



MAN, MIND & MAGIC

The Illustrated
Encyclopedia
of Mythology, Religion
and the Unknown

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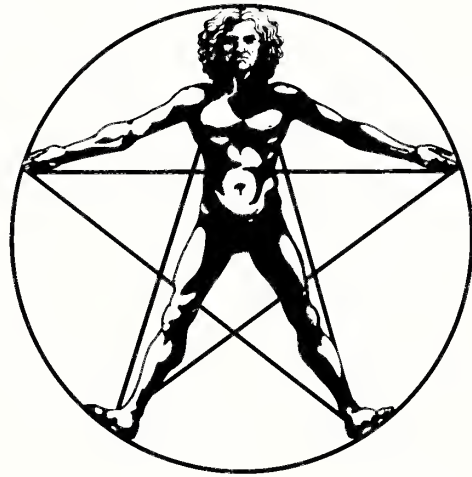
MAN,
MYTH &
MAGIC

VOLUME 17

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The Illustrated Encyclopedia
of Mythology, Religion
and the Unknown

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Richard Cavendish

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Professor E. R. Dodds; Professor Mircea Eliade;
William Sargant; John Symonds;
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Frontispiece: Egyptian deity with the head of a ram, from the tomb of Tuthmosis III in Thebes, where rams were sacred to the god Amun: once a year a ram was slaughtered and the statue of Amun draped in its skin (C.M.Dixon)

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SCORPIO

THE SIGN of the scorpion, according to the traditional zodiac, rules those who are born between 23 October and 21 November. For many years it has been the custom to maintain that Scorpio is the most dangerous sign of the zodiac, with quite the most tricky character that one might have to deal with. It was accused of being the most dark, secretive, treacherous and generally vicious sign of any.

In fact, the genuine Scorpio person is governed by his energy, for this sign, like Aries, is ruled by Mars, the planet of courage, energy and activity. He wants to act, not brood, and hence he is frequently uninhibited

and impatient. To the true Scorpion nothing is too much trouble. His aim is to do, he sees no point in boggling or hesitation, little in compromise and none at all in shirking. He is admirably thorough.

Work, to him, is a pleasurable pastime: to work for money, from the Martian point of view, is slightly dishonest. Work should be a natural expression of one's energy, as it is with animals, and as it is with creative artists and craftsmen. Any attempt to turn work into a burden is offensive to the Martian spirit.

Human relations are made far easier by the positive attitude of the Scorpion, who is not perpetually on the defensive, not grasping, not full of forethought for self, though he may cause offence through too

little sympathy for the timidities of others.

There is something very satisfying in the thoroughness of the Scorpion. He does not merely play at doing things, but carries them through in a properly adult and professional manner, in contrast with those born under Gemini, Virgo and Pisces. Another characteristic of Scorpio is wit and humour, which may be a socially acceptable safety valve as much as an overflow of good nature.

Any quality that confers benefit on others is a virtue, and the benefit to be derived from Scorpions is that they take on themselves the dark, dangerous and risky tasks which others frequently do not dare to undertake. But by the same token, they would rather be active than do nothing and so may be tempted into impatience.

SCORPION

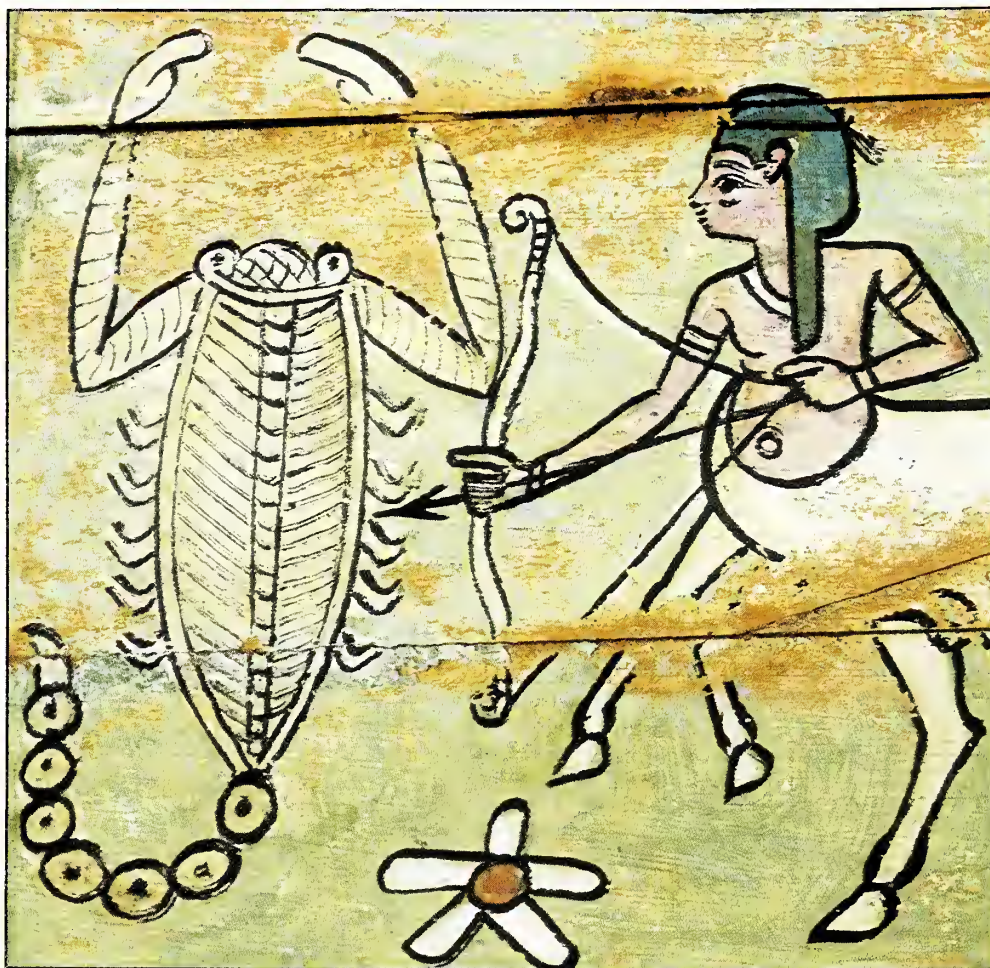
THE SCORPION is classified, not with the insects, but with the spiders. The virulence of its venom has been exaggerated, though there are a few records from the Near East of people dying after being stung. Species living in the Sahara and Mexico are more dangerous. No species is found in the British Isles, but it is familiar by name to most people because of references to it in European literature and the Bible.

The Judaeen wilderness is mentioned as a place of scorpions, and throughout the Bible these creatures are regarded as malignant (Deuteronomy 8.15; Ezekiel 2.6; Revelation 9.5,10). They are associated with drought, wretchedness and pain. King Rehoboam is reported as saying: 'My father chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scorpions' (1 Kings 12.11). The allusion may be to whips armed with spines. Such references contributed to the scorpion becoming symbolic of that which is hurtful and unpleasant.

Although these creatures were familiar to people living in southern Europe, medieval writers and illustrators depicted them in highly imaginative ways. The scorpion was said to have a face like a woman and in a 12th century manuscript in the British Museum it is shown with a human head and four legs, and with a body impaled on the spear-like sting. In the *Ancren Riwe*, a work of devotional instruction dating from about the same period, the scorpion is described as 'a kind of serpent that has a face like that of a woman and puts on a pleasant countenance'. The same notion appears in the works of Elizabethan writers.

Apollonius of Tyana (see APOLLONIUS) was reputed to have cleared Antioch of scorpions by burying a bronze image of one in the centre of the city. Pliny, in his *Natural History*, was responsible for a number of odd ideas about scorpions becoming current in later literature. He says that the scorpion provides a cure for its own poison: 'It is thought good . . . to lay to the sore the same scorpion that did the harm; or to eat him roasted, and last of all to drink it in two cups of pure wine of the grape.'

