it is to ban evil from the water. In either case it is a survival of a long-forgotten past—a simple action, carrying us back to a time when spirits inhabited every grove and running stream.

CHAPTER VII

WITCHCRAFT

WHEN man reached the conception of good and evil spirits as personal and separate existences—that is to say, beings capable of being influenced by him and having an influence over him—it needed but the advent of a Milton to set the gods by the ears. But before the Miltonic conception was reached there was a long transition period during which the gods set men by the ears. We have seen that kings and divine priests claimed to have in their own persons: first, the spirit of the creative and reproductive powers of nature; next, that of their ancestors and predecessors, this latter passing over to the idea of an impersonal god. These were the beneficent patrons of men, who gave them rain, sunshine, crops, fecundity, successful hunting, and kindred blessings. During the world's youth the want of these was attributed to the negligence of the king, and with the lapse of time, perhaps to his malice or ill-will, as when the king was said "to have a bad heart." It was no uncommon experience for the king to be called sharply to task when the course of nature got into confusion and disorder, and men began to feel the pinch of want or the inconvenience of having to travel far afield for game. With the

advent of evil spirits the blame could be laid on their shoulders for all the ills that afflicted humanity. Evil persons were supposed to be in league with those evil spirits, and to be their agents in carrying out their nefarious purposes. As the good spirits acted for men's benefit through the king or tribal priest, so other malign spirits acted through persons whose whole object was pure mischief for its own sake, except when bribed to do good actions by large gifts. The expulsion of spirits had not yet occurred to man; propitiation did not always suit his purpose; and yet the case required that drastic remedies should be adopted. It was obviously a matter of the first importance that means should be discovered for the detection and extermination, if possible, of the class of persons who brought the ills from which men suffered upon them.

In earlier times the king himself was frequently put to death when he failed to order the course of nature regularly, and give the blessings expected from him, and if so, there could be no hesitation or doubt about the art of those who wilfully disturbed the course of nature being a capital crime, or rather the capital crime beyond all others even by comparison. For to savage man there is no crime comparable to witchcraft in malignity of purpose and object. Here, then, we have the origin of that system of jurisprudence and religious ritual which, projecting itself into civilised and Christian times, pursued its victims, under the sanction of civil law and church judicatories, as persons who ought not to live. Primitive faith, or superstition as we call it

now, clung for generations to men professing to be disciples of Him who came to show the higher and better way, so tenaciously that they could, without pity or compunction, see their fellows amidst blazing faggots for an imaginary crime. If the growth of thought has been so slow within historic times, and among a people with a written language, what must it have been among primitive men? When religion, with all the sanction it received from the sacred books of Christianity, took so many centuries to realise such elementary facts regarding man's relation to the supernatural, do we wonder that millenniums pass without any appreciable difference in custom and myth among savages?

But how were wizards and witches to be discovered when the world was young, and before men learned to recognise the "witch's mark?" Spirits bent on evil gave no outward token of their presence so far as that could possibly be avoided. These spirits would only be harboured by persons of the most malignant disposition, or who for some reason had a grudge against their kind. So the spirits sought out those who, through neglect or ill-treatment, had been soured and rendered bitter in heart against their fellows.* Thus it happened that deformed persons, and those who through any infirmity were unable to take their place and act their part in life like their fellows, were believed to be possessed of the devil, or, in other words, were wizards and witches. Dwarfs, dumb persons, women who never were sought in marriage, and those with

* J. Sutton, MS. notes.

any facial peculiarities or defects which made them conspicuous, were most frequently regarded as the incarnation of the evil spirit of the world. From them it was impossible to expel or allure the demon as in the case of a patient who was devil-possessed, for, unlike the sick, the devil dwelt within the wizards by their own will and choice. They were themselves devils incarnate as the king or high priest was incarnate god. Such being the case, the only hope of safety, the sole means of security, lay in the rigid enforcement of that curious Mosaic enactment: "Thou shall not suffer a witch to live."*

Let us now consider how man, as he groped his way towards a higher conception of truth and the facts with which he found himself surrounded in the world, sought to protect himself against the malign influences exercised by those persons who entered into league with evil spirits, for the purpose of injuring their kind. And here it will be better to begin with the southern portion of Africa, with the customs of which I am familiar, and which have been studied and recorded with a greater degree of minuteness than those of any other part of the continent. In any study of witchcraft it must be borne in mind that the wizard's power is unlimited, or only bounded by such limitations and restrictions as the gods are subject to. Evil spirits are as powerful as good; hence it follows that the good must have assistance from man himself, if they are to cope successfully with evil. Man and the gods

* Exod. xxii. 18.

may keep evil in check. Either of them alone would be unequal to the task. Can the beneficent god give rain? The wizard can thwart his purpose by the simplest of expedients. Can he make domestic animals prolific? The wizard has but to get a hair out of a cow's tail to bring murrain among them. Does the "father of men" give easy delivery to mothers? The wizard causes death in childbed or blights the offspring with a curse. Throughout the whole circle of social and domestic life the good designs of Providence and the gods can be frustrated by the art of witchcraft, and, indeed, the wizard may in a sense, be said to be more powerful than the gods. To them belong the initiative; all things are under their control and ordered by them; and the wizard has but to lie in wait till the gods act, and then, by the practice of his art, frustrates their intentions by marring their work. He, on the other hand, is safe from assault by the gods, for he never initiates any original work on his own account. His business is to watch their doings, and when they favour men to bring calamity and death.

