CHAPTER I

THE TRANSFERENCE OF EVIL

§ 1. The Transference to Inanimate Objects

In the preceding parts of this work we have traced the practice of killing a god among peoples in the hunting, pastoral, and agricultural stages of society; and I have attempted to explain the motives which led men to adopt so curious a custom. One aspect of the custom still remains to be noticed. The accumulated misfortunes and sins of the whole people are sometimes laid upon the dying god, who is supposed to bear them away for ever, leaving the people innocent and happy. The notion that we can transfer our guilt and sufferings to some other being who will bear them for us is familiar to the savage mind. It arises from a very obvious confusion between the physical and the mental, between the material and the immaterial. Because it is possible to shift a load of wood, stones, or what not, from our own back to the back of another, the savage fancies that it is equally possible to shift the burden of his pains and sorrows to another, who will suffer them in his stead. Upon this idea he acts, and the result is an endless number of very unamiable devices for palming off upon some one else the trouble which a man shrinks from bearing himself. In short, the principle of vicarious suffering is commonly understood and practised by races who stand on a low level of social and intellectual culture. In the following pages I shall illustrate the theory and the practice as they are found among savages in all their naked
simplicity, undisguised by the refinements of metaphysics and the subtleties of theology.

The devices to which the cunning and selfish savage resorts for the sake of easing himself at the expense of his neighbour are manifold; only a few typical examples out of a multitude can be cited. At the outset it is to be observed that the evil of which a man seeks to rid himself need not be transferred to a person; it may equally well be transferred to an animal or a thing, though in the last case the thing is often only a vehicle to convey the trouble to the first person who touches it. In some of the East Indian islands they think that epilepsy can be cured by striking the patient on the face with the leaves of certain trees and then throwing them away. The disease is believed to have passed into the leaves, and to have been thrown away with them. In the Warramunga and Tjingilli tribes of Central Australia men who suffered from headache have often been seen wearing women’s head-rings. "This was connected with the belief that the pain in the head would pass into the rings, and that then it could be thrown away with them into the bush, and so got rid of effectually. The natives have a very firm belief in the efficacy of this treatment. In the same way when a man suffers from internal pain, usually brought on by overeating, his wife’s head-rings are placed on his stomach; the evil magic which is causing all the trouble passes into them, and they are then thrown away into the bushes, where the magic is supposed to leave them. After a time they are searched for by the woman, who brings them back, and again wears them in the ordinary way." Among the Sihanaka of Madagascar, when a man is very sick, his relatives are sometimes bidden by the diviner to cast out the evil by means of a variety of things, such as a stick of a particular sort of tree, a rag, a pinch of earth from an ant’s nest, a little money, or what not. Whatever they may be, they are brought to the patient’s house and held by a man near the door, while an exorcist stands

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in the house and pronounces the formula necessary for casting out the disease. When he has done, the things are thrown away in a southward direction, and all the people in the house, including the sick man, if he has strength enough, shake their loose robes and spit towards the door in order to expedite the departure of the malady.\textsuperscript{1} When an Atkhan of the Aleutian Islands had committed a grave sin and desired to unburden himself of his guilt, he proceeded as follows. Having chosen a time when the sun was clear and unclouded, he picked up certain weeds and carried them about his person. Then he laid them down, and calling the sun to witness, cast his sins upon them, after which, having eased his heart of all that weighed upon it, he threw the weeds into the fire, and fancied that thus he cleansed himself of his guilt.\textsuperscript{2} In Vedic times a younger brother who married before his elder brother was thought to have sinned in so doing, but there was a ceremony by which he could purge himself of his sin. Fetter of reed-grass were laid on him in token of his guilt, and when they had been washed and sprinkled they were flung into a foaming torrent, which swept them away, while the evil was hidden to vanish with the foam of the stream.\textsuperscript{3} The Matse negroes of Togoland think that the river Awo has power to carry away the sorrows of mankind. So when one of their friends has died, and their hearts are heavy, they go to the river with leaves of the raphia palm tied round their necks and drums in their hands. Standing on the bank they beat the drums and cast the leaves into the stream. As the leaves float away out of sight to the sound of the rippling water and the roll of the drums, they fancy that their sorrow too is lifted from them.\textsuperscript{4} Similarly, the ancient Greeks imagined that the pangs of love might be healed by bathing in the river Selemnus.\textsuperscript{5} The Indians of Peru sought to purify themselves from their sins by plunging their heads