Scorpion lore illustrates both the extent to which Pliny's statements influenced



successive writers for many centuries and the ingenuity with which these writers elaborated and embellished such notions without any attempt to find out the facts. The Jacobean dramatists Beaumont and Fletcher wrote in *Philaster*: 'Now your tongues like scorpions both heal and poison.' And in *Rosalynde* (1590) Thomas Lodge remarked: 'They that are stung by the scorpion cannot be recovered but by the scorpion.' Although these ideas are fantastic, ever since the discoveries of Edward Jenner it has been recognized that immunity from certain diseases may be attained by administering small doses of toxin.

Lupton, a writer of the 16th century, commented that eating basil counteracts a scorpion's sting (see also HERBS). He gave

The scorpion's sting gives it a baleful character in folklore and astrology: the Scorpion and the Archer, from an Egyptian mummy case

this recipe: 'One handful of basil with ten sea-crabs, stamped or beaten together, doth make all the scorpions to come to that place that are nigh to the same.' Presumably this was based on the magical concept that 'like attracts like', there being a vague similarity between crabs and scorpions. Topsell, in the 17th century, had equally fanciful notions: 'The sea-crab with basil in her mouth destroyeth the scorpion.' He describes vividly how scorpions, in order to reach a sleeping man, form a chain from the ceiling, each giving place to another after it has stung him.

The world of the supernatural lies very close to the world of men in the ballads, which preserve, in their many different versions, traditions older than Christianity

SCOTTISH AND BORDER BALLADS

BISHOP PERCY, in the 18th century, found a large notebook of written ballads, without music, rewrote a selection and published it as *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* (1765). Sir Walter Scott, who could not sing though he had heard many ballads sung, printed the second collection of ballads, *The Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border*, at the beginning of the 19th century. Neither collection of these songs had any music, and this omission persisted for 100 years. At the end of the 19th century, Professor Child of Harvard University published his five-volume work *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads*. Since that time the Child ballads, as traditional ballads are often called, have been numbered on his system.

Thanks to the work early in this century of Cecil Sharp in England and Gavin Greig in Scotland, who both collected ballads with their tunes, scholars woke up to the fact that ballads are sung. As Thomas Rhymer told the Fairy Queen, 'Harping keep I none, for tongue is chief of minstrelsy', which means that he sang his songs unaccompanied, as the traditional singers have always done, and the tinkers still do. The ballad-singer gets his story across to his audience in clear sung lines. His method makes it unnecessary to carry a musical instrument, so he is ready to sing at any time and in any place. His ballads are in his head.

This oral tradition has preserved wonderful ballads of the supernatural – of magic, of fairies, ghosts, witches and dragons. The tales are set in country or castle, very seldom in town. The country of the Border ballads is more pastoral than agricultural: there are horses and horse-thieves, cattle and cattle-rustlers, sheep and sheep-stealers. Thus, one Border ballad, *The Lads of Leverhay*, refers to 'the lads of Leverhay that drove the Crichton's gear away'. These Border thieves 'stole the broked cow and the branded bull' and 'ne'er saw a horse but they made it their ain'.

The Road to Fair Elfland

Somewhere beyond the rolling, bare Border hills is Fairyland, or Elfland. Sometimes this country is approached through the greenwood. But when the imagination of the story-teller breaks through into the other-reality of the supernatural, his fancy does not move freely. It is controlled by ballad conventions, a collection of miscellaneous beliefs inherited by the ballad-makers from the past. They have the same patterns that occur in folktales, and would have been well known to the ballad-singer's audience.

Fairyland has its own social organization and supernatural laws. It is, for example,

aristocratic: in the ballad of *Thomas Rhymer*, the Queen of Elfland, whose skirt is of the grass-green silk (an unlucky colour associated also with witches), shows True Thomas the winding road to fair Elfland. Though it has some resemblances to the Land of the Dead, Elfland is in the minds of the ballad-makers distinct from it. Because he has kissed her, the Queen claims Thomas's services for seven years. Behind the choice of the number seven lies numerology, knowledge of the significance of numbers, and in the ballads the most common numbers are seven and three, which have great occult significance (see SEVEN; THREE).

The Queen warns Thomas that he must not speak in Elfland, or he will never

return to his own country – an example of a taboo. Another common taboo is that a human must not eat in Fairyland; however, the Queen gives Thomas an apple from a tree, so that when he eats it he will have a tongue that cannot lie. This tree has some resemblance to the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil in the garden of Eden. The fact that Thomas cannot tell a lie is important, for many prophecies were ascribed to him which are still in existence. One of

'The Gordons good, in English blood they steep'd their hose and shoon': illustration to *The Battle of Otterburn* in a 1908 edition of Sir Walter Scott's *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border*, one of the earliest collections of the traditional ballads of the Border country



them, 'Atween Craik Cross and Eildon tree, is a' the safety that can be', may be interpreted as you wish. Like many of Thomas's rhymes it is as ambiguous as a sibyl's prophecy.

People vanish from the earth into Fairyland. One woman is taken to Elfland to nurse the Queen's child. Tam Lin is an interesting ballad character because of the method of his escape from Fairyland. The ballad begins by telling how the heroine, Janet, goes off to Carterhaugh, though warned that she may lose her rings, her mantle or her maidenhead to Tam Lin. By pulling two roses Janet brings Tam Lin to her side. He makes love to her and she becomes pregnant. She returns to Carterhaugh and asks Tam Lin, when he appears, if he has been baptized. Tam reassures her that he is human, that the Queen of Fairyland carried him off:

But at the end o' seven years,
They pay their teind to hell.

It is Hallowe'en, the date for the payment of their tithe to hell, and Tam is afraid that he may be the victim this time. He tells Janet that to win him, if she loves him, she must go to Miles Cross at evening and pull him off his horse. The fairies will change him into a number of dangerous and terrifying things, but when he eventually turns into a naked man she must baptize him in milk and water. She does all he asks and rescues him to be her husband. In one version, at his request, she names him – a very powerful form of magic.

Though Fairyland is so far away, as we know from *Thomas Rhymer*, the fairies are sometimes very close, so close that to name them or call them brings them immediately. The fairy knight in *The Elfin Knight* blows his horn and when the lady who hears it makes a wish that the horn was in her chest and the knight in her arms, 'She had no sooner these words said, than the knight came to her bed.'

The 'Griesly Ghost'

Though there are a few references in the ballads to heaven and purgatory, the ballads are almost entirely pagan. When ballad-makers refer to Christian life after death, they seem to refer less often to heaven than to hell and the Devil. This is natural if the ballads are more pagan than Christian, and the Devil is the pagan aspect of Christianity.

The False Knight upon the Road is an excellent little ballad in which the Devil, in disguise, questions a 'wee boy' on his way to school. It is a late successor to the early riddle ballads, where failure to answer the question or perform the impossible task puts the person questioned into the questioner's power. The 'wee boy' has an answer to each of the Devil's questions, and reveals in his last answer that he recognizes the questioner. The boy escapes because he has had the last word.

Whether *The Daemon Lover* tells the story of a returning ghost or of the Devil pretending to be the woman's husband, is as uncertain as the nature of the ghost of Hamlet's father. In the ballad he is an evil, destructive force. He has a cloven foot and

the power to change his size. When he has persuaded the wife to go on board one of his ships and to forsake her children, she questions him about the grim land she sees ahead:

'O yon is the mountain of hell,' he cried,
'Where you and I will go.'
He struck the tap-mast wi' his hand,
The fore-mast wi' his knee,
And he brake that gallant ship in twain,
And sank her in the sea.

Suddenly he has become superhuman in size. Abnormal size is one element of the supernatural in the ballads, shared by both fairy and witch ballads. There is *The Wee Wee Man*, whose diminutive size and superhuman strength are the two significant details. He may be an elf from Fairyland, for he is met by a lady, followed by two dozen ladies 'ciad out in green'.

But in the twinkling of an eye,
My wee wee man was clean awa'.