So the Hottentot priest, when he sacrifices for any purpose, takes the most extraordinary precautions against malign influences. He keeps his purpose a profound secret, lest his intentions should become known to some "suspect person." At the sacrifice none must be present except such as can be fully trusted. And here lies his chief difficulty. Wizards are as cunning as are evil spirits themselves, and adopt every kind of disguise so as to remain unsuspected. He can guard against the presence of

reputed wizards and suspect persons. But these have "friends" who are neither known nor suspected, and should one of them be present to inform the wizard of what goes on, and convey to him as much as a single hair from the sacrifice, or even a blade of grass from the spot on which an important person, as the chief or priest, sat, he can accomplish all the evil that he could have done by his presence among the crowd. For some reason, which I never could discover, suspect persons cannot be, or at all events are not, put on trial till specific acts can be charged against them before a properly constituted tribunal. They cannot even be shut up by such methods as we have often found so convenient beyond St. George's Channel.

Under such circumstances it is necessary to have a method by which guilt can be easily and surely brought home to those practising the unlawful art. This is done by a class of men known as witch-doctors. These are really magicians or priests, who, because of the dignity of their calling, occupy a premier position among the religious teachers of Africa. They are permitted to have armed retainers, and to rank on an equality with heads of clans. Their places of residence are sanctuaries; they hold court and try causes; their persons are sacred, and in virtue of their office they are entitled to receive fees in connection with all cases and trials. The following may be taken as illustrative of the witch-doctor's method of procedure:—When any one, say a man in middle life, falls ill, his friends, believing him to be bewitched, repair to the witch-

doctor's house, and sit down outside in a waiting attitude. After a brief interval the doctor appears, says "Good morning," and then sitting down, takes a leisurely pinch of snuff. If the visitors ask for tobacco, he knows it is but an ordinary call, and enters into conversation on current topics. If they do not ask a pinch, he retires to his house, and returns with a dry hide and a small bundle of sticks which he throws down before his visitors. He then says, "You have come about a child?"

They, beating softly on the hide, reply: "We agree."

The doctor proceeds: "You are going to speak about a woman?"

"We agree," say the strangers, while they continue their gentle beating.

"The man you have come about is very ill," may be the doctor's next remark.

"We agree, we agree," cry out the visitors, this time beating violently.

On such lines the doctor proceeds till he has learned all he wishes to know: the man's age; whether of a strong or weakly constitution; how long he has been ill; whether he has any known enemy, and his means. After this he sits a long while in silence, and then says, oracularly, "You are being killed." When asked how and by whom, he replies that he cannot tell; they must return on the following day, and meantime the gods may divulge to him the secret. He mentions his fee, generally an ox, as a retainer, and this must be brought when they return next day, otherwise no revelations will

be made to him. He is the servant of the gods, and what is given to him is offered to them. The deputation then retire, and when they go home a trusted friend receives a hint as to whom they suspect of bewitching the patient. This neighbour goes at dead of night, and has an interview with the doctor, who is now in a position to act. A muster of villagers is duly called, attendance at which is compulsory on pain of confessed guilt. The accused marches, in ignorance of his doom, with the cavalcade. On the way he may be casually asked, "What does the person bewitching our brother deserve?" and he of course promptly replies, "He must die."

The ritual followed at the meeting varies, but the following is one method. All the villagers give up their arms to the doctor's guard, and then seat themselves in a semicircle. The doctor sings, dances, capers and mutters incantations within the circle of expectant sitters; then rushing up to the doomed man cries out, "This is the wizard who bewitched so and so, the gods name him." He then runs in among his armed guards, and all the people jump up, leaving the culprit sitting alone. He must not move, nor will any one go near him. No one is allowed to plead his cause even if they wished. His friends are disarmed and cannot strike a blow for him. The man's doom is inexorably fixed, and his only chance of escape is the somewhat slender one of the chief ordering an ox to be substituted and offered as a sacrifice; this, or a clean pair of heels, if he can show them. On crossing the border of the

tribal territory he is safe, there being no extradition treaty for wizards.

As we move northwards we find the same or even greater precautions taken against witchcraft, but the system of jurisprudence is modified. In the Nyassa region, for example, the office of discovering persons who practise the illegal art falls not to the priest, but to the prophetess, who is frequently the principal wife of the chief, and one of the most formidable and justly dreaded persons met with in Africa. It is to the prophetess the ancestral spirits make known the will of the gods. When she sees these face to face, which always happens at the dead hour of night, she begins by raving and screaming, which she continues till the whole village is astir, and she herself utterly prostrated by her exertions ; she then throws herself on the ground in a kind of trance, during which the villagers gather round her, awe-stricken, waiting for the oracle of the god, for she is now god-possessed. After such possession and revelations she may impose impossible tasks on men, and these they will attempt without question as their destiny.* She may demand human sacrifices, and no one dare deny her victims. Suppose she declares a victim must be offered to a mountain deity—for there are gods of the valleys and gods of the hills, deities of the river and of the forest—the victim is conducted to the spot indicated and bound hand and foot to a tree, If during the first night he is killed by beasts of prey, the gods have accepted the sacrifice ; if not, he is left to die of

* Rev. Duff Macdonald.

starvation or thrown into a pool. The slave was not worthy the god's acceptance ; he is of no further use to any one.