\textsuperscript{2} Ivan Petroff, Report on the Population, Industries, and Resources of Alaska, p. 158.
\textsuperscript{3} H. Oldenberg, Die Religion des Veda (Berlin, 1894), p. 322.
\textsuperscript{4} J. Spieth, Die Ewe-Stämme (Berlin, 1906), p. 800.
\textsuperscript{5} Pausanias, vii. 23. 3.
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in a river; they said that the river washed their sins away.¹

An Arab cure for melancholy or madness caused by love
is to put a dish of water on the sufferer’s head, drop melted
lead into it, and then bury the lead in an open field; thus
the mischief that was in the man goes away.² Amongst the
Miotse of China, when the eldest son of the house attains
the age of seven years, a ceremony called “driving away the
devil” takes place. The father makes a kite of straw and
lets it fly away in the desert, bearing away all evil with it.³
When an Indian of Santiago Tepehuacan is ill, he will
sometimes attempt to rid himself of the malady by baking
thrice seven cakes; of these he places seven in the top of
the highest pine-tree of the forest, seven he lays at the foot
of the tree, and seven he casts into a well, with the water of
which he then washes himself. By this means he transfers
the sickness to the water of the well and so is made whole.⁴
The Baganda believed that plague was caused by the god
Kaumpuli, who resided in a deep hole in his temple. To
prevent him from escaping and devastating the country, they
battened him down in the hole by covering the top with
plantain-stems and piling wild-cat-skins over them; there
was nothing like wild-cat-skins to keep him down, so
hundreds of wild cats were hunted and killed every year
to supply the necessary skins. However, sometimes in spite
of these precautions the god contrived to escape, and then
the people died. When a garden or house was plague-
stricken, the priests purified it by transferring the disease to
a plantain-tree and then carrying away the tree to a piece
of waste land. The way in which they effected the trans-
ference of the disease was this. They first made a number
of little shields and spears out of plantain fibre and reeds
and placed them at intervals along the path leading from
the garden to the main road.

¹ P. J. de Arriaga, Extirpacion de la Idolatria del Piru (Lima, 1621),
p. 29.
² This I learned from my friend W. Robertson Smith, who mentioned as
his authority David of Antioch, Tawzin, in the story “Orwa.”
³ R. Andree, Ethnographische Paral.
⁴ “Lettre du curé de Santiago Tepe-
huacan à son évêque sur les mœurs et coutumes des Indiens soumis à ses
soins,” Bulletin de la Société de Gé-
ographie (Paris), Deuxième Série, ii.
(1834) p. 182.
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To bear fruit, was then cut down, the stem was laid in the path leading to one of the plague-stricken huts, and it was speared with not less than twenty reed spears, which were left sticking in it, while some of the plantain-fibre shields were also fastened to it. This tree was then carried down the path to the waste land and left there. It went by the name of the Scapegoat (*kyonzire*). To make quite sure that the plague, after being thus deposited in the wilderness, should not return by the way it went, the priests raised an arch, covered with barkcloth, over the path at the point where it diverged from the main road. This arch was thought to interpose an insurmountable barrier to the return of the plague.1

Dyak priestesses expel ill-luck from a house by hewing and slashing the air in every corner of it with wooden swords, which they afterwards wash in the river, to let the ill-luck float away down stream. Sometimes they sweep misfortune out of the house with brooms made of the leaves of certain plants and sprinkled with rice-water and blood. Having swept it clean out of every room and into a toy-house made of bamboo, they set the little house with its load of bad luck adrift on the river. The current carries it away out to sea, where it shifts its baleful cargo to a certain kettle-shaped ship, which floats in mid-ocean and receives in its capacious hold all the ills that flesh is heir to. Well would it be with mankind if the evils remained for ever tossing far away on the billows; but, alas, they are dispersed from the ship to the four winds, and settle again, and yet again, on the weary Dyak world. On Dyak rivers you may see many of the miniature houses, laden with manifold misfortunes, bobbing up and down on the current, or sticking fast in the thickets that line the banks.2