In *King Henry*, on the other hand, the 'griesly ghost' who appears to the King is very tall: 'Her head hat the roof-tree o' the house'.

Return from the Grave

The most complete ghost ballad is *The Wife of Usher's Well*. The wife gets word that her three sons are drowned. She makes a wish, or works a spell – we are not sure which – and they return one dark Martinmas night, wearing hats of birch from the gates of paradise. Whether the wife knows that her sons are ghosts is not stated, but left to the listener's imagination. Following ghost convention, the red cock and the grey cock summon the three back to where the worm is fretting their bodies; it is also a world where they can be punished and suffer sore pain for being late in returning.

The ghosts of the children in the ballad of *The Cruel Mother* know what their mother's punishment is to be for murdering them: ghosts know the future. In one version, collected in 1906 by Gavin Greig, the children tell their mother that she will be seven years a fish, seven years a bell, and seven years in the deeps of hell. Hell is a Christian concept, but this kind of fish is not.

One of Margaret's seven brothers, in *Clerk Saunders*, kills her lover. After the burial, Clerk Saunders's ghost stands at Margaret's window asking her to give him back the faith and troth he gave her. Eventually she returns his troth in a silver wand, though at first she refuses to give it to him unless he kisses her. Saunders warns her that his kiss would be the kiss of death but she follows him back to his grave.

Is there ony room at your head, Saunders?
Is there ony room at your feet?
Or ony room at your side, Saunders,
Where fain, fain, I wad sleep.

But there is no room in his lowly bed among the hungry worms. The ghost seems in this story to have returned in his former shape, not as a disembodied spirit.

In another ballad, proud Lady Margaret's

brother returns home to give her a warning but does not allow her to go away with him: 'For ye've unwashen hands, and ye've unwashen feet, to gae to clay wi' me.' It needs a clear, unaccompanied singer to drop this hint, which would have told the audience at once that the brother was dead, and that he referred to the washing of a corpse before burial.

Dead Marjorie's three brothers in *Young Benjie*, watch her corpse, knowing that at midnight she will tell them the name of her murderer.

About the middle o' the night,
The cocks began to crow;
And at the dead hour o' the night,
The corpse began to thrav (writhe).

They ask her who threw her over the falls. Young Benjie was her first love and her murderer, she tells them. Should they behead him, or hang him, or pick out his two grey eyes? Marjorie chooses the third. At the end of every seven years they must lead the blind man to the place where he drowned his sweetheart. This will be his penance.

A famous harper, in *Binnorie*, makes a harp of a dead woman's breastbone with strings of her yellow hair. When he comes to her father's hall, the harp begins to play and at the end of the passage concludes, 'Woe to my sister, false Helen!' which reveals her as a murderess.

Talking Animals

Speaking animals and birds appear frequently. Parrots carry on intelligent conversations. The knight in *The Broomfield Hill* is told by his milk-white steed and his gay goss-hawk that they had tried to waken him when his sweetheart was near. A bonny bird in *Lord William* speaks from a high tree, charging the lady with murder. The bird may be the soul of the dead man; it is intelligent enough to refuse to come down even for a golden coin.

Even inanimate objects are able to communicate messages. The ring in *Hynd Horn* is one example of this: 'When this ring grows pale and wan, you may know by it my love is gane.' In *Cospatrick*, the hero speaks to his bed on his bridal night:

Now speak to me blankets, and speak
to me bed,
And speak thou sheet, enchanted web;
And speak up, my bonny brown sword,
that winna lie,
Is this a true maiden that lies by me?

The bed tells him the real state of affairs.

The fire, in *Earl Richard* spares the maid, Catherine, who has been condemned to be burnt for murder, but eagerly burns the murderess when she is condemned instead. When the maid touches the corpse it does not bleed, but when her mistress touches it the blood makes the ground red. The spectators know by this who is guilty of the crime.

Then there are witches. When the knight goes off to his tryst with his lady among the broom in *The Broomfield Hill*, a witch woman gives the lady advice so that she will be able to keep her wager with her



lover and yet 'come maiden home'. The witch *Allison Gross* promises various gifts to the man she wants for her lover. When he refuses, she turns round and round (probably widdershins, or counter-clockwise) and mutters certain words so that he falls down and becomes an 'ugly worm' – maybe a snake or a dragon. His sister Maisry combs his head on her knee with a silver comb. On Hallowe'en the Queen strokes him three times over her knee and turns him again to his own proper shape.

One of the most horrible and fascinating of the witch ballads is the tale of *Willie's Lady*. The lady cannot be delivered of her first child because Willie's mother, a witch, has put spells on her. The witch refuses all gifts: her daughter-in-law shall die and her son wed another maid. Then the Billy Blind (a friendly domestic spirit) tells Willie to shape a loaf of wax into a baby with two glass eyes, and to invite the witch to the christening. He does so, and the witch asks who has loosed the nine witch-knots in the lady's locks, taken out the combs of care, taken down the bush of woodbine, killed the master kid beneath the lady's bed and loosed her left shoe? Willie does all these things, the spells are broken and his wife bears a bonny son.

Mermaids also have supernatural powers in the ballads. In *Sir Patrick Spens* a mermaid who rises beside Sir Patrick's ship with 'the comb an' glass in her hand' warns him that he will never see dry land. The hero of *Clerk Colven* meets a mermaid, takes her by the hand and green

Left In *The Douglas Tragedy* Lady Margaret's seven brothers are killed by her lover but he is mortally wounded in the fight and she dies of grief **Right** The ballad of *Sir Patrick Spens* tells the story of the drowning of 'the best sailor that ever sailed the sea' and the Scots lords who sailed with him: 'and lang, lang may the maidens sit wi' their gowd kames in their hair, a-waiting for their ain true loves! For them they'll see nae mair'

sleeve, and forgets his own lady. To cure his headache he cuts a piece from her garment to tie round his head. When the pain grows worse, he threatens her with a knife, but she becomes a fish and jumps into the water. He goes home to die. The mermaid's garment is reminiscent of the poisoned shirt that killed Hercules.

The Wicked Stepmother

A very strange character in the ballads is the stepmother. In *Kempion* it is the stepmother who changes the lady into a fiery beast, until Kempion kisses her three times and returns her to human shape. Here again is the idea of the power of a kiss, which can both kill and cure. The supernatural lady in *King Henry* has been changed by her stepmother into a ghost; King Henry gives her all her will and she becomes a beautiful woman, a version of the story told by Chaucer's *Wife of Bath* in the 14th century in *The Canterbury Tales*.

The supernatural in the ballads is best seen as an added dimension to reality. The Anglo-Saxons called our world *middan-*

geard, the middle dwelling-place. In it is the grave, through which all men pass to heaven or hell; a few go, or are enticed while still alive, into Fairyland. From these regions come, at times, some of their inhabitants – ghosts from the grave, demons from hell and mermaids from their land beneath the ocean. These beings are largely human in appearance but may betray themselves by a cloven foot, or by their other-worldly conventions and supernatural power over humans. There are ways of guarding against this power, such as knowing the power of a name, the nature of spells, making sure to have the last word or answering the last trick question.

At times animals and birds speak intelligently. Ordinary things demonstrate strange powers. Combs and mirrors may have magical qualities; rings brighten and fade in sympathy with the fortunes of their owners; fire has the power to distinguish between good and evil, which it shows by refusing to burn innocent victims; while musical instruments made from human bone and hair from a dead person retain the character of the person and supply necessary information, usually about a murder.

WILLIAM MONTGOMERIE

FURTHER READING: D. Buchan, ed., *Scottish Ballad Book* (Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973); Francis James Child ed., *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads* (Dover, N. Y., 1965 reprint); Lowry C. Wimberley, *Folklore of the English and Scottish Ballads* (Univ. of Chicago Press, 1928).