It is, however, as a detective of wizards and witches the prophetess is in most constant demand. When she travels on such duty she is accompanied by a strong guard ; and when she orders a meeting of a clan or tribe attendance is compulsory. When all are assembled, our friend, who is clad with a scanty loin cloth and literally covered from head to heels with rattles and fantasies, rushes about among the crowd in the most frantic manner. She shouts and raves and rants like one demented. After which, assuming a calm judicial manner, she goes from one to another touching each person's hand. As she touches the hand of the bewitcher, she starts back with a loud shriek and yells, " This is him, the murderer. Blood is in his hand."* Having discovered the culprit, she next proceeds to prove his guilt. This she does by " finding the horns " he used in the prosecution of the unlawful art. These are generally the horns of a small species of antelope which are *par excellence* " witches' horns." She finds the horns by going along the bank of the stream from which the family of the bewitched person got water. At intervals she lifts water from the stream, which she pours upon the ground, and then stoops to listen. Spirit voices direct her to the wizard's hiding-place. Arrived there, she begins to dig with a hoe she carries, muttering incantations as she works, and there she finds the incriminating horns. †

* Rev. Duff Macdonald.

† *Ibid.*

Now, how does the prophetess find the horns? By what devil's art does she hit upon the spot where they are concealed? The explanation is to us very simple, but the African has not yet discovered it, or if he has, no one has dared to say so. Wherever she is employed she must spend a night at the village before she begins operations. She does not retire to rest with the other villagers, but wanders about the live-long night listening to spirit voices. If she sees a villager outside his door after the usual hour for retiring, she brings that up against him next day as evidence of guilty intention, and that, either on his own account or the wizard's, he meant to steal away to dig up the horns. The fear of such consequences keeps all persons within doors, and leaves the prophetess free to arrange for the tableau of the next day. So far is the fear of witchcraft carried, that whole villages have been known to partake of the ordeal poison in order to root out evil persons.* If a man is guilty, he dies; if not guilty, even if caught in the act red-handed, he recovers—he was in that case not a thief, he was bewitched to make him steal. Such is the Wayao philosophy of trial by ordeal.

Among the Bongo on the White Nile no communication can be had with the spirit world except by means of certain roots which are known to the magicians.† These are of service, not only in holding communication with the gods, but in warding off all evil influences. Had the secret been kept, the

* Rev. Duff Macdonald.

† Schweinfurth.

Bongo would have been the happiest people under the sun, but in an evil hour some noted wizard discovered it and made the world unhappy. With this knowledge in their possession, old people may apparently be lying peaceably in their beds while their spirits range the forest by moonlight in search of the magic roots.* These spirits assume animal form, which remind us of the familiar stories of farmers wounding hares, and hearing of old women in the next village having broken arm or leg mysteriously, which they set and dressed without aid of doctor; assured sign that the fear of his seeing the bullet-mark prevented their seeking his aid.

The Bongo priest who has obtained the coveted roots, can only hold communication with the gods in the approved manner by falling into a trance and receiving their commands in dreams and visions. The wizard, wielding equally potent spells, and restricted by no canons of custom, can leave the visible body, as the soul does in sleep, his only risk being the body being stolen during the spirit's absence, enter a hyæna, and range over mountain and plain, working evil as he goes. When a people are exposed to such dangers, to exorcise ghosts, demons, wood goblins, and all evil spirits and persons, must ever be their chief religious duty. When the destiny of a nation depends on guarding against evil influences of a spiritual nature, that people must be regarded as deeply religious, however little their rites may attract the attention of those who visit them.

* Schweinfurth.

Dr. Schweinfurth, who is one of our best authorities on the usages of tribes living on the upper reaches of the Nile, says that some of them have hardly any religion. The Niam-niam, he says, have no religion, and use for divinity the word for lightning.* It is curious so observant a traveller should have been so far misled as to what constitutes religious observances. We are familiar in Zululand, Nyassa region, and in Uganda with the use of the term for lightning—in each case a different word—for heaven, thunder, or the god, and these peoples are among the most religious communities in Africa. When a man cannot knock his foot against a tree stump without attaching to it a supernatural significance† that man is religious whether he has a separate word for his god or not. The statement seems all the more inexplicable when we find the doctor himself saying that the same Niam-niam, who have no religion, “have a word for prayer”; that they practise augury, and believe in goblins, ghosts, and witches, the latter of which are treated by them as they have always been by persons with properly constituted minds—that is, by getting rid of them in the manner most approved for the extermination of the pestilent race. If the Niam-niam have no religion, to whom do they pray? Whence came their goblins? How do their witches attain their power except by spirit agency? These are questions which must be satisfactorily disposed of before we can accept a general statement that a people have

* Schweinfurth.

† Rev. Duff Macdonald; Dr. Elmslie, MS. notes.

been found who have no religion—that is, no faith in regard to supernatural powers or agents.

If the Nile tribes conduct their witch prosecutions, and religious services generally, in so perfunctory a manner as to attract the attention of travellers but slightly, their deficiency is more than made up by the Bullom tribes of the West Coast. When they drink beer they pour out a few drops as a religious act; when they eat, particles of food are allowed to fall on the ground for the same purpose.* They can neither walk nor sit, sow nor reap, hunt nor fish, without performing acts of devotion and dutiful obedience to the gods. They move among divinities, and these may be disturbed by loud laughter, by improper movements, or by words which can imply disparagement of the gods or their works. Each day has its own religious duties, but it is in the “witch palaver” their true devotion and fidelity to the will of the gods is seen to best advantage.