These examples illustrate the purely beneficent side of the transference of evil; they show how men seek to alleviate human sufferings by diverting them to material objects, which are then thrown away or otherwise disposed of so as to render them innocuous. Often, however, the


transference of evil to a material object is only a step towards foisting it upon a living person. This is the maleficent side of such transferences. It is exemplified in the following cases. To cure toothache some of the Australian blacks apply a heated spear-thrower to the cheek. The spear-thrower is then cast away, and the toothache goes with it in the shape of a black stone called karritich. Stones of this kind are found in old mounds and sandhills. They are carefully collected and thrown in the direction of enemies in order to give them toothache.¹ In Mirzapur a mode of transferring disease is to fill a pot with flowers and rice and bury it in a pathway covered up with a flat stone. Whoever touches this is supposed to contract the disease. The practice is called chalawwa, or “passing on” the malady. This sort of thing goes on daily in Upper India. Often while walking of a morning in the bazaar you will see a little pile of earth adorned with flowers in the middle of the road. Such a pile usually contains some scabs or scales from the body of a smallpox patient, which are placed there in the hope that some one may touch them, and by catching the disease may relieve the sufferer.² The Bahima, a pastoral people of the Uganda Protectorate, often suffer from deep-seated abscesses: “their cure for this is to transfer the disease to some other person by obtaining herbs from the medicine-man, rubbing them over the place where the swelling is, and burying them in the road where people continually pass; the first person who steps over these buried herbs contracts the disease, and the original patient recovers.”³ The practice of the Wagogo of German East Africa is similar. When a man is ill, the native doctor will take him to a cross-road, where he prepares his medicines, uttering at the same time the incantations which are necessary to give the drugs their medical virtue. Part of the dose is then administered to the patient, and part is buried under a pot turned upside down at the cross-road. It is hoped that somebody will step over the pot, and catching

² W. Crooke, Popular Religion and Folk-lore of Northern India (Westminster, 1896), i. 164 sq.
the disease, which lurks in the pot, will thereby relieve the original sufferer. A variation of this cure is to plaster some of the medicine, or a little of the patient’s blood, on a wooden peg and to drive the peg into a tree; any one who passes the tree and is so imprudent as to draw out the peg, will carry away with it the disease.¹

Sometimes in case of sickness the malady is transferred to an effigy as a preliminary to passing it on to a human being. Thus among the Baganda the medicine-man would sometimes make a model of his patient in clay; then a relative of the sick man would rub the image over the sufferer’s body and either bury it in the road or hide it in the grass by the wayside. The first person who stepped over the image or passed by it would catch the disease. Sometimes the effigy was made out of a plantain-flower tied up so as to look like a person; it was used in the same way as the clay figure. But the use of images for this maleficent purpose was a capital crime; any person caught in the act of burying one of them in the public road would surely have been put to death.² Among the Sena-speaking people to the north of the Zambesi, when any one is ill, the doctor makes a little pig of straw to which he transfers the sickness. The little pig is then set on the ground where two paths meet, and any passer-by who chances to kick it over is sure to absorb the illness and to draw it away from the patient.³ Among the Korkus, a forest tribe of the Central Provinces in India, when a person wishes to transfer his sickness to another, he contrives to obtain the loin-cloth of his intended victim and paints two figures on it in lamp black, one upright and the other upside down. As soon as the owner of the loin-cloth puts it on, he falls a victim to the ailment which afflicted the artist who drew the figures.⁴ Every nine years a Mongol celebrates a memorial festival of his birth for the purpose of ensuring the continuance of his life and welfare. At this solemn ceremony two lambskins, one

black and the other white, are spread on the floor of the hut, which is further covered with a felt carpet, and on the carpet are made nine little ridges of earth brought from nine mountains, the bottom of a river, and a sepulchral mound. The owner of the hut, for whose benefit the rite is performed, next seats himself on the black lambskin, and opposite him is set an effigy of himself made of dough by a lama. The priest then throws a black stone at the effigy, praying that the black arrow of death may pierce it, after which he throws a white stone at the master of the hut, praying that the bright beam of life may endow him with wondrous strength. After that the Mongol gets up, steps over one of the ridges of earth and says, “I have overcome a mishap, I have escaped a death.” This ceremony he performs nine times, stepping over all the ridges, one after the other. Then he sits down on the white lambskin, and the lama takes the dough effigy, swings it thrice round the man whom it represents, spits on it thrice, and hands it to attendants who carry it away into the steppe. A little holy water sprinkled over the Mongol now completes his protection against perils and dangers. This last is a case of the beneficent transference of evil; for in it no attempt seems to be made to shift the burden of misfortune to anybody else.