As the scryer peers into the crystal ball, the globe becomes foggy or opaque from the inside; then, perhaps, the mists dissolve to reveal the hoped-for vision. Of all types of fortune teller, it is said, 'the crystal-gazer is the person most likely to have a genuine psychic ability'



Martin Weaver

SCRYING

THE WORD 'scrying' means seeing, as in the slightly old-fashioned 'descry', for which most people would now use 'discern'. But scrying refers to a seeing of the future, and that in a special way. Strictly speaking, scrying is the kind of divination which uses transparent materials – water, mirrors, crystals – in which are formed visions of the future.

Under the heading of scrying one might include a startling range of techniques. Scrying with water is properly called hydromancy; also using water are such secondary forms as cyclicomancy (using cups of water) and leconomancy (using oil poured onto water in basins), not to mention all the forms that involve moving water, or indeed other liquids ranging from ink to treacle. Mirror scrying, or catoptromancy (see MIRRORS), also has its subsidiary forms, which include divination by the reflections in brass objects and on the backs of watches, and through magnifying glasses.

Today it is medicine rather than magic which suffers from over-specialization, and the seers have broadened their bases once again. The more obscure forms of scrying never had more than a limited application. Hydromancy and catoptromancy dominated the field, and instances of the use of cups of water, and variants, can be found in magical traditions from all over the world – ancient Egypt, Assyria, Persia, primitive Tahiti and primitive southern Africa, as well as from the Graeco-Roman world and among later European peoples. Mirrors, too, were beloved by the prophets of the old civilizations, including that of the Aztecs, who held them to be a sacred emblem of the dark god Tezcatlipoca.

These interrelated forms of scrying maintained their prestige into fairly recent centuries, but then slowly began to die away. There may be a few determined hydromancers left, in the backwaters (literally) of

modern occultism. But in our time the form of scrying that has pride of place is that which uses the crystal – properly known as crystallo-mancy, but more often and familiarly called crystal-gazing.

This process displays quite an impressive heritage. Primitives are not unfamiliar with the crystal: tribes in north Borneo, New Guinea and Madagascar have such divination in their traditions, while the aborigines of Australia venerate pieces of crystal quartz which are apparently sometimes used to provide visions. An Inca legend mentions a chief who owned a magic crystal which revealed the future. The Maya of Central America, and other tribes of that region, believed firmly in divination from polished stones. And in what is now the United States, the Cherokee Indians once looked for foreknowledge in bits of polished crystal, while the Apache used such stones to scry the whereabouts of lost or stolen property.

In Europe the crystal apparently began to come into its own among the Franks and Saxons in the early centuries of the Christian era. Small crystal globes were found – by excavators centuries ago – in the tombs of barbarian leaders, and scholars eventually concluded that the objects were used for divination rather than as ornaments. Certainly many early Christians, including St Patrick in the 5th century, decried the practice strongly enough to indicate its spread.

Angelical Stone

Mirrors and water remained in common use for divination during the Middle Ages. Roger Bacon, Cornelius Agrippa and even Nostradamus (see AGRIPPA; NOSTRADAMUS) all had their names linked with catoptromancy. But the crystal ball was becoming a serious rival, and received the seal of approval of Dr John Dee, astrologer to the court of Elizabeth I (see DEE). Dee and his dubious associate Kelley peered into a crystal globe about the size of an egg, which the doctor called his 'shew-stone' or 'angelical stone', the latter name indicating its supposed origin. Dee's stone has been the object of much scholarly dispute. Different accounts give it different sizes or shapes, assert that it was solid black, and so on.

By the 17th century it had become the accepted thing for an occultist to have a crystal ball, and perhaps a sizeable clientele paying for predictions through it. The ball tended then to be called a 'speculum' – but the gazing was rarely termed speculation, though this would have well described the use of the crystal by such famous charlatans as William Lilly, the 17th century astrologer.

By the 19th century at the latest, crystallo-mancy had become firmly established as one of the most popular forms of fortune telling, ranking with astrology and palmistry, cards and tea leaves. The British astrologer and fortune teller who called himself Zadkiel (R. E. Morrison) also published almanacs, as did many after him who used the same pseudonym; the publication for 1851 purported to offer 'Wonderful Revelations from the World of Spirits,

which have been given through a Magic Crystal'.

In our own time, crystal-gazers can be found wherever back-street fortune tellers feel a living is to be made, while the crystal, if not the customary shoddy props, will be prominent among the possessions of higher-class astrologers and clairvoyants who do special readings for regular and often well-to-do clients. Apart from the professionals, amateur crystal-gazers are also apparently on the increase, judging from the evidence of advertisements for the sale of crystal balls in occult journals. The current price in Britain seems to be from £2 up for a globe made of glass, four inches in diameter.

Do-It-Yourself Scrying

Some of the explanation for crystal-gazing's popularity must lie in its simplicity. Sitting and staring into a glass ball is obviously a great deal less work than drawing up horoscopes or laying out Tarot cards. Nor is there any prerequisite jargon to be learned. And yet, in the history of scrying, men have gone to a great deal of trouble to impose complication upon this basic simplicity.

The ball itself might be merely a sphere of glass. But past authorities often insisted that it should be the more costly kind, a specially rounded and polished sphere of crystalline rock. Quartz was always a favourite, though the wealthier scryers put their faith in the stone called beryl, of which aquamarine and emerald are variants, and which has certain valuable mystic connections (see JEWELS). Beryl is usually green-tinted within its translucence, though John Aubrey in his *Miscellanies* (1696) suggests that for scrying it ought to have a tint of red.

No hard and fast rules exist for positioning the crystal. Most modern fortune tellers place it in a simple mount which holds it still on the table. In the past it has been pierced and hung from a string, or partly flattened so that it rested on a table by itself, or was simply held in the hand. But the paraphernalia sometimes associated with the practice could be varied and abundant. One crystal owned by a scryer known to William Lilly was said to be set in silver, with the angelic names of Raphael, Gabriel and Uriel engraved on the mount.

John Melville's account of scrying, first published in 1896, provides lists of much more involved trappings. The ball, says Melville, should be enclosed in a frame of polished ivory or wood and should stand on a crystal or glass pedestal. The frame should have 'mystic names' engraved on it, preferably in raised gold lettering – Tetragrammaton, Emmanuel, Agla, Adonai. The pedestal should have the name Saday inscribed on it.

Melville recommends the use of a special table called the 'Lamen', circular and bearing similar mystic engravings. Otherwise, the scryer can make do with a simple small table covered with a white cloth, and perhaps a black handkerchief round the base of the ball to shut out reflections. But in the scrying room there

Scrying

should be a place for a fire, perhaps a brazier, to burn the 'usual perfumes' (probably incense, balsam and so on). Also on the table should be two candles set in gilt or brass candlesticks with the names Elohim and Elohe engraved upon them.

Ritual Purity

A considerable amount of ceremonial is apparently expected to precede successful scrying. The care of the crystal is crucial: it must be kept perfectly clean, and this cleanliness is without doubt a form of ritual purification. One washes the crystal with soap, rinses with alcohol or vinegar, and polishes with velvet or chamois. The table and the room must also be spotless. And the sryer himself comes in for a share of purifying, through careful washing, abstinence, prayer and the like. Melville recommends the occasional herbal infusion, of mugwort or perhaps chicory, to keep the sryer properly attuned. This idea of essential purity is especially prominent in older traditions – Asian or Middle Eastern above all – which insist that virgins or young unsullied boys make the best seers. Many magicians kept such a person handy, on a retainer, to do all necessary scrying.

Preparations for scrying must be made while the moon is waxing; the process itself works best when the sun is in its farthest northern declination, and also at sunrise, midday or sunset. The zodiacal sign Libra is of crucial importance to sryers: Melville says that it rules the kidneys, which have connections with the

eyes and with the intuitive faculties. Libra also governs the beryl, and the two herbs mugwort and chicory, mentioned for the infusions.

The sign Taurus, linked with the cerebellum, has some part to play as well. And the moon, as so often in the mystic realm, is said to be the dominant planetary influence, though it has no associations with either of the two signs of the zodiac mentioned.