Their three great palavers are, “sauce palaver,” “woman palaver,” and “witch palaver.”† In the first, which refers to all ordinary offences, the case is conducted according to the ordinary rules of evidence, either by witnesses or the ordeal. The accused is held as guilty, and he must prove his innocence. If he have witnesses, good; if not, then the poison bowl. The same remarks apply to “woman palaver,” only that in this case the accused must submit to the ordeal. What that ordeal is we

* Walker.

† Winterbotham.

shall see in another connection ; our present business is with the "witch palaver." In this case the accused can prove his innocence by no other means than the ordeal. When the offence was committed he may have been on a journey, at sea, asleep, sick and unable to move, on the war path ; in any condition or circumstances. None of these things can be admitted in evidence nor in mitigation of sentence. Persons who have the power of transforming themselves into animals or insects, feigning sleep, or even death, so perfectly as to deceive the very elect—that is to say, the authoritative religious guides of the community—are not to be trifled with. So it is, when a suspect is on trial for specific acts of witchcraft, a red hot-iron is applied to his skin, partly to jog his memory, but principally that the brand may be examined to determine how much skin adheres to the hot metal, whether the wound bleeds, and how its edges "curl."* To each of these signs great importance is attached in determining presumption of guilt. This ordeal may be final and satisfactory, but the probabilities are against it. The show is too good to be over so soon, and the red-hot poker is succeeded by a jar of oil, which is placed on the fire till it boils. Into this boiling oil a stone, made red hot in the fire, is now dropped and the culprit directed to fish it out with his naked hand.† According to the condition of the hand after the ordeal is the presumption of guilt or innocence. If

* Winterbotham.

† *Ibid.*; Rev. Duff Macdonald.

these means do not conclusively prove the case, he must drink "red water." * This is a decoction which is prepared by the priest in public from poisonous substances. After the preparation is made the priest washes his hands, as well as the mortar and pestle used, as a ceremonial act. The accused for a similar reason must rinse his mouth with clean water. He is then given a quantity of boiled rice which he must eat; after it he drinks the poison. If the red water acts as an emetic, and that vomiting continues till he brings up particles of rice, he is innocent and escapes; the red water ran away from him. When it does not act as an emetic, even if the man does not die from the effects of the poison, he is guilty; the red water clung to him. Sometimes the drug causes purging. In this case the culprit has "spoiled the red water"; the augury is doubtful, and to remove all difficulties he is sold—out of the territory, it is needless to say.

This latter form of ordeal is common in cases of supposed adultery among many tribes of the West Coast, as well as throughout the whole of the Lake region of Central Africa, and is specially worthy of note because of its close resemblance to, if not identity with, the practice of trial by ordeal for the same offence among the Jews: "If a man's wife go aside, and commit a trespass against him, and a man lie with her carnally, and it be hid from the eyes of her husband, and be kept close And the spirit of jealousy come upon him, and he be jealous of his wife, and she be defiled; or, if the spirit of

* Winterbotham.

jealousy come upon him, and he be jealous of his wife, and she be not defiled, then shall the man bring his wife unto the priest And the priest shall take holy water in an earthen vessel ; And the priest shall have in his hand the bitter water that causeth the curse And the priest shall write three curses in a book, and he shall blot them out with the bitter water, and he shall cause the woman to drink the bitter water that causeth the curse And when he hath made her to drink the water, then it shall come to pass, if she be defiled, and have done trespass against her husband, that the water that causeth the curse shall enter into her and become bitter, and her belly shall swell, and her thigh shall rot, and the woman shall be a curse among her people. And if the woman be not defiled but be clean, then she shall be free.”* The connection between this enactment in the Mosaic legislation and the practice among primitive men, it is not my province to trace in the present essay, but the resemblance is so striking that the inference seems plain enough.

Turning to the history of witchcraft among civilised peoples, we have in it perhaps the best illustration of the persistency in popular imagination of the belief in the supreme power of evil spirits, and in man’s power to influence the course of nature by necromancy and magic. It would be easy to cite examples from every country in Europe to show how the same belief in the power of evil, personified in wizards and witches, influenced the

* Numbers. v. 12-28.

whole domestic and social life of the people. In Jutland a rowan growing out of the top of another tree is exceedingly efficacious against witchcraft.* This tree has the same virtue in Scotland, and I knew a worthy farmer's wife, who died only a few years ago, and who annually, in early summer, had a St. Andrew's cross made of rowan twigs, which she placed in the cowhouse as a talisman against the arts of witches. German farmers use the mistletoe for a similar purpose. In the island of Rum it was believed that if one of the family of Lachlin—a local family of note—shot a deer on the mountain of Finchra, he would either die on the spot or contract a distemper from which he could not recover.† This may belong to the class of totems rather than to witchcraft. Traces of clan totems are frequently met with in the north and west of Scotland.

Confining ourselves to this country, we have ample evidence, in the witch and fairy cult still current, of the ancient belief in man's power to influence nature and the lives of his fellow-men. And not the least curious thing is, that the persons accused of witchcraft often claimed to possess the power ascribed to them, though this meant an alternative between faggots and a deep pool. Among savage men, on the contrary, denial is all but universal when one is accused of having communication with evil spirits, or exercising the art of witchcraft. Among Scottish witches and fairy folk we get glimpses of persons of different grades, some of them holding high office and directing the affairs of the

* Kamp.