§ 2. The Transference to Stones and Sticks

In the western district of the island of Timor, when men or women are making long and tiring journeys, they fan themselves with leafy branches, which they afterwards throw away on particular spots where their forefathers did the same before them. The fatigue which they felt is thus supposed to have passed into the leaves and to be left behind. Others use stones instead of leaves. Similarly in the Babar Archipelago tired people will strike themselves with stones, believing that they thus transfer to the stones the weariness which they felt in their own bodies. They then throw away the stones in places which are

specially set apart for the purpose.\(^1\) A like belief and practice in many distant parts of the world have given rise to those cairns or heaps of sticks and leaves which travellers often observe beside the path, and to which every passing native adds his contribution in the shape of a stone, or stick, or leaf. Thus in the Solomon and Banks' Islands the natives are wont to throw sticks, stones, or leaves upon a heap at a place of steep descent, or where a difficult path begins, saying, "There goes my fatigue." The act is not a religious rite, for the thing thrown on the heap is not an offering to spiritual powers, and the words which accompany the act are not a prayer. It is nothing but a magical ceremony for getting rid of fatigue, which the simple savage fancies he can embody in a stick, leaf, or stone, and so cast it from him.\(^2\)

An early Spanish missionary to Nicaragua, observing that along the paths there were heaps of stones on which the Indians as they passed threw grass, asked them why they did so. "Because we think," was the answer, "that thereby we are kept from weariness and hunger, or at least that we suffer less from them."\(^3\) When the Peruvian Indians were climbing steep mountains and felt weary, they used to halt by the way at certain points where there were heaps of stones, which they called apachitas. On these heaps the weary men would place other stones, and they said that when they did so, their weariness left them.\(^4\) In the passes of the eastern Andes, on the borders of Argentina and Bolivia, "large cairns are constantly found, and every Puna Indian, on passing, adds a stone and a coca leaf, so that neither he nor his beast of burden may tire on the way."\(^5\)

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In the country of the Tarahumares and Tepehuanes in Mexico heaps of stones and sticks may be observed on high points, where the track leads over a ridge between two or more valleys. “Every Indian who passes such a pile adds a stone or a stick to it in order to gain strength for his journey. Among the Tarahumares only the old men observe this custom. Whenever the Tepehuanes carry a corpse, they rest it for some fifteen minutes on such a heap by the wayside that the deceased may not be fatigued but strong enough to finish his long journey to the land of the dead. One of my Huichol companions stopped on reaching this pile, pulled up some grass from the ground and picked up a stone as big as his fist. Holding both together he spat on the grass and on the stone and then rubbed them quickly over his knees. He also made a couple of passes with them over his chest and shoulders, exclaiming ‘Kenestiquéu!’ (May I not get tired!) and then put the grass on the heap and the stone on top of the grass.” ¹ In Guatemala also piles of stones may be seen at the partings of ways and on the tops of cliffs and mountains. Every passing Indian used to gather a handful of grass, rub his legs with it, spit on it, and deposit it with a small stone on the pile, firmly persuaded that by so doing he would restore their flagging vigour to his weary limbs.² Here the rubbing of the limbs with the grass, like the Babar custom of striking the body with a stone, was doubtless a mode of extracting the fatigue from them as a preliminary to throwing it away.

Similarly on the plateau between Lakes Tanganyika and Nyassa the native carriers, before they ascend a steep hill with their loads, will pick up a stone, spit on it, rub the calves of their legs with it, and then deposit it on one of those small piles of stones which are commonly to be found at such spots in this part of Africa. A recent English traveller, who noticed the custom, was informed that the carriers practise it “to

¹ C. Lumholtz, Unknown Mexico (London, 1903), ii. 282.

Indians of Guatemala, when they cross a pass for the first time, still commonly add a stone to the cairn which marks the spot. See C. Sapper, “Die Gebrauche und religiösen Anschauungen der Kekchi-Indianer,” Internationales Archiv für Ethnographie, viii. (1895) p. 197.