the prophet is sacred, and his every word received as the oracle of heaven, among those who have advanced in their philosophy a chief has been known to sacrifice his whole college in one holocaust. The King of Moreo, referred to in an earlier chapter, is a case in point. Nebuchadnezzar would have been another but for the timely intervention of Daniel; while we have recent examples in Zululand and in the country of Moselekatse of the same thing.

Nor is the explanation offered inconsistent with the history of the Jewish prophetic order as given in the sacred books of the Hebrews themselves. The older prophets are giants, men both before and above their time, and who left the impress of their own character on the life and institutions of their country. The later prophets, like the later judges, mark a fatal deterioration. Whole schools of them fell from their own standard of office, and sought to bear the name of prophet when everything but the name had perished. Those the sacred writers describe uniformly as "false prophets." They were men who sought office not because they had a message for men, but because they could calculate on the ignorance and credulity of the people for gain. To such prophets it is said: "Will ye pollute Me among My people for handfuls of barley and pieces of bread?"* Not content with such imposition as false prophecy, as understood in their own day, they fell back on older superstitions, and appealed to lingering beliefs which had long passed away. They revived the primitive doctrines regarding human souls and the power of divine or sacred

* Ezek. xiii. 19.

persons over these; for it is made clear that, like their ancestors in the primeval jungle, they professed to catch and retain souls. "Woe to the women that sew pillows to all armholes, and make kerchiefs upon the head of every stature to hunt souls. Will ye hunt the souls of My people, and will ye save the souls alive that come unto you?"* Compare this with the following account of a common custom in the South Seas; "Two young wizards were passing a house where a chief lay very sick; they saw a company of gods from the mountains sitting in the doorway. They were handing from one to another the soul of the dying chief. It was wrapped in a leaf, and had been passed from the gods inside the house to those at the doorway. One of the gods handed the soul to one of the wizards, taking him for a god in the dark, for it was night. Then all the gods rose up and went away; but the wizard kept the chief's soul. In the morning some women went with a present of very fine mats to fetch a famous physician. The wizards were sitting on the shore as the women passed, and they said to the women; 'Give us the mats, and we will heal him.' So they went to the chief's house. He was very ill; his jaw hung down and his end seemed very near. But the wizards undid the leaf, and let the soul into him again, and forthwith he brightened up again and lived."†

The false Hebrew prophets thus carry us back to a practice which existed in early days—for wizards could steal as well as restore—when souls were

* Ezek. xiii. † J. G. Frazer, quoting G. Turner: *Samoa.*

hunted and caught; a clear proof that the office had fallen so low that its original conception was lost or forgotten. Of this we shall see farther illustration when considering the duties of prophets among primitive men, and how these were performed at various stages of culture during the world's progress.

Every prophet claims to hold converse with the world of spirits, and to act in discharge of his sacred functions only in obedience to the will of the gods. Does he carry the soul of a sick person back to the invalid's bedside?* It is because the gods reveal to him that the sick is to recover. Does he offer sacrifice for rain? He does it to appease the wrath of the offended ancestors, or because they are hungry and are crying out for food.† When he, by his arts, secures places and persons against the thunderbolt, after being struck by lightning, he assuages the anger of the gods, who have visited their children with affliction because of some neglect of filial duty. Should the prophet be called upon to discover a witch or wizard, he "smells them out"; but it is the gods who reveal to him who they are, a knowledge which they deny to all others.

The subject of prophecy and magic is too wide for full discussion in a single chapter, and can be best illustrated by selecting one or two particulars, as the treatment of the sick and the methods adopted to detect crime. We have already seen the methods by which wizards are detected when considering the subject of witchcraft. Other criminals are

* Gill: *Myths and Songs of the South Pacific.*

† Hon. C Brownlee, MS Notes.

discovered by means of a magic horn.* This may be the horn of a domestic sheep or that of an antelope, and the prophet, by looking into it and examining its contents, can discover a thief or murderer. By the same means he is supposed to know the whereabouts of the stolen property, if not removed beyond the tribal boundaries—a necessary qualification in this branch of the profession. Readers of Highland traditions will recognise in this the well-known "second sight" of Celtic legend. Those possessing this gift could foretell events, especially deaths and calamity, and in doing so used the shoulder-blade of a sheep, through which they looked, and saw the future in panorama before them. I once met, at Paible, North Uist, a man who was said to "see things." The old man, who derived his living, partly at least, from propitiatory gifts, had quite a reputation for prophecy, and if he suggested to any one by a dark hint that he had seen a shroud, that family was plunged into grief, knowing that he referred to one of their number, though no name was mentioned.

The prophet, among savage men, explains the cause of drought and floods, and must devise a remedy for these visitations. Among the Zulu tribes, if the spring rains are late, a black ox is sent to the doctor, who being warned of the approaching visit, sits in his hut covered with a thick layer of mud. If there are no indications of rain, he may direct them to come after the lapse of a few days; but if things are propitious, he at once orders a muster of the tribe. There is much feasting and dancing, mystic ceremonies are performed, sacrifices

* Speke.

are offered, and then the prophet announces that before a given day rain will fall. Should the prediction prove correct, well; if not, the prophet must account for his failure. This he does by charging some one high in authority, as the chief's principal wife, with working against him, and raising a dry wind which drives the clouds away. This she does by exposing her posterior to the skies.

In time of war the prophet has to perform rites to ensure victory. Among the Waganda, when the case is urgent, a child is flayed and placed on the path, and the warriors made to step over it,* or a child and a fowl are placed on a grating over a pot with water in it. Another pot, inverted, is used as a cover, and a fire kindled to heat the water. After a given time the contents are examined, and if found dead the war must be delayed as the omen is against the expedition.†

But the prophet's services are not confined to the living; they extend to the dead. In Akra when a young person dies the body is placed on a bier. This is raised on two men's heads, and carried to a place indicated by the prophet, who accompanies the procession. Arrived at the spot, he takes his stand in front of the corpse. He holds in his hand a magic reed, which he shakes over the body, and at the same time asks the question, "Was your death caused by age and infirmities?" If this is answered in the affirmative by the body impelling the bearers forward, no more is said, and the funeral proceeds; if not, the prophet continues: "Was it caused by your bad actions?" Corpse answers

* Speke. † *Ibid.*

"No" by remaining perfectly still. "By whose witch was it caused, so and so, or so and so?" naming the head men of the district.* When the right name is mentioned the dead impels the bearers forward. It is the duty of the head man indicated, or rather his magicians, to discover the culprit by the approved methods.

The dangers to the dead are not over when the soul has left the body, and the Angoni prophet must see to it that the devil, to use a Highland phrase, is cheated of his own. Did evil spirits know a man's grave in that unhappy land, they would undoubtedly steal his soul to be educated in their own evil college. So every precaution must be taken for the repose of the departed. Till burial the soul of an Angoni hovers near the body, seeking an opportunity to re-enter its former abode. A soul does not at first know death. To it death is sleep. "Death and sleep," said a Kaffir once to me, "are one word." This being the case, a lay figure is made before the funeral. At the hour announced this figure is carried out, followed by a great concourse of people, who weep and wail, mourning for the dead. As soon as the cortége leaves the house drums are beat, horns blown, and guns fired to drive away evil spirits. These, kept back by the noise, hover about the outskirts of the crowd, lured on by the signs of mourning, till the grave is reached. There the figure is buried with all the respect and honour due to the departed, and as the crowd disperse the devils swoop down upon the grave to snatch away the soul, but only to find they have been outwitted and betrayed.