Immediately before the scrying begins, the final preparations introduce more magical ceremony. Crystal-gazers are often described as making a few 'magic passes' over the globe, before getting down to business. John Melville asserts the efficacy of such passes, which he says help to 'magnetize' the crystal. But other kinds of prescribing magic involve much more elaborate procedures.

Many writers proffer lengthy, involved prayers or incantations as used by seers of the past. Melville tells the would-be sryer to follow the speaking of the prayer by putting a special ring on the little finger of his right hand, hanging a pentacle around his neck and drawing a magic circle with an ebony magic wand. Then, after more incantations, and the burning of the perfumes,

Most crystal-gazers say that the crystal seems to become foggy and opaque from the inside, and that the mists then clear away to reveal a vision which may range from swirling, abstract shapes to clearcut scenes from reality: 19th century woodcut from the Victoria and Albert Museum

the sryer can finally get down to some serious gazing.

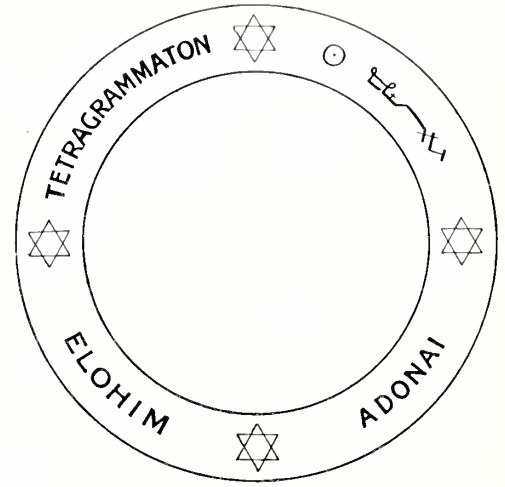
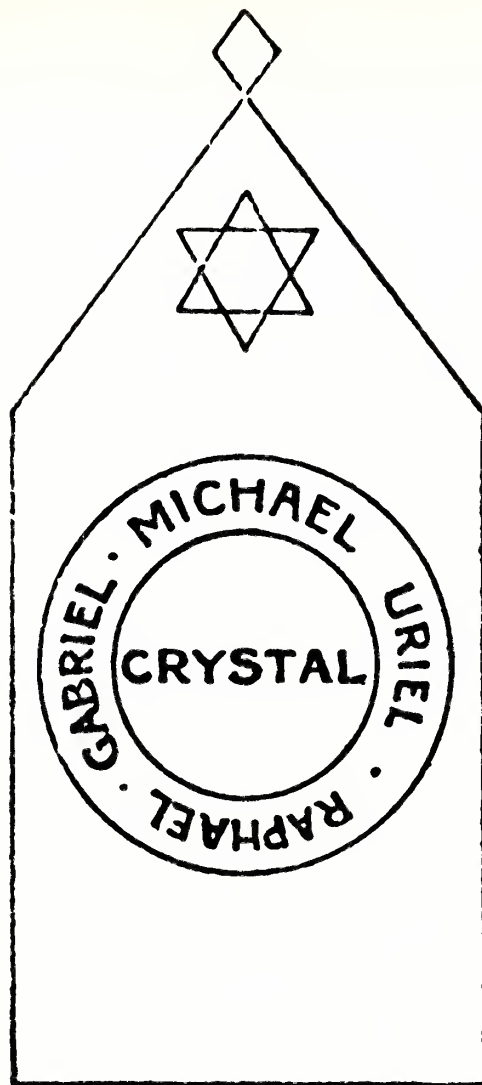
In modern times, the crystal-gazer merely stares at the globe with a certain concentration. (Many writers believe that he enters, or must enter, a trance. Others disagree.) F. W. H. Myers, the psychical researcher (see MYERS), recommended a dim light and about 10 to 15 minutes of gazing. But various sryers have claimed to be able to function quite well in bright light or in darkness, and each seems to have his or her own idea about how long it takes to see anything.

Visions in the Glass

What, then, does one expect to see? Melville follows older magical handbooks when he says that the ceremonies will conjure up an angelic spirit in the glass, though medieval authorities were convinced that all scrying was demonic and that the spirit was either Satan or one of his devils. Modern Spiritualists sometimes use the crystal to get in touch with spirits, and there have been claims that visual contact has thus been made with 'the beyond'. In these cases, it seems, the prophesying or fortune telling was done verbally, by the visible spirit to the sryer.

But most crystal-gazers today claim to see visions, not supernatural beings. What they see may range from swirling, abstract shapes to sharp-edged, explicit scenes from reality. Most agree that before the vision appears, the crystal seems to become foggy and opaque from the inside. Then the





mists dissolve to reveal the vision. From various scryers questioned by the Society for Psychical Research in the 1880s, come examples of things seen: a favourite but long dead dog, a moving coloured light resembling an eye, beautiful landscapes from some unknown land – and, of course, scenes from the future. A Miss Goodrich-Freer, for instance, reported several striking precognitions concerning coming journeys and messages; a Mrs A. W. Bickford-Smith glanced idly into someone else's crystal and within a few minutes saw a vision of an old friend's death, a precognition that came true within days.

Evil Black Clouds

The traditions of scrying have been partly systematized, so that even if the amateur never gets past the foggy stage he can still find meaning in the mists. White cloudiness, predictably, is a good portent, but black is evil. Green or blue cloudiness indicates coming joy; red, yellow or orange clouds herald disaster. If the clouds ascend, the answer is 'yes' to any question you have asked; descending clouds mean the answer is 'no'. And in a recent book on fortune telling, Basil Ivan Rakoczi explains that the vision of a globe within the crystal indicates travel; a skull indicates death or wisdom; a star, success or a warning; an eye, good luck or impending evil; a bird, some message or potential rebirth.

There are those who will say that crystal-gazing on any level is fraud and fakery. Others, more kindly, will suggest that the

Diagrams from John Melville's *Crystal Gazing and Clairvoyance*, first published in 1896, which recommends involved trappings and procedures for success in scrying. The crystal ball should stand in the centre of the Lamén, or 'Holy Table' (centre). A magic circle with hexagrams and names of power (left) should enclose the crystal and the gazer, and the top of the Lamén (right) should be similarly decorated

scryers are self-deluded – that they are hallucinated, thanks to all the magical preparations and their own suggestibility. Because many scryers have claimed to go into trance, it has been said that the visions spring out of their own unconscious minds, and this explanation may often apply, especially to the more amateur scryers. But

psychical researchers like Myers and Frank Podmore found that many scryers remained fully and normally conscious. Their own explanation made reference to the form of ESP called clairvoyance (see EXTRA-SENSORY PERCEPTION).

Theodore Besterman, in his scholarly and objective account of crystal-gazing, proffers several accounts (authenticated enough to satisfy him) of clairvoyance through the crystal. There can be little doubt that many people are firmly convinced that it works, that the crystal is a valid way of activating and focusing the scryer's clairvoyance. Sybil Leek goes so far as to say that, of all types of fortune teller operating today, 'the crystal-gazer is the person most likely to have a genuine psychic ability'.

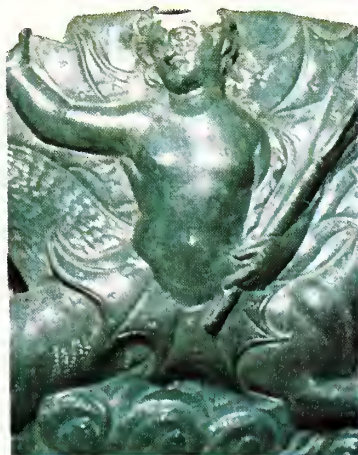
So in the end all the mumbo-jumbo of burning perfumes and mystic names can be swept aside; all that is necessary appears to be the simple crystal ball and the scryer's gift of clairvoyance. But for those who are about to buy a crystal and try it for themselves, a word of warning from John Melville. The crystal, he says (and Sybil Leek concurs), is a form of white magic. Use it with an evil purpose, and it will 'react upon the seer sooner or later with terrible effect'.