† Martin.

peculiar community to which they belong. Thus, in the confessions of Isabella Gowdie, indicted for witchcraft at Nairn in 1662, we have a King and Queen of Fairyland. "I was," said Isabella when in the dock, "in Downie hill, and got meat from the Queen of the Fairies, and more that I could eat. The queen is brawly clothed in white linen and in white and brown cloth; and the king is a braw man, well-favoured and broad-faced. There were plenty of elf bulls, rowting and skoyling up and down, and affrighted me."* Mr. Kirk, from whom I quote, adds, that on the authority of local tradition, fairyland is well supplied with musical instruments and books of history, travel, plays, novels, biography, but no Bibles—the lack of the latter owing to the fairy folk being in league with the devil, from whom they receive their government and power.

Before our familiar fairy cult was evolved, the evil spirits of primitive man had crystallised into a personal devil, supreme and all-powerful, with numerous attendant angels or messengers, and it is curious to note that something very nearly akin to this is met with in Ashantee, where the king has a thousand "Kra," or souls.† The Kra are the king's spies, a kind of secret service guild, and are called the king's souls, because when he dies they are all put to death that they may attend upon him in the land of shades. To strike, or even touch a Kra, is not only a deadly insult, but a serious capital crime. It is doing it to the king himself; and it is quite consistent with savage thought to regard a powerful king and his

* Kirk.

† Kuhne and Rameyer.

Kra as still actively engaged in connection with the world's affairs long after they have quitted the upper air. He is chief dictator, and each of his souls do his behests in the affairs of men. This is the common doctrine of witchcraft as that lives in popular imagination. The black art is something carried on under the direction of a supreme evil spirit, who is assisted by a countless host of minor devils or angels; that is to say, messengers, Kra, or souls. This doctrine must have been developed when man reached the conception of a supreme spirit of good, opposed by a supreme spirit of evil. But in tracing the growth of the idea of one supreme spirit of good, or god, we are met by greater difficulties than in tracing the doctrine of devils, for the latter took shape and colour from the former. When man found a supreme spirit among the gods, he had to account for the fact that he did not, or could not, at all times order events for the good of man. Evil still persisted; so he concluded there must be a supreme and personal devil, who commanded such agencies in the unseen world as were at the disposal of the good god himself.

The difficulty of tracing the growth of the idea of a supreme god arises from the impossibility of determining with certainty what was originally a local or tribal deity, and what a spirit regarded generally as supreme. We have seen that the Zulu term *Mlungu*, and its equivalents may mean, great ancestor, lightning, the powers of nature generally, or god, and we have at least one instance which seems to show how such ideas as that of *Mlungu* first

take hold of the popular imagination, and become almost universal myth, for myth it is when all has been said, but myth which describes a sober fact of human faith and the progress of thought. The Rev. Duff Macdonald, a careful observer, who lived several years in Central Africa, says of the Wayao, that they not only worship their own ancestors, as is common to most Africans, but also invoke by prayer and sacrifice the gods of the country who were worshipped by the people they expelled. The older inhabitants were compelled to retire before the advance of the Wayao, but their great god Kangomba remained undisturbed on Mount Socki, nor would he be displaced by the newer divinities or the arts of magic.* So it is that the present chief, Kapeni, when making annual supplication and sacrifice, asks some noted Wanyasa priest to come to his assistance. The Wanyasa are related to the people whose god Kangomba originally was, and their presence is acceptable to him. Such a god as this, though originally a local tribal deity—some remote ancestor of a chief—gradually gathers more than a local reputation. The Wanyasa priests officiating at his annual festivals will carry his fame to their own people, and bring the Wanyasa tribe, through association with the Wayao at his festivals, to worship him in times of stress and trial at their own homes. If he grants their prayer his reputation will speedily spread as both powerful and good. Besides, every African who returns from a journey exaggerates all his experiences, and adorns

* Rev. Duff Macdonald.

his narratives with gorgeous imagery. In this way Kangomba will lose nothing of his glory and power by distance. He will be spoken of in every Wanyasa village as great beyond all local deities, and may, in a few generations, occupy a place second only to Mlungu himself.

Such probably was the origin of Mlungu when first men worshipped him, and if so, it furnishes us with the key we have been striving to find as to how primitive men arrived at the idea of a supreme god, and from that deduced the doctrine of a supreme devil, on which he hangs all the traditions he has regarding witchcraft and kindred evils. It will also help us to understand much with which we have long been familiar, though we may not have understood the relation of facts to one another. Such conceptions of deity and of evil are consistent with the acknowledgment of Nebuchadnezzar, that the God of Daniel was supreme among the gods—greater than those of the mighty empire itself.