* Winterbotham.

Meantime the corpse has been quietly and expeditiously buried without beat of drum or sound of horn.* By using such precautions the prophets outwit the devil, and do an important service to the dead and the ancestral spirits, who wait the arrival of their brother spirit with much anxiety.

When a Wahunga chief dies, his prime minister is killed and buried with him, to be his councillor in the dangers of the passage. All his wives are also killed except one. For her a pit is dug in the ground, just large enough to hold her. In this she is placed and covered over with earth, a small breathing aperture being left. A spear is passed down this hole, which she holds in her hand; if at the end of the second day she is alive and holds the spear, she is taken out and allowed to live. If her fingers are too nerveless to grasp the spear, no farther ceremony is needed; she is buried already.†

The Congo natives keep the bodies of their chiefs for years, wrapping them in successive layers of cloth till the mass is so heavy as to be hardly portable. The same was done in the case of the queen-mother of Uganda, for whom Mackay made the famous copper coffin, and with whom, within and around her three coffins, £1500 worth of cloth and copper was buried; a fact which proves that the Waganda do not wish royal personages to be restricted in the matter of apparel in ghostland.

When King Eyambo (Congo) died, the prophets ordered thirty of his wives to be burned the first day,‡ and before the funeral rites were over several

* Dr. Elmslie, MS. notes. † J. Thomson, *Through Masai Land.*
‡ Waddell.

hundreds were sent to accompany him. Should he have gone without a respectable following, or with only a few, the spirits would ask, "What poor slave is this who is coming alone?" and on the discovery that it was a king, his people would be visited with every form of calamity for having allowed their monarch to go from them like an unknown waif.

Prophets regulate functions of government, and in some cases determine the succession to the throne. In Uganda three chiefs or councillors, who are magicians or semi-divine, elect the new king from among the late monarch's sons, and generally select a young son—if an infant so much the better—for the regency is theirs, and the younger the king the longer will be their term of office. The elder sons are kept in confinement till the heir is of age, and then burned, except two or three reserved with the view of keeping up the succession should the young king die without issue.* This, though in theory an excellent system to prevent disputes, was apt to lead to awkward consequences for the three who held the regency. A son, when his father fell sick, might retire to another tribe, and, returning suddenly seize supreme power and send the regents to join their late master. This was done by the Batetwa chief Dingiswayo,† who fled to the Cape Colony, to return in a few years to claim his rights with direst results to his rival's patrons.

Prophets experiencing such vengeance now and then, sought to secure their order against untimely accidents by organising guilds or colleges, the

* Wilson. † G. M. Theal, *Boers and Bantu.*

members of which were regarded as sacred in virtue of their office. Under such a system a king might be slain by a rival, but the magicians were sacred, and their divinity would be respected. The rules of their order permitted them to be the supporters of the *de facto* king, apart from oaths of allegiance to one who might be a fugitive. Thus the Bulloms have an institution binding its members to keep the sacred mysteries secret for ever, and to yield prompt and unquestioning obedience to the superior of the order;* rules which raise a doubt as to whether Loyola's conceptions were marked with that degree of originality which is generally attributed to them. New members are admitted after a long novitiate, during which the most severe tests are put upon their loyalty and resolution. Even then they cannot be admitted till friends of theirs, already members, bind themselves by an oath to put the novice to death instanter, should he make known any forbidden secret. The manner of execution is as secret as it is expeditious and effective. There is no escaping the ordeal of the guild. Similar institutions, with local modifications, exist among the Soosoms, Timmanes, Basutos, and many other tribes. Among the Timmanes a woman prophetess is general of the order, and a kind of inquisition or confessional exists among them. To the care of this hag fathers and husbands confide their daughters and wives, and the methods pursued by her and her college is highly characteristic. When a penitent appears she is smeared with white clay, and asked

* Winterbotham.

to confess, on pain of death. If her confession is deemed satisfactory she is dismissed with an admonition, and injunctions to perform certain acts, unless her sin is witchcraft, in which case she is sold into slavery. If any one refuse to confess, nothing more is heard of her. Should the confession be unsatisfactory in itself, a decoction is given to force a fuller statement from the penitent. This, if the confession was not full, causes intolerable pains which can only be relieved by the priestess. If pains follow, she proceeds to discover the concealed crime by means of divination. The penitent is then charged with it, and asked to plead. If she deny the crime, she is sold; if she refuse to plead, she is poisoned.*

These guilds exist wherever religion has developed into a system. The chief priest assumes functions to himself which belong to royalty, and so reduces the kingly office to a shadow. This is the case with the Egbo of Calabar,† the Lubare of Uganda,‡ and the Moro of the Waneka.§ The same abnormal development of the power of the priestly office took place in Europe during the Middle Ages. The temptation and danger of all religious systems is to claim power and authority over men's lives and actions outside its own proper sphere. The result in such cases has always been a degrading of the sacred office, and ultimate disaster to the system itself.

But there is another permanent function of prophecy, important in itself, and universal among savage men, which has been touched upon only

* Winterbotham. † Waddell. ‡ Mackay. § New.

incidentally, and that is foretelling the future. When a tribe goes to war a great many details cannot be arranged by the chief and his councillors; they must be determined by augury. Such details seem to us to be of the very essence of practical affairs, to be decided by generals, but to savage men the case presents itself in an entirely different aspect. The prophet must decide the strength of the expedition, the clans who are to send their contingents, the sacred place where the army is to be charmed, and the route that is to be taken. Nor can a general go into action, even against a handful, should the oracles be unfavourable. In 1879, during a period of disturbance in South Africa, a chief, Umhlonhlo, was marching leisurely across country with his whole army. The day was hot, and not a cloud could be seen. Presently the magicians, ever on the alert for omens, noticed a peculiarly shaped cloud on the horizon. It rose rapidly in one mass, and was observed "to roll upon itself." Its progress was intently watched till it reached the zenith and passed over the sun. This was an evil omen. The spirits were offended, and had passed in shadow over the chief and his army. Their backs were turned upon their children. There was, however, no immediate danger, for their scouts had reported that no soldiers were within many miles of their line of march, and they could retire to some sacred spot to have their warriors re-charmed. While they were discussing which place to resort to, the van of a small column of cavalry appeared unexpectedly over a rising ground. Dismay was

written on every countenance; black fear was in every heart. The war minister, one of the bravest of men, urged the troops to form into order of battle. No one answered his summons. A fatal paralysis had crept over chief and people. He did his best to organise an orderly retreat, but in vain; not a blow was struck; every man took to his heels, and the army never reassembled.

On another occasion a chief, Oba, led an army against some people of the Fingoe tribe. He knew their place of encampment, and sent a trusted spy to find out all he could and report. This man crept up close to their camp fires, and there saw a diviner pronouncing an incantation against Oba and his army. This was reported to the chief who paid no regard to it. But on the following morning two ospreys flew over the army uttering piercing cries. This the prophets declared to be an evil omen which boded defeat, but Oba was not to be frightened by Fingoe curses or the screams of birds, and advanced boldly. From the crest of a hill they saw the Fingoe camp, and a number of cattle grazing between. Six men tended the herd, and these advanced shouting "Basolieve," meaning "they are cursed." Qwarana was ordered to advance, which he did at the head of his men. When quite near the Fingoes fired a volley, shooting Qwarana through the body. This was enough; the army turned and fled. Oba did his best to stay the panic; he begged his soldiers to act like men, he called them cowards and women. It was in vain. They had been warned by the ospreys, and now a

body of nearly two thousand warriors fled in panic before six cowherds.