DOUGLAS HILL

FURTHER READING: F. Achad, *Crystal Vision through Crystal Gazing* (Yoga Pubn. Soc., 1976, c1923); John Melville, *Crystal Gazing* (S. Weiser, N. Y., 1970 reprint); T. Besterman, *Crystal-Gazing* (Rider, 1924).

Scylla and Charybdis

In classical mythology, Scylla was a monster with six heads, 18 rows of teeth, 12 feet, and a voice like the yelping of dogs, who lived in a cave and snatched seamen from passing ships; nearby lurked Charybdis, a whirlpool; Odysseus sailed between the two, which were later located in the Straits of Messina between Italy and Sicily.

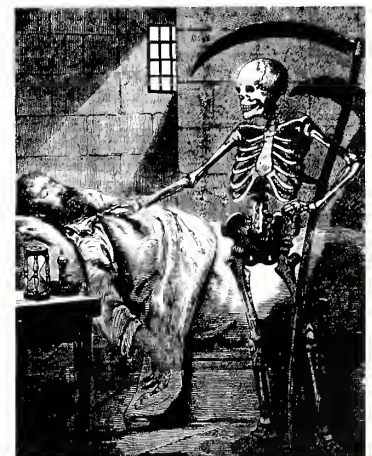


C. M. Dixon

Scythe

Symbol of death, and of time when linked with death; death is frequently represented as a skeleton carrying the scythe with which he mows down the living; Father Time is an old man with a scythe, derived from the sickle of the Roman god Saturn.

See DEATH.





The cradle of mankind and the grave of countless seamen, the sea is also the Great Mother who must be propitiated, her trinkets, the sea-shells, are endowed with powerful symbolism in terms of sex and magic

FROM THE SEA came the first forms of life, and for this reason it is justly called the Great Mother; many of whose names, Maia, Mara, Mary, Miriam, Myrna, are associated with *mare*, the Latin word for the sea, the ultimate source of all things.

The movement of the tides is a theme which permeates our thought, our language and our literature. Life comes in with the tide, according to superstition, and recedes with the ebb. 'There is a tide in the affairs of men,' says Shakespeare, 'which taken at

the flood, leads on to fortune.' The moon as supreme deity of the sea is mistress of the tides, and she is believed to exert her influence not merely upon these terrestrial fluids but upon the humoral fluids within the human body (see MOON).

Seamen once observed many moon superstitions. A new moon on a Saturday and a full moon on a Sunday were omens of misfortune. It was said that as many days as the moon is old at Michaelmas so many rainstorms may be expected before Christmas. The stars provided the first nautical chart, for they lit the way for the righteous while representing among them the goddess Venus who had arisen from the sea foam (see APHRODITE). To secure the aid of the sea goddess many seamen might have a star

Beautiful and treacherous, the sea elementals sought tribute from all Right In Dürer's *Das Meerwunder* a merman carries off a woman Above Hokusai's *The Wave*: Japanese fishermen still make cloth and rice gifts to the sea god

tattooed on one arm. In Roman belief a falling star was the sailor's storm warning.

The sun, the god of day, was represented by the Egyptians as the god Re who sailed through an azure sea to the Western horizon, and during the night he voyaged under the world, through the region of the dead. The female deities of the sea symbolized sexual love, and their effigies in the form of figure-heads graced the bows of sailing ships until about a century or so ago. Among sailors the naked body of a woman has always been





In the mysterious depths of the ocean, or haunting islets and shoals, lived creatures part human and part fish, uncanny beings which were both hostile to men and dangerously seductive. The mermaid personifies the beauty, the lure and the treachery of the sea, and her appearance is a portent of danger. *Left* Detail from a mosaic of the 3rd century AD. *Below* Japanese carving of a mermaid on a clam shell, itself a symbol of the female genitals. *Facing page* Hong Kong fisherfolk worship at an ornate altar during the sea goddess festival.



considered a luck-bringer, whether in effigy or reality. There was in fact a vulgar practice among 19th century seamen in which the female pudenda were 'touched for luck' before embarking upon a long voyage, a rite known as 'touching the bun'.

Human Tribute

Within the mysterious depths of the ocean, or haunting the islets and shoals, lived a host of minor elementals, the best known being the sea nymphs, or mermaids, the marine counterparts of the landsmen's water sprites, and their mermen (see MERMAIDS; NYMPHS). Like the gods of the land, the sea elementals demanded and received tribute from those who used their resources. Alexander the Great sacrificed a bull to Neptune on the brink of the ocean, and modern Mediterranean fishermen carve ships on harbour walls, these representing votive offerings to the mighty deities of the sea. The Romans sacrificed a bull before embarking on a voyage, and Japanese fishermen pay tribute to the sea god with gifts of cloth and rice.

Human tribute was also offered to the sea. It was long the custom in ancient Europe to hurl offenders over cliffs either to be dashed to pieces on the rocks below or drowned, a practice which was believed to propitiate the gods. A tradition survives that in pre-Norman times criminals were sacrificed in this barbaric manner over the white cliffs of Dover. An interesting relic of sea sacrifice is preserved in the ceremony known as 'crossing the line' in which Father Neptune

initiates the luckless passenger into a nautical way of life by a baptism of cold sea water and a ritual shave with a wooden razor. In ancient times similar rites were performed when passing important headlands or river mouths, at which places temples were often erected in order to be clearly visible from the sea.

In its original form sea sacrifice usually involved bloodshed; the Vikings used to run the keels of their long-ships over the bodies of bound prisoners in order to redden the planks with blood. In the South Seas no chief's canoe would be launched without its accompanying tribute of a human life.

It was once taken for granted that if the sea should ever be denied her tribute of a human life she would take another in its place. Arising directly from this old belief is the superstition that it is unlucky to rescue a drowning person as the sea will claim a substitute, usually the rescuer. The emphasis placed upon sacrifice to the sea deities is reflected in Rudyard Kipling's *Song of the Dead*:

We have fed our sea for a thousand years
And she calls us still unfed.
Though there's never a wave of all the waves
But marks our English dead.

Today, sacrifice is confined to breaking a bottle of champagne on the bows of the ship at the launching; if the bottle fails to break the sign is ominous for the ship's future. Among some fishermen it is the custom to deck the mast of a new fishing boat with garlands of flowers.

Monsters of the Deep

Any domain of the gods must of necessity have its devils; the more powerful the former, the more horrific the latter. The demons of the sea are monstrous creatures, vast, obscene and destructive. The Old Man of the Sea, the terrifying 'thing' that leaped on the back of Sinbad, in *The Arabian Nights* story was a typical sea monster.

The marine monsters of mythology were conjured out of the nightmare visions of seamen who were confused by mirages and haunted by fear of death. But like bad dreams they could never have been invented and are obviously caricatures of real beasts, endowed with the qualities of evil spirits. Thus the Remora, which sucks at the keel of a ship and enchants away the sexual proficiency of men and women, corresponds to some extent to the incubus and the vampire of the landsman. Monster sharks three times the length of ships were in effect underwater giants, as was the mighty Kraken (see KRAKEN), which was huge as an island. To guard against monsters the seaman painted huge eyes on the bows of his ship; the Japanese fisherman painted similar eyes on his junk. Sea monster could be overcome if shot with a silver bullet.

Charms and Luck-Bringers

The widespread assumption that every land creature had its opposite number in the sea found fanciful expression in the names given to marine creatures. An example is the sea-horse, which serves as Neptune

steed. There is a sea-cow, a sea-elephant, a sea-hare and a sea-mouse, as well as the humble dogfish and the catfish.

Sea coal, a symbol of sun worship, was often carried by the sailor as a lucky charm, and the sea-onion, when judiciously rubbed on his garden gate, was supposed to have power to protect his home against devils. A piece of amber in the pocket was a magical aid to health and vitality. In Japan, where dried crab is hung over doorways to destroy evil, the lobster is the symbol of longevity.