We have now arrived at an advanced period of the world's progress in thought. If the theory suggested is correct, the African, starting with the crude idea that men could influence the course of nature, and that the power to do so was vested in his king, who was god—the personification of nature herself—advanced a long way when he conceived his chief, whose body he had buried or burned, still living and taking an active interest in the world's affairs. As thought progressed and man began to differentiate more accurately, he reached the doctrine of all human souls living in a land of spirits, thus

making his way towards the conception of immortality, and that instead of the world's forces being regulated by caprice, there were good and evil spirits at work. To secure success to the good, good men sought for means of thwarting the evil. The evil, on the other hand, not to be balked of their object, sought out agents on whom they conferred supernatural powers. This war of good and evil could not long continue before certain of the good spirits, or evil, attained to a place of supreme power. In tracing the history of witchcraft and the methods adopted to eradicate its votaries, we find how naturally man came to believe in persons possessing supernatural powers for evil. We have also seen, casually, the growth and development of another order, magicians and prophets; but before endeavouring to trace the history of prophecy among primitive peoples, it may be best to consider some of their festivals, as those of first-fruits and harvest, where magicians or prophets are seen to best advantage in the exercise of their functions; after which we can the better understand the development of the order and the importance attached to the office.

CHAPTER VIII

HARVEST FESTIVALS

THE festivals and ceremonial acts of any people give a clue to the original form of their institutions, and when these can be compared with what still exists, in its original form, among untutored nations, it affords evidence which is of the first importance in tracing the development of religion and the growth of civilisation.

The Yam festivals, as observed in Ashantee, were referred to in considering substitutionary sacrifice, and we saw how closely bound up with the religious life of the people are all the facts relating to the ripening of crops and the gathering in of the harvest. Nor is this peculiar to Ashantee. Everywhere the feasts of first-fruits are intimately associated with the religious observances of the people and the homage which they render to the gods. Among savages this homage is to the powers of nature, whose efforts are crowned with success when the creative and reproductive spirit of vegetation yields its increase to man. When a Pondo chief is to hold the feast of first-fruits, some of his people procure a ripe plant of the gourd family, pumpkin or calabash, from another tribe. This is cooked; the inside cleaned out, and the rind made ready for use

as a vessel. It is then presented to the chief with much ceremony.* The first-fruits are now brought forward, and a sacrifice, generally a young bull, is offered, after which the feast commences. The chief issues certain orders for the conduct of the proceedings, tastes the fruits which are served in the gourd dish with which he has been presented, and then abdicates all his functions while the festival lasts.

The cattle from all the neighbouring villages are collected in the vicinity, and now they are brought together, and the bulls incited to fight to determine which is to be king among them for the next year. The young people engage in games and dances, feats of strength and running. After these are over the whole community give themselves over to disorder, debauchery, and riot. In their bull-fights and games they but did honour to the powers of nature, and now, as they eat and drink, the same powers are honoured in another form and by other rites. There is no one in authority to keep order, and every man does what seems good in his own eyes. Should a man stab his neighbour he escapes all punishment, and so too with all other crimes against the person, property, and morality. People are even permitted to abuse the chief to his face, an offence which at any other time would meet with summary vengeance and an unceremonious dispatch to join the ancestors. While the feast continues a deafening noise is kept up by drumming, shouting, hand-clapping, and every kind of instrument that can be made to emit sound. Men advance to the chief and explain their origin,

* J. Sutton, MS. notes.

and also the object they hold sacred, by imitating the sounds and movements of their most sacred animal. This is the person's totem. Others imitate the gurgling made by an enemy when stabbed in the throat. Those who adopt this latter emblem are known as "children of the spear."

When the ceremonies, revels, and mummeries are ended, the chief repairs to his accustomed place, and sitting down there, by that act resumes his kingly functions. He calls the bravest of his braves before him, who is immediately clothed and decorated with skins of animals suggestive of courage and strategy. He performs a dance amid the frenzied shouting of the multitude, after which the chief declares the festival at an end and harvest commenced.*

The facts deserving of special notice here are the sacrifice, the fighting of the bulls, and the honour done to the reproductive powers of nature. These, and the abdication of the chief, would lead to the inference that the festival is a true survival of what, in earlier times and under a ruder system, existed when a temporary king was appointed and killed as a sacrifice, the incarnate god himself being slain that nature might revive in spring. Whether from such facts men came at last to infer a resurrection of the body, it is impossible to determine. The Pundos are not singular in their observance of harvest customs. The Hos of North-east India have a notion that at this period men and women are so overcharged with vicious propensities that it is absolutely necessary to let off steam by allowing

* J Sutton, MS. notes.

for a time full vent to their passions.* For the time they give themselves up to feasting, drinking, and debauchery. The men lose all respect for the women and for themselves, and the women all notions of modesty. Usually the Hos are a quiet, reserved, and well-behaved moral people, but at the harvest festival all this is reversed, and their nature seems to undergo a complete change. The curious thing is, that when all is over they settle down into their old steady, sober habits as if nothing had happened.

But what is most peculiar about harvest festivals and feasts of first-fruits is, their close resemblance to one another among all peoples the world over, and how near those of civilised man are to the savage; differing not in kind, but only in the manner of conducting them; thus showing to us, that they are among the most ancient and primitive of man's ritual and customs. For example. The Peruvians believe that all useful plants are animated by a divine being, that is spirit, who causes their growth.† These divine beings are named after the particular plant, as the Maize mother, the Rice mother, or the Potato mother. Figures of these mothers made from the stalks of the respective plants, and dressed in women's clothes, are worshipped. As the mother, these figures had power of giving birth to or producing much rice, maize, or potatoes, as the case might be,‡ and in this acted according as they were treated. The Peruvian mother of the Maize was kept a whole year, and burned at the time of harvest :

* Dalton, "Ethnology of Bengal," quoted by J. G. Frazer.

† J. G. Frazer.