But the future cannot be left to such accidents as a midday shadow, or the flight of eagles. Methods that can be resorted to at any time must be found. These differ among most tribes, but the following may be taken as illustrative. The Bongo consult the oracle thus :—A stool of a particular wood is made, the surface of which is rubbed perfectly smooth, a block of the same wood is then prepared to lie flat on the stool. When a response is wanted a few drops of water are placed between the stool and the block, the latter is then moved backwards and forwards. If it moves easily, and begins to glide without friction, the oracle is favourable ; if not, the undertaking proposed cannot prosper. Or an oily fluid from the bengeye-tree is given to a hen. If the bird dies there will be misfortune ; if not, success.* Another method, which the same observer records, is to dip a cock again and again in water till it is senseless. It is then left in the sun, and should it revive the augury is favourable. By such means men determine war and peace, as well as the guilt or innocence of accused persons.

The Bullom tribes determine the future by "casting the sand."† This may be to discover if a sick person is to recover or not. The diviner takes a goatskin on which he carefully spreads a layer of fine dry sand ; he then shuts his eyes, and with the three first fingers of his right hand makes lines and dots in the sand. According to the position of these, the

* Schweinfurth. † Winterbotham.

patient will live or die. The same result may be obtained by taking a number of palm nuts, and arranging them in groups with the eyes closed. Gallas divine from the appearance of the entrails of slaughtered animals,* while almost every action a Basuto or Baralong performs is determined by the fall of dice. So it happens, that when a man goes to commit a crime, he lays aside his fetish, and does not consult the oracle, as he could not in that case obtain a favourable response. He covers his god with a cloth, that he may not know what the worshipper is doing.† The Wayao determine the future by a flour cone. When a man has determined on an undertaking, as a journey, his magician takes a quantity of flour, and lets it fall in a steady stream at the head of his bed. If it forms a perfect cone as it falls, the omen is good; if not, that is an end of the matter by the flour-cone test. Should the cone be perfect, it is covered by an inverted pot and left for the night. In the morning, when the pot is removed, the cone is examined, and if found perfect, there is nothing further needed beyond offering the customary sacrifice. But if there has been a falling down of the flour, even a small slip, it is a sign not to be disregarded. An equally effective method is to pour out beer on the ground, which if it sinks at one spot is a good omen, but if it runs along the ground, bad.‡ Three bits of stick may be laid on the ground, two parallel and one across. If found, after an interval of some hours, in position as left, the oracle has granted the worshipper's prayer.

* Krapf. † Tucker. ‡ Duff Macdonald.

When prophecy descended to such trivialities as those represented by the auguries and observances referred to, it was doomed as a system. While it contented itself with exposition, purgation of demons, expanding philosophic conceptions and the enunciation of principles in an abstruse form, it commanded men's respect, and the prophet was regarded as a divinely commissioned messenger. But when it descended to the petty details of village life, it could not escape the fate of any great institution which is hopelessly vulgarised. When the prophet became little better than the court fool he could only receive a fool's treatment. When a man who hurt his toe against a stump could command the services of the expounders of the supernatural to explain the fact, it was not surprising that other men, despising at once tree stumps and prophets, should introduce a new and more vigorous, if less reverent, form of government.

As men's conception of divinity expanded from the crude unformed idea of a divine king to local deities, reaching gradually towards one supreme god, the world needed a philosophy to correspond with the new-born faith. This, prophecy did not as a system supply. Instead of advancing with the growth of thought to a higher and truer conception of life, it pursued a course which could only lead to deterioration and final extinction. But though prophecy as a system became moribund, and so continues among savage men, it was from it the new philosophy took its rise. This philosophy springing out of what was once a system in advance of current

thought, led to the development of the great religious systems which at different periods became world wide. While the old-world prophet "cast the sand," or fumbled among the entrails of an expiring cock, there were men among his disciples who conceived bolder notions, and only waited for a favourable opportunity to give practical effect to their thoughts. They had to wait many weary years, generations, centuries, but their opportunity came at last. Such men in the early days could do little beyond raising a protest against the most glaring abuses among their own order and in society. Even in this they would meet with treatment similar to that experienced by the Hebrew prophet Jeremiah, and many of them would share the fate of all bold reformers—the gallows or the fire. One after another would quietly disappear as unworthy of their office and subverters of the faith of men. But the ashes of such men do more to fertilise the soil of human thought than their wisdom while they live. Like the dragon's teeth, they produce a fresh and ever-increasing number of souls with like thoughts and aspirations. The words of such men are treasured by a few. They are pondered, digested, made fruitful of new thoughts. As the years pass, and the angry passions raised by the heretic's teaching die away, men first view him as one who meant well, next as a true prophet, and finally as a sacred being whose memory is cherished as a divine heritage. Posterity places him among the gods. He was incarnate.

No sooner is the popular mind led to regard such

men as saints and martyrs, than a web of romance is woven round their lives, and the philosophy they taught becomes a new religion. Those of their successors who cherish their memories and keep their teaching alive, seize the opportunity, and boldly claim divine sanction for their doctrine. This is one way. There is another. All such reformers do not share the martyr's fate. A powerful king, weary of the inanities taught and practised by his college of magicians; weary too of the endless sacrifices and the ever-deepening stream of human blood; blood it may be, as in the case of a king of Ashantee, in which to float the royal canoe,* throws the protection of his strong arm over the reformer, as the king of Babylon did to Daniel, and so encourages the movement. Or, it may be, the reformer, finding the current too strong, retires to a lonely place where he lives a life of meditation and privation. Such a man, especially after the invention of writing, formulates doctrines into aphorisms. These, brief, wise, practical, as they must be in his circumstances, he communicates to the few faithful disciples admitted to his sanctuary and confidence. They carry them from hamlet to hamlet, thence from house to house, where they pass into the current language of the people. These, when received with favour, the popular imagination connect with a direct revelation from the gods; ultimately it deifies the man who utters them.

Such a life as this would lead a man to introspection and a comparison between himself, with his

* Kühne.

half-uttered wisdom, and the folly of popular beliefs. There was nothing more natural than for him to conclude that he was god-possessed, and that his words and actions were those of the god. When this was asserted and boldly proclaimed, men in a primitive age, when the old order and the worship of ancestral spirits was discredited, and the new still unsettled and fluctuating, would readily seize upon the idea as giving a clue to the solution of the perplexities with which they were surrounded. The very multiplicity of ancestral gods complicated the situation. The presence of demons, as powerful and more subtle than the gods themselves, made matters worse. The great, or one god, was too shadowy and remote to be approached, and his existence, if he did exist, gave no relief to the pious. Thus the incarnation of divinity, in the person of a prophet, would be hailed as giving a hope that the mysteries of the spirit world would at length be solved.

But we are now approaching a stage of development which carries us beyond the bounds of our inquiry. In Africa there has been no great incarnation of deity as in Brahmanism and in Buddhism. An examination of these, however brief, would lead to the discussion of Vedic religion, which is foreign to my present purpose. The fact to be noted is, that earlier forms led to the incarnation of the founders of the respective systems, and that myth surrounded them with a halo which makes it impossible to distinguish the true from the false, so as to get at the man and the philosophy he taught in its simplicity

and truth. For it is the truth which those systems contained that has given them vitality to exist through so many thousands of years.