Cradle and Grave

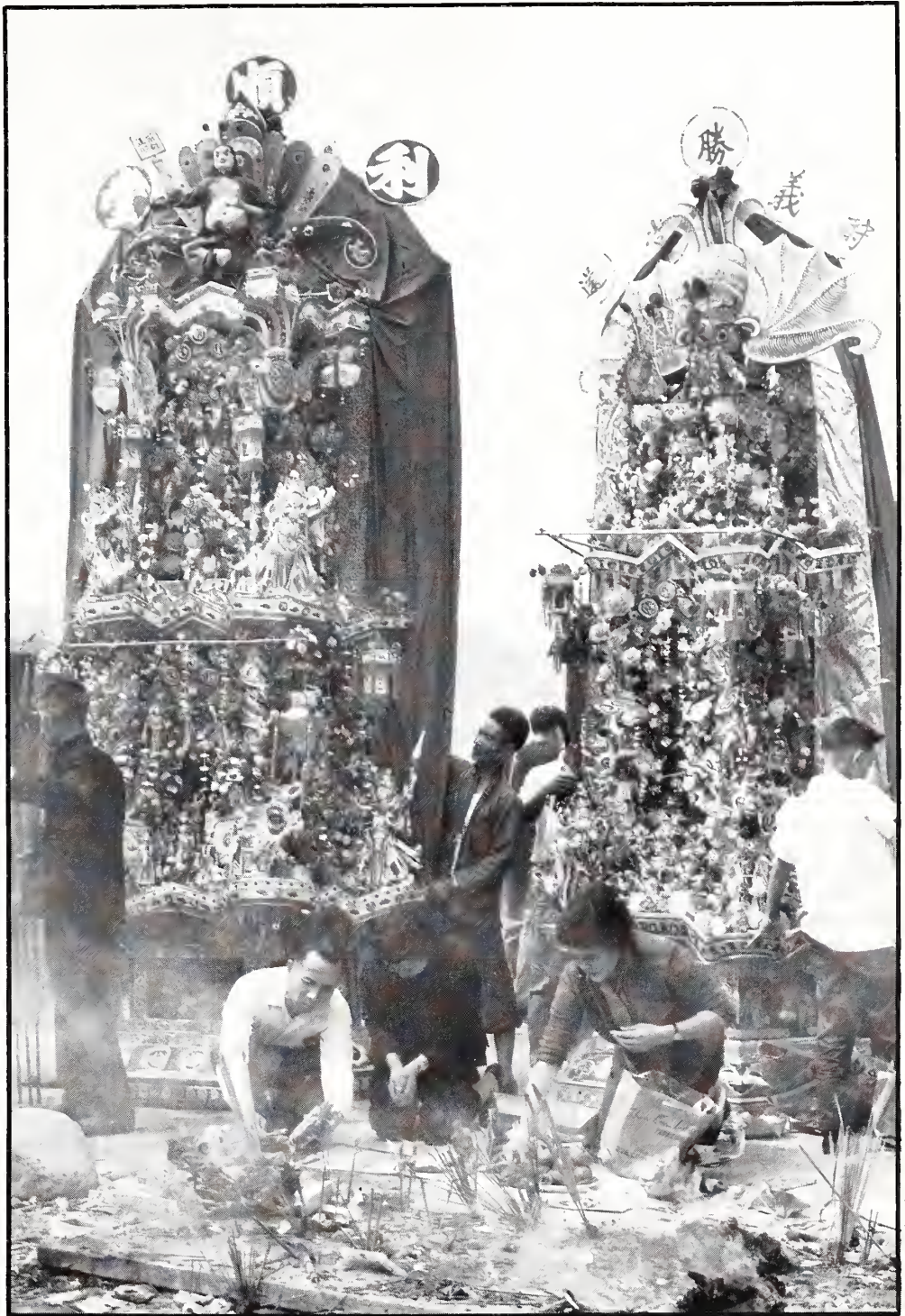
There is a tradition among the fishermen of the Ile de la Seine in France that the Ship of the Dead appears off that island blazing with infernal lights. On the wild Cornish coasts the living were summoned to enter the waters of death by hearing a dreadful voice howling from the deep. In his *Popular Romances of the West of England* Robert Hunt refers to the tradition that the drowned call out their own names within hearing of the living. A dark ship with black sails has been known to hug the Cornish coast when a Cornishman is about to die. For those drowned at sea there could be no rest, for popular superstition decreed that such lost souls were doomed to wander hopelessly a full 200 years while awaiting their last sepulchre. It was also believed that not until a sinless fisherman had been washed upon the shore could there be an end to a bad storm. Deep beneath the ocean were the domains of the Prince of Watery Death, Duffy or Duppy, or the more familiar 'Davy Jones' who stood guard over his locker of lost souls.

The sea is the fount of life, yet it is also a vast grave; it is therefore both womb and tomb, the cradle of mankind as well as the sepulchre of the seaman and his ship. Its demon-haunted depths are paralleled by its haunted surface where ghost ships once drifted along the trade routes used in the days of sail. In the British Isles, from Scotland to the Cornish coast, phantom barges have been seen hugging the coastline, and occasionally observed soaring above the beaches to drift slowly over the land. On the high seas the famous Flying Dutchman must sail through the tempests until the end of time. Another doomed ship, captained by the German nobleman Falkenburg, races through Northern waters with tongues of fire licking at its masthead.

Cursing from Pole to Pole

The lives of seamen were made still more wretched by the further hazard of witchcraft. From classical times onwards, tales have been told of sea hags who lured the seaman to sudden death upon the rocks or sank his ship by magic. Many of the world's greatest storms at sea have been ascribed to the black arts, like the one said to have been successfully conjured up by Sir Francis Drake in concert with Satan for the express purpose of wrecking the Spanish Armada. Devil's Point, near Plymouth, is still pointed out as the site of that transaction.

Land-based witches were known to pursue seamen who had given them offence, either in person or by means of long-range



curses which could apparently traverse the oceans from pole to pole uninterrupted by wind and tide.

Against the ever present menace of marine witchcraft the seaman could do little but consult his favourite white witch who, for a suitable fee, would tie a series of knots in a piece of string in order to bind the winds and would also unknot them again if paid sufficiently to do so. Even more lowering to a sailor's morale than the attentions of evil witches was the presence of a Finn among a ship's crew. Although popular in fair weather, Finns were regarded as wizards and were liable to disappear overboard should there be an adverse change in the direction of the wind.

Perhaps out of respect for the cosmic

forces represented by the ocean, the seafarer tattooed his arms and body with symbols of Tritons, sea serpents and sea nymphs. He avoided using the unlucky word 'pig' about his craft, and never swore at sea. If he ever lapsed from this strict code of conduct, he attempted to offset the resultant evil by sticking his knife into the ship's mast, thus subscribing to the belief in the protective properties of cold iron (see IRON). Furthermore he instructed his sweetheart ashore never under any circumstances to point her finger in the direction of his ship, since this doomed him to destruction.

The terrors of the sea were reinforced to a considerable extent by the seaman's child-like interpretation of every minor manifestation of man or Nature as a sign from the





Dulwich College Picture Gallery

Left *The Old Man of the Sea*, a terrifying monster, leaps on to Sinbad's back: medieval manuscript *Above On Ascension Day* each year the Doge of Venice symbolically married the sea, throwing a gold ring into the Adriatic and saying, 'We wed thee, O sea, in token of perpetual domination': the Doge's state galley, the *Bucentaur*, in a painting by Canaletto

gods. Among these hazards was St Elmo's Fire, a ball of flame which attaches itself to a ship's mast during electrical storms. The name is supposed to be a corrupt form of St Erasmus, an early martyr who is patron saint of sailors. A single ball of fire is an infallible sign that the worst of a storm has yet to come; a double flame provides consolation that it will soon blow itself out.