‡ Mannhardt.

when a fresh one took her place. During the festival, eating drinking and general rejoicing goes on. In Ashantee all laws are abrogated for one day at the Yam festival, and for the time every man does whatever he pleases. One custom observed is to bring out, to be placed before the fetish house, the skulls of noted enemies killed in war, and it is said the skull of an English baronet did duty for many years—in fact, was still in existence, kept in a brass basin, when the late king's power was overthrown by the English. The people during the day of liberty give themselves up to dancing and revelry. Executioners caper about, ornamented with necklets made from the jaws of victims they slew as offerings or king's "messengers" to the nether world, and with girdles of skulls. Before eating the new yams the king bathes in fetish water as a ceremonial act; when all is over he resumes his authority as we saw done by the chief of Pondoland.

These customs, of which examples might be multiplied from every region of Africa and the heathen world generally, differ in no essential feature, and are singularly like the survivals we have in Europe. In Aberdeenshire, Scotland, the last sheaf cut, or "maiden," is carried home in merry procession by the harvesters. It is then presented to the mistress of the house, who dresses it up to be preserved till the first mare foals. The maiden is then taken down and presented to the mare as its first food.* The neglect of this would have untoward effects upon the foal, and disastrous consequences

* Miss J. Ligertwood, MS notes.

upon farm operations generally for the season. In Caithness the person who cuts the last sheaf is called "winter," and so remains till next harvest. The sheaf itself is carefully preserved till it is displaced by another the following year. The Celts of the west country attached great importance to cutting the last sheaf. All the harvesters stood round in a circle while the youngest girl among the reapers cut a few straws left standing at the corner of the field for that purpose. This sheaf was ultimately used, as I have been assured by old people, for making Brud's bed, which was as follows :—On Candlemas day the mistress and servants of each family take a sheaf of oats, and dress it up in women's apparel. They put it in a large basket, and beside it a club of wood. They then cry three times in chorus, "Brüd is come, Brud is welcome." This is done just before they retire to rest, and in the morning they examine the ashes; expecting to find among them the mark of Brud's club. If they do, it is an indication of a prosperous year and good crops; if not, the opposite.*

In the district of Lochaber, where dancing and merry-making on the last night of harvest used to be universal, and is still generally observed, the ceremonies without the "maiden" would be like a wedding without the bride. The maiden is carried home with tumultuous rejoicing, and after being suitably decorated is hung up in the barn, where the dancing usually takes place. After supper, which is served in the barn ball-room, and before

* Martin.

dancing begins, one of the company, generally the oldest man present, fills himself a glass of whisky, which he drinks, after he has turned his face to the suspended sheaf and said: "Here's to the maiden." The company follow his example, each in turn drinking to the "maiden." This I have seen done more than once. Shall I add that I have myself done it? Very similar to this is the custom observed in the neighbourhood of Dantiz, as recorded by Frazer, who follows Mannhardt. He says: "When the winter corn is cut and mostly bound up in sheaves, the portion which still remains to be bound is divided amongst the women binders, each of whom receives a swath of equal length to bind. A crowd of reapers, children, and idlers gathers round to witness the contest, and at the word 'Seize the old man,' the women fall to work, all binding their allotted swaths as hard as they can. The spectators watch them narrowly, and the woman who cannot keep pace with the rest, and consequently binds the last sheaf, has to carry the 'old man' (the last sheaf) to the farm-house and deliver it to the farmer with the words: 'Here I bring you the old man.' At the supper which follows the 'old man' is placed at the table and receives an abundant portion of food, which, as he cannot eat it, falls to the share of the woman who carried him. Afterwards the 'old man' is placed in the yard, and all the people dance round him. Further, the woman who bound the last sheaf goes herself by the name of the 'old man' till the next harvest; and is often mocked with the cry, 'Here comes the old man.'"

In Bavaria each reaper, as they are about to finish, has a patch to cut. They reap as fast as they can, and he who has to cut the last few handfuls "drives out the old man." Near Stettin the woman who binds the last sheaf has "the old man," and bears the nickname for a year. Formerly she was herself dressed up in pease-straw and carried home, when the harvesters danced with her till the straw fell off.

These examples illustrate the contests in reaping and binding, as well as the subsequent treatment of the sheaf and the person cutting it; and when it is remembered that the person who is last at reaping represents the corn spirit, the idea is fully expressed by dressing him in corn straw. That it is the corn spirit that is represented is clearly seen from the customs of parts of Germany, where a man and woman, called the "oats' wife" and the "oats' man" dance at the harvest festival, after which the corn stalks are plucked from their bodies till not a particle is left. In these cases the idea is that the corn spirit—the "old man"—the woman, or maiden, is the last sheaf, and that the spirit lives in the barn during the winter. At sowing time it goes out to the fields again to resume its functions. And, as we saw, in the giving of the maiden to the first mare that foals, in Aberdeenshire, and as is done in parts of the West Highlands, where it is distributed among the cows at Christmas, these functions include reproduction among cattle as well as growth of corn.