Thus, from the rude conception of a divine king who ruled nature, thought advanced to a doctrine of souls, thence to separate and personal divinities, slowly gravitating towards the idea of one supreme god, unknown and unknowable. Pursuing its inquiries, never resting for a moment, the human mind reached the conception of the one god becoming incarnate in time. And here it is curious to note, that those in whom deity became incarnate, so far as we can discover, put forward comparatively modest claims, and that these were expanded by their disciples into a cumbrous mass of doctrinal teaching which, in some cases, fell to pieces by the very weight of its ritual and ordinances. Men could not bear the burden.

In Africa, always excepting ancient Egypt and the countries bordering upon it, there is nothing which corresponds with the Asiatic development of religion. The art of writing being unknown would, apart from other causes, have made that impossible. But our inquiries have, so far, tended in the direction of a development not unlike that through which the great systems of the east must have passed. Tradition does not preserve the words of wise men, as is done where there is a literature. The words may be said to remain, or a faint echo of them, but tradition gives them a local setting and myth adapts them to local circumstances. Still, the position occupied by the God of the Wayao, as the God of the original

inhabitants, and his reputation as a beneficent and powerful deity, points to a deification of a prophet whose soul was developed into a principal god. Mlungu is doubtless such another. A great man whose memory has waxed dim, and whose words cannot be recalled as those of Brahma may. Myth itself has almost died away in the course of ages, yet Mlungu lives as a faded memory though the traditions of his life have perished.

The sketch attempted of the growth and decay of the prophetic order is consistent with what we are familiar with. In a highly developed state of society the prophetic function ceases to be exercised as we meet with it in primitive times. But it is still present. The wise men of a nation are its prophets. Its poets, philosophers, preachers, reformers, scientists, and discoverers, are as truly the guides of men's thoughts and actions as were the magicians of Ancient Egypt or Chaldea. They are the descendants of humble ancestors who determined the fate of individuals and nations by casting the sand, or by the spots found on the entrails of a decapitated cock. Men may imagine themselves independent of all external circumstances, but we are the creatures of our surroundings as were those who sacrificed their god that his spirit might enter his successor. We may make it our boast that we have freed ourselves from the thraldom of superstition, but there are still curious survivals among us. And of these, one of the most remarkable is the suspicion with which religious teachers are regarded in popular imagination.

There is a deeply rooted prejudice against religious teachers among the peasantry of Europe, and not unfrequently those who are most devout in the discharge of their own religious duties, have the most pronounced superstitions regarding clergymen. Fishermen will not go to sea with a minister on board, as in that case no success would attend their labours; they will not even have one enter their boats, if possible, as that is apt to take the boat's luck away. Skippers fear to have them as passengers, and voyagers expect contrary winds if a priest should happen to be among their fellow voyagers. I remember one, Rob MacLauchlin, the owner of a smack that plied between Oban and Morven, having on one occasion a very boisterous passage, to the intense alarm of his passengers. On his arrival one of the villagers remarked on the state of the weather and how suddenly the storm had sprung up. Rob, who had had a sail carried away and was in no good humour, replied, garnishing his sentences with expletives which I shall omit, "How could we escape wind with three ministers on board." These worthies were on their way to a local meeting of Presbytery. One of them, ignorant of seamen and their ways, offered a remonstrance, and tried to enlighten the skipper, but had to beat a hasty retreat. Rob knew all about it by long experience, and all his predecessors, from the days of Jonah at least, had been conversant of the fact. That was final and admitted of no appeal, and the villagers to a man sympathised with the skipper who was compelled to carry such cargo.

Nor is this fear confined to traditions of the sea. The minister is feared because he can bless or ban, and village children regard him as a being to be avoided when that is possible. When at play, if he happens to pass, there is a hurried and fearful whisper of "There's the minister," and play ceases till he is well out of reach. If they must present themselves before this august presence, they cease to be children as by instinct, and a word or movement becoming the age of five or six meets with the awful maternal reproof, "Do ye no ken that's the minister?" Clergymen themselves are, perhaps, largely to blame. The Church has played so many parts on the stage of European politics and social life that much of the present suspicion may be owing to her arrogance and avarice. But this is not all. Like our harvest customs, this superstitious reverence and fear, is doubtless a survival from primitive times, when the magician was a being to be at once feared and honoured. The primitive man who offended one of those powerful beings who directed all his life's actions, might expect to be the next victim when a case of witchcraft had to be disposed of, or, if no case cropped up the gods might require his presence among them, and so demand him as a sacrifice. And so it is that in spite of respectability, unblemished reputation, great services to mankind, honour, place and influence, religious teachers have never been able to free themselves from the suspicion and fear with which their humble ancestors, the priests of the jungle, were regarded in popular imagination.

This is perhaps an extreme instance of the persistency of early beliefs, but it goes to show how slowly the human mind parts with ideas once universal, and the vast intervals that must elapse before a complete revolution in thought is possible under the most favourable circumstances. There could be no condition more likely to obliterate the past than that created by Christianity, and yet these customs, myths, and superstitious fears have lived through millenniums of literature and careful oral teaching. The process has been slow, and is not yet completed. And what has taken Europe from the dawn of history to accomplish, with the aid of literature, philosophy and Christianity, could not be done by the African groping his way through oral tradition and universal usage through many thousands of years. The customs which we study to-day, and which at first sight appear to be local or tribal, carry us back in their original form to a period long anterior to the first dawn of traditional history in the East. They bring us into contact with the condition of the world before the families of men began to scatter themselves hither and thither over the face of the earth. They are our only record of the condition of the world when it was young, and of man in his first struggles with the problems with which he found himself surrounded as he began to look out upon the works of nature as these could be seen in his immediate locality.

CHAPTER X

SOCIAL USAGES

It may at first appear as if there were no connection between the religion of primitive peoples and their social usages. The latter, according to European ideas, have so little of the nature of religious rites that they are seldom associated with piety and devotion to the gods. Some men spend their lives among savages and never look below the surface, nor do they suspect that those whom they daily meet have any forms of religious observance. I was once told by a missionary of twenty years' standing in Africa that certain ceremonial acts performed by natives had no religious significance. In fact, he went so far as to say, "These people have no religion; they live a purely animal existence; whatever they do is just custom." How the worthy man, for he was a truly pious soul, could ever get into sympathy with them, or make any impression upon their minds, I have often wondered. I have long ceased to wonder how a man of such unblemished life and absolute devotion to duty, but so totally blind to the facts of savage life, should have to confess with a sigh and the shadow of a life's sorrow, that "the people about here are very hardened; few of them have come under the influence of the Gospel. It is

very sad, and I at times doubt if I should be here, but I try to labour on in faith." Being at the time a novice in Africa, I accepted both statements without question. Since then I have learned a good deal, and among other things, that my aged friend's faith must have often been sorely tried as he endeavoured to do his duty in a sphere that never could have been congenial, but having made the mistake of becoming a missionary, he heroically stuck to the guns he had not learned the art of using. To gain any influence over savages one must first of all master their system of thought, and learn how to connect the most trivial acts with their philosophy, and such conceptions as they have of the supernatural. It is impossible to know what an act of devotion is till one has learned something of social usage and myth. To illustrate.

When a Dongolowa belle is to be married the eligible young men assemble, each armed with a kurbach or slave-whip. The elders of the tribe and a number of women gather as spectators and judges of the contest that is to follow. The young men, stripped stark naked, begin a mutual process of flogging, and he who stands this ordeal best is the successful wooer.* No other consideration or feeling is allowed to interfere with custom, as that would be displeasing to the gods. Should a woman marry without such a contest, her prospects would be poor indeed, having despised an ordinance of heaven. At times there is a tie between two young men in the flogging match, and in that case the girl has to

* Felkin.

decide the matter between them. This she does, not by choosing one, for that would be to despise another equally worthy suitor whose hide in the end might prove the toughest. The matter must be decided in a more excellent way. It is done thus :— The coy maiden straps a knife to each of her arms, the blades projecting an inch or two below her elbows. She then sits down on a log, a suitor on either side sitting close beside her. At a given signal she raises her arms from the elbows, and leaning slowly forward rests her weight upon the young men's thighs, into which she steadily presses the knife blades. He who does not wince, or winces least under the ordeal, wins the bride and carries her off triumphant.

In Unyoro, the relatives of the late king fight for the throne. Here, too, it is a case of the toughest skin, but it is no vulgar contest, but a sacred function conformable to the will of the gods who delight in manly vigour. A Mitto chief warns those entering his country of war being made upon them, should they persist, by displaying on a tree near the path, an ear of corn, a feather and an arrow.* He who touches corn or cock will receive an arrow. In that country, too, a man wishing to marry applies to his chief for a wife. If thought worthy one is bestowed upon him, as all persons and property within the territory belong to the king. Both Mitto and Niam-Niam bury their dead, with strict regard to the points of the compass ; men being buried with the face towards the east ; women looking to the west.†

* Schweinfurth. † *Ibid.*

This is conformable to the rule that women must eat alone, and not come near men at meals, unless it be to attend upon them. When a Waneka arrives at the age of puberty, he is smeared with white clay and decorated, after which he betakes himself to the woods, either alone or in company with others of his own age. There they must remain till they meet and kill a man, after which they wash off their clay and return home to be feasted and honoured.* They are now men, not boys. A Waneka prophetess begins operations at midnight by frantic screams. When all are astir she declares, "Roma, *i.e.*, spirit or the god, is here, and demands the sacrifice of a black ox." This is at once provided, and men heave a sigh of relief to find it is not a more costly victim.

The men of Jagga spit on a departing guest as an act of courtesy, and to bid him God speed. By so doing, they bestow on him their highest mark of honour, for it is a religious act. A Wakamba must carry away his bride by strategy, and for this purpose may have to lie in wait for months. Before he begins his vigil he pays the parents the dower. Hottentots preserve a certain membrane at birth, a bit of which is worn through life. Its loss would entail evil here and hereafter.† Common people in Dahomey may not grow grain except for domestic purposes, as all property belongs to the king. So, too, the persons of his subjects. At certain annual festivals he holds a sale of marriageable young women.‡ Court favourites receive wives free, but all others pay. Unlawful wounding is an injury done

* Krapf. † Moody. ‡ Rowley.

to the king's person in that of his subject. All things merge in him as the head of the State and the object of reverence. To his people he is divine.

The house of the Bodio or high priest of the Kroomen is a sanctuary to which criminals may flee for refuge. From it they cannot be removed except by his orders, and, as he gives no reason for his decision, he shelters a large number of ruffians, who, more secure under his protection than ever Jew was in a city of refuge, live and enjoy themselves, doing all the dirty work and throat-cutting for the Bodio in their nightly prowlings. A Manganga magician, or even wizard, can soar aloft on the wings of the wind like a Highland beldam on her broomstick. The prophet among the same people can discover a criminal in the following manner. He calls a muster of the tribe, and then taking a bundle of reeds in his hand rushes round the circle of the assembled tribesmen. If the criminal is among them, one of the reeds flies out of his hand as he approaches him. This reed he picks up, as the magic reed, and lays the bundle aside. He then presses it against the man indicated, when, if he is guilty, the rod revolves in his hand.* When an earthquake occurred at Accra, the king issued a proclamation that his father's spirit was giving the earth a shake, because the children were not obeying the customs, and giving due reverence to the reigning monarch. After this, he called for three of his principal chiefs, gave each a drink of rum, delivered to them a message for his father to the effect that his wishes would be attended

* Elmslie, Krapf, Perry.

to, and then had them beheaded. Thirty-four others were enclosed in jar-like baskets, their heads projecting from the neck. These were brought in one by one and promptly beheaded, to go as an escort with the chiefs who carried the king's dutiful message. He then retired to his gardens, satisfied he had done an act of most reverent devotion. His conduct will not seem so strange and horrible as at first sight appears, when it is borne in mind that as late as 1230 human sacrifices were offered in Prussia in honour of the goddess of corn and fruits.*

When old King Chop of Calabar drank, a chief held his great toe. The chief of Old Town kept his soul in a sacred grove near a spring of water. Some Europeans, in frolic or ignorance, cut down part of the grove, to the intense indignation of the spirit, who, according to the king, would visit them with all manner of evil.† A successor is not chosen till the king is buried and all the ceremonies completed. These are elaborate and protracted. What becomes of the soul in the grove I do not know; probably it enters the new king, who in turn deposits it in the wood for safe keeping. For, after all, this is the great object of savage man in guarding divinity, and if a perfectly safe place could be found for the purpose of depositing the soul there, he would be supremely happy. But as love laughs at locksmiths, so do wizards at man's arts in concealing the whereabouts of souls. To enter the council of government among the Waneka, the candidate is placed in an enclosure where he lies down as if stone dead. His head is

* Dr. Maclear. † New.

then covered with a thick layer of mud. A mixture of clay and hair is spread over his face. Horns are mounted over his eyes, and his body decked with feathers. He is then led to the edge of the forest, where he wanders till he has killed a man, after which he returns and has a ring of rhinoceros hide placed upon his arm as a badge of office and to indicate that he is now a sacred person.* Some tribes regard twins as the greatest good luck, others as monsters to be killed—the harbingers of calamity. Most, if not all Africans have some sacred animal which they do not kill, and with which their lives are in some way bound up. This is in reality fetish, totem or clan badge, according to the stage of civilization at which a people has arrived. Among the Majame strangers are received in the following manner:—A goat is brought forward by the tribal priest, which the chief takes by the horns and spits on its forehead, saying, "As this stranger has come into our land, and says he is our friend; if he lies may he perish, he and all his caravan." The stranger then takes the goat, and doing as the chief has done, says, "If I practise any evil against Maganine, him or his people, his cattle or his lands, may I utterly perish, and this caravan." † The goat's head is then cut off "that blood and saliva may mingle." The skin of its forehead is divided into two parts and one given to each of the parties to the contract. A small slit is made in this and worn as a ring on the middle finger in token of brotherhood. The Wagorengo of the same region practise blood brotherhood to

* New. † Myer.

cement friendship.* The people of Kiwendo never sacrifice a goat, but at their great religious meetings they turn one adrift to wander where it will. The animal has a collar of cowries tied round its neck, by which it is distinguished from a strayed animal.† This is the only approach to the idea of a scapegoat, as understood by the Jews, I know of in Africa. The goat is devoted to Lubare. Of old, when a Scottish king gave an unjust judgment his neck took a twist, and so remained till justice was done. African chiefs have boils‡ in such a case as this.

These customs I have set down at random, selecting them from the observances of peoples widely apart. My object is not to trace the development of any idea, but to show that all these are in the savage mind associated with religion and the worship of the gods. This will be better understood if we now consider acts of devotion, and the object aimed at by the performance of these acts.