This points to our harvest customs as being a

survival from primitive times, and that in one form or another they have passed down from generation to generation, adapting themselves to all conditions of life and of faith. They carry us back to the wild revelry that surrounded the man-god when he gave his people the gifts of harvest. They still have an echo—faint it may be but real—of the days when the chief abdicated for a time that he and his people might do homage to the corn spirit, and to other darker rites when a victim was slain as the personification of that spirit, to ensure a resurrection in spring. Even in Christian times, and before our forefathers had freed themselves from the lingering customs of paganism, they preserved the maiden as an act of faith and religious duty. What is now a pleasant ending to the labours of the season was formerly a serious fact, a rite which, if omitted, might entail the entire subversion of the order of nature for the season. Formerly the god was present among men, and could give or withhold blessings, and on that account his rites could not be neglected with impunity. Man has travelled far in his conceptions of divinity since then, but the facts of the present connect the life and knowledge of modern times with a long-forgotten past, which carries us back to the youth of the world, when man first began to make his way, by slow and painful steps, to an understanding of the facts of the universe around him, and the supernatural which he felt must exist somewhere. The significance of his acts has changed, and the ideas which are associated with them have no resemblance to what an earlier people

conceived, but the acts remain. They are the same substantially the world over. It is impossible they could have been so universally borrowed, and the only conclusion is, that they existed from earliest times.

CHAPTER IX

PROPHECY

THE office of magician is to primitive man what that of prophet is to a more advanced people. He is the teacher of the ignorant; he delivers to men the oracles of the gods; he foretells events, and explains what is mysterious. The term magician, as that is ordinarily understood, does not cover the idea savage man has regarding his religious teachers. His conception is that of one possessed of supernatural knowledge, wisdom, and power; power which he has in virtue of his office, and which he can exercise in the discharge of it. He is in reality what the prophets of Israel were to the Jews; so I adopt the terms prophet and prophecy rather than magician and magic.

Under witchcraft frequent reference was made to magicians and recognised diviners. These magicians, or prophets as we shall call them, are among primitive men a distinct class, who, dating their origin from the very beginnings of society, developed into guilds or colleges with the growth of thought and early human institutions. As man's conceptions of deity and the physical facts around him expanded, the necessity of special insight into the spiritual sphere was felt. The king was no longer the only god; he had ceased to be god at all; his father, and the

fathers of countless thousands, passed in long array before the worshipper's imagination as objects of worship; true divinities, whom he was bound to honour and obey on pain of dire physical calamity. But while under the necessity of doing homage to departed ancestors, he knew nothing of their condition, could hold no converse with them, nor ascertain their wants and wishes. The more he longed for a glimpse beyond the portals of this mortal life, the denser the darkness closed around him. The king, content with temporal power and a more secure tenure of office than in former days, left such matters to those who might find it more easy to quit the upper air, should the gods call. In any case, it was more convenient for him that they should enter the home of the gods, than that he himself should be compelled to change substantial and tangible honours, even if necessarily temporary, for those shadowy if permanent glories of which he knew little and understood less.

The circumstances demanded men of boldness of conception and clearness of vision. The necessities of the case were urgent, and could not be met by half measures or halting compromises. Men must know something of the unseen, and if their just aspirations were to be met, a new departure was the only alternative to the collapse of all institutions and the overthrow of the physical universe. This being the condition of society in those far-away times of transition, there is no doubt but the earlier prophets were simply men who could see farther than their fellows, and who, piecing together the meagre

philosophies of the past, boldly struck out a new system, and appealed to men as the interpreters of all that was essential and permanent in the past. The temporary and passing they abolished, as they understood it, while they retained what was truth and permanent. At first their efforts would be wholly devoted to giving an explanation of the facts of life and natural phenomena as these from time to time presented themselves. An attempt would be made to reconcile man's original conception of deity and providence with the changed conditions and more advanced thought. For a time this would be sufficient, and the religious teachers would flatter themselves, as has so often been done in the history of the church, that they had arrived at a complete and final solution of all questions regarding both gods and men. But this could not be. Fresh complications would arise, and each, as it pressed on men's minds, necessitated fresh explanations. The successive oracles needed to be consistent with fact and with one another, which, as they accumulated, they were not. The prophets themselves needed to be interpreted as well as the facts they sought to explain.

Besides, new claimants would arise, outbidding the old for popular favour and official recognition. The office, at first hereditary, or at least confined to a close guild or college, would become vulgarised as dishonest or ignorant men found their way into office. Apart from this, daring and speculative spirits among the community would not be permanently silenced. Sooner or later their conclusions would reach the multitude, and the new thoughts,

struggling for recognition, would compel the prophets to adjust their system to that which men had discovered independently of their order. Should the oracles delivered by two persons claiming the prophetic gift differ, the bolder or less scrupulous of the two would naturally assert that he had held communication with the gods, and that his oracle must be accepted as final. But this would establish a dangerous precedent, and the next time a difficulty arose his rival would be prepared with a revelation at the initial stage. Here we have two elements which would of necessity lead to a vast extension of the order in point of numbers, and a great widening of the scope of prophecy itself, tending to convert what began as a philosophy into an occult art. This in process of time would lead to a subdivision of function ; one would become the prophet or doctor of war ; another of rain ; a third of witchcraft ; a fourth of lightning. The multiplication of offices and prophets to fill them would be regulated by man's necessities on the one hand, and his ability to support such an army of ghostly councillors on the other ; these being periodically thinned out, when, as in the case of the King of Babylon's vision, it was made abundantly plain that the whole college was a huge imposition and fraud.

If this is a correct or even probable explanation of the origin and development of the office, it would be natural to infer a steady and sustained deterioration or degradation of the order both in character and influence. And this is what we do find. For while among those tribes farthest removed from civilisation