* Ashe † *Ibid.* ‡ Grant Stewart.

CHAPTER XI

ACTS OF DEVOTION—MYTHS

To the savage who is constantly surrounded with spiritual beings, and whose life is dependent on securing their continued favour, no actions can be performed without a religious significance. He has not arrived at the idea of natural law apart from agents which regulate phenomena. To these agents he owes allegiance, because of the benefits he receives at their hands, and according to his conceptions of their wants and wishes, their tastes and fancies, will his life and actions be ordered. At first sight it would appear as if the whole business of religion were left to its avowed professors, for these are in evidence in connection with every event which happens. But there could be no greater error than to conclude that the magician's vocation represents the domestic religious life of the people. We may take it as a general rule that the magician's services are required only in connection with what is unusual in village life, as births, marriages, deaths, accidents, evil omens or any circumstance the meaning of which may be doubtful. The religion of ordinary life, of eating and drinking, sleeping and walking, working and talking is conducted by each individual according to the approved method of the tribe. In

the details of this religion he has been instructed from childhood. His intellectual faculties lie dormant, but the ritual of life has been burned into his very soul and become part of his being. An African is no more likely to forget the minutest detail of private devotion than a European is to forget to undress when he retires to rest. The chief, as in the case of the Barotsi, may be a demi-god,* and his people flock to his village for protection during a thunderstorm, but it would be an error to suppose the Barotsi devoid of a religion and ritual, because of this simple childish trust in the divinity of the chief. They have a peculiar method of presenting their offerings. A sacred horn is stuck into the ground, and when they sacrifice they pour the blood of the victim over the horn. It is also customary to tie pieces of cloth devoted to the gods round it. The horn is generally placed in a sacred grove, and is really an altar to which the worshipper repairs to do his private devotions.†

There seems but little religion in a number of love-sick swains battering one another with slave whips, nor in a maiden running knife-blades into their thighs, but in a land where the bull is the emblem of universal life the gods rejoice to see a display of vigour and virile power. That and heroic endurance are the cardinal virtues. A free fight with bare sabres for a crown is not consistent with our ideas of succession, and the suggestion of weapons of war banishes all thoughts of devotion from our minds. But he who is to sit upon the

* Arnot, *Garanganze.* † *Ibid.*

throne favoured by the gods must, as an act he owes to them, win his position by giving evidence of the physique as well as mental vigour necessary for upholding the dignity of the tribe. A chief hanging on to the toe of old King Chop as he regaled himself with trade rum is not suggestive of altars and incense, but then King Chop himself was divine and represented the god-life to his people. To hold his toe was a sacred office, an act of dutiful obedience to the gods. Who could tell but, as he poured the "devil water" down his throat, the god spirit might escape by his toes if these were not held by a sacred person? The Waneka who wandered in woods with murderous intent during his novitiate believed himself to be doing a religious duty of the most sacred nature, and that without this preliminary the gods would never give him wisdom in council nor strategy in war. By obedience he was qualifying himself to advise regarding the affairs of gods and men, so different are savage man's conceptions of qualification for office from ours.

The King of Dahomey while doing homage to the gods would to us appear to be engaged in a profitable commercial transaction, and but for his being himself divine there would be a strong suspicion that considerations of profit influenced him. All the women of the country are his by divine right. It is an act of divine favour to bestow a wife on a subject, and when he does bestow one he expects handsome black mail. It is he who gives to men all they possess. They must toil for the corn which

the king gives through regulating the course of nature, and if they must pay by toil for the lower gifts, it would be impiety not to labour also for the higher—that is, for their wives. The king has given his subjects fecundity; they in return must reward him for the blessing, else the younger generation of women will be barren.

Thus we see that many acts, which according to Western ideas are far removed from the region of devotion and worship, are in reality parts of a life every act, word, and movement of which has a significance in a religious sense. I have seen natives of Africa perform acts of devotion before the eyes of men who declared that they had no idea of worship nor of gods. When a native glances at the sun or moon, he prays; when he drops a small particle of food on the ground before he begins to eat, he offers an oblation; if he throws a tuft of grass, a bit of stick, or a stone, out of his hut door in the morning before he emerges himself, he has said matins. Nor does he neglect to sing vespers when he turns his face to the bright constellations overhead before rolling himself up in his skin blanket for the night. These are all acts of devotion, and represent forms of worship common among a large proportion of primitive men. They are performed by each individual on his own account, apart from the more formal religious rites which are the proper functions of the magician. And this is consistent with what we know of the growth of religious ritual among those nations where the evolution of religion can be best studied. The earliest forms of devotion of

which we have an account among the Jews were very simple and acts of sacrifice were exceptional and rare. With the development of the religious life of the people different orders sprung up, and these confined themselves to particular functions. But though we know but little of domestic and individual religion among the mass of the people, such indications as we have go to show that each man did perform acts of devotion however simple these might be.

We have seen that the king of Old Town kept his soul in a sacred grove, and that this was an act of devotion. It, however, gives the clue to a class of myths which are common from the Ganges to the Atlantic, and that is the soul dwelling apart from the body. It is difficult to classify the legends and folk-lore tales in which these myths are met with. They partake of magic certainly; but are more of the nature of devotion, and the caring for the soul's welfare by placing it in such safe keeping as to defy the enemies of mankind to obtain access to it.

In a former chapter reference was made to the soul's absence during sleep or fainting. Some of the dangers of soul-snatching by ghosts, wizards, and evil spirits have also been noticed. The dangers of the soul during its temporary absence were considerable. While resident in a man's body it was comparatively safe; but even then there were dangers, and dangers of such nature as to be difficult to guard against. While a man remained in sound vigorous health his soul was safe, but should he be taken ill his soul was then in danger, for it could

be reached and injured, perhaps stolen, through his body, as in the case of the soul which the wizard got as it was handed about among the gods at the sick man's door. This being an admitted and recognised fact, it would be of the utmost importance for a man to have a place of safe keeping where he could deposit his soul in time of danger, and if this place were very secure, it would be a manifest advantage to have his soul kept there permanently. This would make a man independent of wizards on the one hand and of magicians on the other. The former could no longer hurt him; the latter he could dispense with when freed from the fear of witchcraft. Such a man could boldly strike out a new course, and become a reformer by a defiance of the powers of evil, and a total neglect of the gods. Hence it is that such men, in popular imagination, are regarded as giants, monsters of impiety, cruel and cunning, regardless of all interests except their own, and oppressing all who come into their power. Evidence of this is found in the folk-lore tales taken from the traditions of peoples living widely apart, and the number and variety of such tales is proof that, at one time, this was a sober belief widely diffused throughout the world, and is a faithful reflection of the facts of life, in relation to the unseen, as these appeared to primitive man. These tales would in the first instance be preserved and recited as a true statement of the facts, and, handed down through millenniums of years, told at one time to warn the impious, at another as nursery rhymes, or by the fitful light of a blazing log on a winter's

night, to amuse the curious, they would preserve much of their original form, though places and circumstances would change.

Such was the story of "Headless Hugh," of my own nursery days. I still, when the winds howl about the gables and among the trees, find my mind running back to the time when Headless Hugh was a real living man, who on stormy nights rode along the sea shore "between wave and sand," and watched whether little boys went to sleep quietly. If they did not he took them away on "the grey filly that never had a bridle." It must be nearly thirty years since I heard old Betty Miles tell the story. I could repeat it word for word now, so persistent are the impressions of childhood, especially when accompanied by a wholesome state of terror.

Hugh was a prince of Lochlin, and was long held captive by a giant who lived in a cave overlooking the Sound of Mull, and known by his name to this day. For many years Prince Hugh lived in the dismal recess of this grotto. One night there was a violent altercation between the giant and his wife, and Hugh who lay very still listening, knowing that he would be killed and eaten if it was known that he overheard their conversation, discovered that the giant's soul was in a great pearl—literally precious gem—which he always wore on his forehead. The prince watched his opportunity, seized the pearl, and having no means of escape or concealment, hastily swallowed the gem. Like the lightning from the clouds, the giant's sword flashed from its scabbard and flew between Hugh's head and his body to

intercept the gem before it could be swallowed. It was too late, and the giant fell down, sword in hand, and expired without a gasp. Hugh had lost his head, but having the giant's soul in his body, saved his life and gained his liberty. He took the giant's sword, slew his wife, and then with the trusty weapon buckled to his side he mounted "the grey filly that never had a bridle, and swifter than the east wind," and made his way home unconscious of the loss of his head. His friends did not recognise him, declared he was a ghost, and refused to admit him to the palace, and so "he wanders in shades of darkness for ever, riding the grey filly faster than the east wind." On stormy nights he is seen riding along the shore "between waves and sand." He has taken many boys who would not go quietly to bed, and none of them have ever returned. This is the outline of a story I often heard from an old beldam who made my young life a long-continued torment while she had the opportunity of doing it.

Compared with it, the following Hindoo tale betrays a common origin in the days when such facts were soberly believed. The story is of a giant or magician who had held a beautiful queen captive for twelve years. At last the queen's brother came to visit her, and they both spoke the magician fair. He told them, in a moment of confidence, that he kept his soul thousands of miles away in a desolate country covered with jungle. In this jungle there was a circle of palm trees; within the circle six water tanks, piled one above another; under the lowest a birdcage with a small green parrot in it.

The parrot was his soul, or rather he kept his soul in the parrot. The queen's brother hearing this sought out the jungle, and at last found the cage which he brought to the magician's palace. When the magician saw it, he cried, "Give me my parrot." The boy tore off a wing; the magician lost an arm. In this way he was torn limb from limb, and, finally, when the parrot's neck was wrung he fell down dead, his neck broken.* In another Hindoo story the soul is in a necklet. In a well-known Highland story the giant says: "There is a great flagstone under the threshold; under the flagstone is a wether; in the wether's belly is a duck; in the duck's crop an egg, and that egg contains my soul."† The egg, as usual, is found and crushed and the captive is set free. The giant dies, of course.

The same form of superstition and myth is common to Teutons, Norse, Slavonians, Ancient Greeks, and Jews. The history of Samson,‡ as recorded in the Book of Judges, is a case in point. He remained invulnerable till, through the wiles of his wife, he was shorn of his locks, and then his strength departed. The variations in this case from the Hindoo and Celtic tales is nothing more than might be expected, when the national characteristics of the Jews and their peculiar history is taken into account. This form of myth is as wide as humanity. I was on one occasion sitting in a Hlubi chief's house waiting for the appearance of the great man, who was doing his toilet, to hold a palaver. Several of his chiefs and

* Mary Frere, *Old Deccan Days.* † Campbell. ‡ Judges.

councillors were present, and entered freely into conversation with my attendants. I did not pay any particular attention to what passed till one of my own people said, in English, "Ntame has his soul in these horns," at the same time pointing to a pair of magnificent ox-horns placed in the roof by the lightning doctor to protect the house and its inmates from the thunderbolt. The horns were those of an animal offered in sacrifice and were sacred. I took the statement at the time to mean that to hold a palaver with Ntame was equivalent to holding converse with an ox, and made no farther inquiries. Whether my factotum spoke a parable, or stated a sober fact gathered from the councillors present, I cannot say. He addressed me in English, which he spoke fluently, and as no one else present understood a word of what he said I took his statement to be a hint to be careful what I said, and how I received our host's promises and professions of friendship. I have had no opportunity of verifying the statement, but the idea is in no way foreign to South African thought. A man's soul there may dwell in the roof of his house,* in a tree, by a spring of water, or on some mountain scaur.

This form of superstition leads by an easy transition to totemism, and it is on this account I regard it as more religion than magic or witchcraft. The object where the soul dwells is sacred, and it gets its sanctity because it is the home of the soul. This may be a bird, as the tufted crane among Kaffirs; an animal, as the crocodile, among Bechuanas; an insect,

* J. Sutton, MS. notes.

as among the Hottentots, who regard the *mantis religiosa* as a divinity. All these objects are sacred because either a person's life is bound up with a particular specimen, or the tribal life with a class. The horns of a lightning sacrifice are sacred, and must not be touched except by the doctor, but this does not extend beyond the family in whose interests the sacrifice was offered, while animals that are sacred to the tribe are sacred to each individual member of it. To shoot a crane would be a more heinous offence than to shoot a fox before the hounds. Again, tribes are named after animals or objects, as the elephant people, the swimmers, men of the wood, and such other names or titles descriptive of supposed qualities as tradition has preserved.

In Sutherlandshire at the present day there is a sept of Mackays known as "the descendants of the seal." These claim as their ancestor a laird of Borgie, who married a mermaid, and as the legend has never been in print, I give it here as recently told me by one well versed in north-country mythology.* It is as follows :—The laird was in the habit of going down to the sea rocks under his castle to bathe and drink salt water. One day he saw a mermaid close in shore, combing her hair and swimming about as if anxious to land. After watching her for a time, he noticed her cowl on the rocks beside him, and knowing she could not go to sea without it he carried it up to the castle, hoping she would follow him. This she did; but he refused

* Rev. A. Mackay.

to give up the cowl and detained the maid herself, whom he made his wife. To this she consented with great reluctance, and told him her life was bound up with the cowl, and if it rotted or was destroyed she would instantly die. The cowl was placed for safety in the centre of a large hay-stack, and there it lay for years. One day, during the master's absence, the servants were working among the hay and found the cowl. They showed it to the lady of the house, not knowing what it was. She took it, and then, strapping her child securely in its cot, she left and went to sea never to return again to Borgie. For years she used to come close in shore that she might see her boy, and then she would weep because he was not of her own kind so that she might have him at sea with her. The boy grew to be a man, and his descendants have always been exempt from drowning. They are famous swimmers, and are known locally to this day as "Sliochd an roin," that is, the descendants of the seal.

It is difficult to give an explanation of such myths as this, but when I first heard it I began to make inquiries, and discovered that there are floating traditions of shipwrecked crews having settled down among the native population, and I have thought that the Borgie mermaid may have been a cast-away maiden. If so, was she detained against her will? Did she make her escape? Were there negotiations about the custody of her child between her friends and the wild septs of the Reay country? And did local tradition weave these facts into the legend as it was current half a century ago? An

answer to these questions is made all the more difficult by the existence of other local traditions. There is a sept known as "the men of the hide" in the same district, and the tradition regarding their name, if not their origin, is this:—The devil visited the district to get the names of all those who were willing to aid him. The laird of Cobachy met the stranger, whom he found a "nice-spoken gentleman," albeit he was attired in a bull-hide with the horns attached. The laird noticed that his visitor kept his feet concealed, but in leaping a bog he got a glimpse of the cloven hoof, and to get rid of him recommended a visit to Melness. The devil put to sea in his bull-hide, and raised the Kyle of Tongue into foam and furrow as he crossed. After an interval he returned, and called to pay his respects to his friend Cobachy. The latter asked how he had succeeded. "Oh," said he, "that is the place to go to; I have covered my hide with names. I got so many that some are marked on the horns."* The men of the district are known as Fir-na-Sioch—the men of the hide. This the present generation resent, and are apt to fly to their fists if bull-hides are mentioned.

* Rev. A. Mackay, MS. notes.

CHAPTER XII

WOMAN

In any inquiry into the religion of primitive men, it is necessary, if we are to understand the significance of many actions and familiar customs, to take account of woman's position and her true sphere in savage life. Many travellers describe woman among untutored tribes as a beast of burden pure and simple; an animal to be driven while it lasts and can do useful work; then left neglected to die, sometimes of hunger, but oftener by means still more equivocal. There could be no greater error than to accept such statements as correct, or as giving a clue to woman's position and influence among the community. That labour, which, according to western ideas, belongs exclusively to men, falls to the lot of women is true. Nor do they have a voice in village councils and palavers. Even domestic arrangements as brewing beer, the food for the day, washing and the like are regulated by the men, but this is largely accounted for by the system of polygamy. It is, however, this outward and apparent position of woman, which makes her appear to the stranger of so little consequence in the affairs of the community. She seems to be a mere drudge; a beast of burden with intelligence, and whose duty it is to

labour for her husband; bear children and rear them, but take nothing to do with the produce of her own labour or the training of her offspring.

We have already seen the prophetess at her work in the Lake Region. We might find a woman regent in South Africa. The wife of the noted chief Makoma acted as regent during the minority of her son, Sandili, and with conspicuous success. A woman was once war doctor to Hintsa, and among the Khonds a woman is not supposed to be unworthy of representing the god life of creative energy and reproduction. But it is more in the code of restrictions or taboos to which women are subject that we learn the important place assigned to them in the moral and religious codes of savage men. Individual women rising to eminence might prove too much if that were taken by itself, but when we place such facts beside the general treatment they receive, we see how important is the place they occupy and the influence they have on national life and religion. For example. Among the objects placed under taboo is blood, and especially woman's blood. So great is the dread of its touching any part of the person, and especially the head, which, in savage philosophy is peculiarly sacred, that an Australian will not pass under a leaning tree or the rails of a fence lest a woman should have been on it, and that blood from her, resting on the tree, might fall on him.* The Siamese think it unlucky to pass under a rope on which women's clothes are suspended. In New Zealand the blood of women is supposed to have

* J. G. Frazer, quoting E. M. Curr.

disastrous effects upon males. If a South African touches the blood of woman at certain periods his bones become soft. If a woman steps over him, or even over his spears he cannot hit his enemy in battle. In Burmah it is an indignity to have a woman overhead in a house of more than one story, hence it is that most houses have but one floor. In a house raised on piles, a servant will not go in below the house for any purpose lest a woman should be in the rooms over his head.

With divine and sacred persons a number of rules have to be observed for their own safety and the safety of the community. One of these is that the sun may not shine upon them. The Mikado might not touch the ground with his foot, nor was the sun thought worthy to shine on his royal head. The heir to the throne of Bogota forfeited his right to the succession if the sun shone direct upon him. In Sogomoso the heir-apparent is shut up in seclusion for seven years without seeing the light of the sun.* Now, it is remarkable that girls at puberty and women at regular intervals and after delivery are subjected to the same rule of restrictions during a variable period. In Laondo, a purely negro State, girls at puberty are confined in separate huts, and may on no account touch the ground during the period with any part of their body. Among the Zulus and kindred tribes, when the first signs of womanhood show themselves, a girl, should she be walking or working in the fields, runs to the river and hides herself for the day among the reeds that she may not be

* J. G. Frazer, quoting Alonzo de Zurita.

seen by men. Her head she covers with her blanket that the sun may not shine on it and shrivel her up into a withered skeleton, an assured result of any disregard of custom. At night she returns home and is closely secluded for a period of seven days. She then resumes her work. New Ireland girls are confined for four or five years in small cages and kept in the dark.*

Customs akin to these are world-wide, and have left in the folk-lore of all nations evidence of their being once universal. For example. A Greek story warns a princess to be careful in her fifteenth year lest the sun should shine on her. A Tyrolese legend tells how a lovely maiden was doomed to be transported to the belly of a whale, Jonah fashion, if ever a sunbeam fell upon her. Old Highland women, when I was a boy, always made a great ado if girls went, say to a hayfield, with bare heads. Boys might, but it was not good for girls. It was not altogether because they would get sunburned. There were "other things," all of which was conveyed to them in hints of Delphic ambiguity, but which was very awful to our youthful imagination.

The ground of this seclusion and guarding from sunlight lies in the dread primitive man has of woman's blood. Hence a woman must live apart during the period; she is then unclean, and, should any one come near her inadvertently, she must give them warning not to approach. Similar restrictions are imposed on women after delivery, when they are secluded and guarded for weeks. Nor are

* Rev. B. Banks.

restrictions confined to the periods referred to. Precautions must be taken against accidents, as these may happen at any moment. Scores of times did I put the question to South Africans: "Why do your women never enter the village by the paths the men follow?" before I could get a satisfactory answer. I was told it was custom; women must be taught obedience; people always did it; or that the master made rules and all must obey; that it was to keep wives from quarrelling if they saw the head of the village walking frequently with a favourite wife; because men are greater, that is, more sacred, than women; "the woman is to a man a child." Gradually and indirectly I came to know that the restriction was designed to avoid accidents such as might happen with the advent of womanhood unexpectedly. The object of all such restrictions is to neutralise the dangerous influences which are supposed to be connected with women at certain periods. The woman is viewed as charged with certain properties; properties productive of evil in themselves, and which, in certain circumstances, she can use with infinite power for mischief. These must be kept within bounds. If not, they may prove destructive to the woman herself, as in the Zulu shrivelling up, and to all with whom she comes into contact.

The uncleanness of woman and the sanctity of the sacred or divine man do not, to primitive men, differ from one another. Both must be guarded against and avoided when that is possible. Both must be surrounded by taboos for this object as well as for

their own sakes, so that their properties, which are good or bad as they are directed, may be guided to be conducive of good to man.

Persons charged with such properties, and having at their disposal such powers for good or evil, cannot be without influence upon the community. Where every action has a supernatural significance, it is impossible to have any force in existence without its tending to give colour to all the institutions existing among men.

In a land where a woman may not touch a cow's udder* on pain of direst results, we may expect to find her wielding power however harshly she may be treated. Even from the most closely guarded harem come influences which go to make or mar the state. The Lubare of Uganda may be under the direction of a prophetess. In the Lake Region, the prophetess is all powerful, and may determine peace or war, as she often does in the south. The women of most African tribes are modest and retiring, and seldom address strangers except when they bring articles for sale, and even then it is not uncommon to find a husband or father accompany the woman to do the actual trading while she carries the burden. But this is not universal. There are tribes where the women are bold, aggressive and self-assertive. The Monbutto women are independent, obtrusive and immodest.† They do the field work as is done by all African women, but in other respects assert their independence in a manner rarely met with. The Monbutto are an island of humanity, in the very

* Felkin. † Schweinfurth.