Cities Under the Sea

The sudden appearance of islands, hallucinatory and otherwise, have made the sea even more mysterious. Frequently formed by volcanic action, they have emerged and later plunged beneath the waves. One of the best known mythical isles is St Brendan's Isle (see BRENDAN).

Like mirages, frozen ships have been observed poised on ice floes in Arctic regions, as in 1851, when two such craft suddenly materialized off the coast of Newfoundland. The treasure-guarding ghost was another type of phantom conjured up by the sailor's imagination. The treasures were said to be pirate hoards under the protection of spirits.

Mankind, whether on land or sea, has an

obsessional need to create phantom cities in unpopulated deserts, build castles in the air, or construct lost civilizations beneath the waves. The best known submarine civilization is Atlantis (see ATLANTIS). Another famous legendary continent is Lemuria, supposedly submerged beneath the Indian Ocean (see LEMURIA).

Britain is said to have many cities and lands buried beneath the sea (see FLOOD). Lyonesse with its Arthurian associations lies perhaps somewhere between Lands End and the Scillies; the Seven Rocks which jut out of the waters are supposed to mark the site. From the lost world of Lyonesse a church bell has been heard tolling within the last half century.

In the symbolism of dreams, a calm sea means attainment and a storm-wrecked one anger and disquiet. A sea voyage is a sexual voyage and undersea currents represent spiritual forces. In art the sea may be represented by the crescent moon, by the dolphin, the white horse or the sea-horse. For most of us the sea is not so much a symbol, however, as a shrine for the renewal of the tired spirit: all adults are transformed into children by the seaside, for the sea is the source of the rejuvenating power of the eternal mother.

Beach-combers have always been fascinated by seashells both for their beauty and for their curious shapes, while their association with that infinite well of creativity, the sea, has endowed them with a powerful symbolism in terms of ornament, magic and sex. The seashell has become the symbol of

inaccessibility and reserve; it is also a symbol of immortality, and was inscribed on Christian tombs as a sign that only the husk of man remained within, for the soul or essence had moved onwards. This concept seems very ancient, for sea-shells were placed by primitive men in the graves of their dead.

The scallop is an emblem of Aphrodite, Greek goddess of love. Because of its ray-like flutings it is also a symbol of light, and as a symbol of safe travel it inherits a reputation acquired in the Middle Ages when it was worn as a badge by pilgrims who had made the journey to the shrine of St James of Compostela in Spain. Perhaps a last relic of this medieval pilgrimage was the celebration of Cockleshell Day, the feast of St James, on 25 July: small urchins with home-made grottoes or piles of seashells sat in the gutters crying out plaintively to passers-by, 'Please remember the grotter.'

Used as amulets, seashells are said to be extremely effective against 'overlooking' by the Evil Eye, especially the cowrie, which resembles the human eye. The conch confers oratory, learning and wealth, the clam restores life. Even modern city dwellers often preserve shells gathered at the seaside as mascots. Along the Atlantic seaboard of France young children sometimes wear necklaces of limpet shells for protection, and in the St Malo area of Brittany seashells are left in the cradle to ward off ill luck. And in this part of France the use of shells in the construction of crosses is not uncommon.

ERIC MAPLE

SEAL

THE FOLKLORE of the seal owes much to the animal's resemblance, in some respects, to a human being. The round head with its large, staring eyes, appearing suddenly out of the water near a boat or an observer on the rocks, tends to arouse the sense of mystery associated with semi-human creatures. The curiosity of seals induces them to swim close to where there are sounds of talking or music, and some of their calls, especially when heard echoing in sea caves, have a weird human timbre. Even on shore some of the movements made by a seal's flippers bear a grotesque resemblance to human gestures. It must also be remembered that people living near great rivers, lakes or the sea have commonly supposed the water to be inhabited by strange beings with partly human, partly animal, characteristics.

Beliefs and customs concerning seals have naturally been most detailed and numerous where acquaintance with these mammals is greatest — among those who depend on them for food, clothing and light. The Inuit attitude to seals (see INUIT) is similar to that of other primitive hunting peoples to their quarry. In Baffin Land, and around Hudson Bay, a man who killed a seal was regarded as committing an offence for which he must make atonement. The taboos he had to observe after such a transgression were basically similar to those imposed for killing a man. He must not scrape frost from a window, clean drips from his lamp, shake

his bed, scrape hair from skins or work in wood, stone or ivory. A woman was forbidden to comb her hair or wash her face.

The scrupulous observation of these rules was essential; otherwise the goddess Sedna's fingers would give her pain, for seals were believed to have originated from her severed fingers. Thus, there was no clear distinction between men and animals, and divine beings were believed to have some affinity with both. Almost all observances were designed to retain Sedna's goodwill or appease her wrath. She was the mythical mother of the marine mammals which lived in the lower world and controlled the destinies of men. Human motherhood was also her concern. If a woman concealed the fact that she had given birth prematurely, people who came near her would be adversely affected so that the seals would avoid them, and the offence would be attached to the souls of the animals, who would carry information of it down to Sedna.

When a seal was killed, its soul had to wait three days before returning to her, so the men responsible rested for three days after the animal's death. Unless the taboos were scrupulously observed the seals would evade their hunters. These procedures helped to conserve the food supply by preventing ruthless exploitation. Greenlanders avoided breaking the skulls of seals but kept them intact by the door so that the souls of the animals might not be offended and frighten other seals away.

In Kamchatka, Siberia, mimetic cere-

monies were performed before sealing expeditions in order to further their success. Packets of herbs were placed to represent seals and miniature replicas of boats were drawn along the sand. The Eskimo of Bering Strait preserved the swim bladders of seals as the repositories of the beasts' souls, offering them food. The bladders were suspended and made to dance by pulling a string while the people flopped around in a dance imitating the movements of the animals. The shaman, bearing a huge torch, ran to the ice, with the men following, carrying the bladders on their harpoons. The bladders were then thrust below the ice, so that the souls of the dead animals could be reborn, and then the participants purified themselves by leaping over a fire.

In certain areas where the caribou were hunted, Sedna was believed to dislike these beasts and certain rules had to be observed lest she should be annoyed. Probably this indicated that when the Inuit moved south and were able to augment their resources by hunting caribou as well as seals this new activity was not readily assimilated into their culture.

Maidens and Mermaids

The seal legends in the British Isles have such affinities with those of the Scandinavian countries that it is tempting to believe they were introduced by Norse invaders, though some elements seem to belong to earlier modes of thought. Similarities between stories of seal maidens and of mermaids, both of whom were cred-



Facing page below The seal's semi-human appearance, cries and gestures lie behind the numerous legends of families said to be descended from seal ancestors, and the stories of seal maidens who married humans but eventually returned to the sea **Right** 18th-century drawing of two seals from an account of Admiral Anson's voyage round the world

ited with prophetic gifts, suggest that the traditions fused. The seal maiden tradition may have contributed to the northern mermaid legends (see MERMAIDS).

In the west of Ireland, the islands north of the Scottish mainland, and the Faroes, certain clans, families or persons are said to be descended from seals. The sept (division of a clan) of the Mackays in Sutherland are known as 'the descendants of the seal'. The laird of Borgie in Sutherland saw a mermaid seeking a place to land. He stole her cowl (or cap), which gave him power over her and she became his wife. She told him her life was bound up with the cowl. The laird hid it in the middle of a haystack, but eventually his servants found it and showed it to the mermaid. She took it and, leaving her baby son in his cot, plunged into the sea. From time to time she came close inshore to see her son, weeping that she could not take him with her. He and his descendants became famous swimmers and it was said that they could not drown.

A similar story is told of the MacCodrums of North Uist. In Colonsay in Argyllshire, the McPhees were held to be descendants of a drowned maiden whose sealskin the clan chief had found by the shore. It is said that people belonging to such families must not kill seals. The Coneelys in the West of Ireland were said to have been seals – hence their name, which has that meaning. According to the tale it became changed to Connelly. Comparable stories were told of the O'Sullivan and O'Flahertys of Kerry, the Macnamaras of Clare, and the Achill Islanders. In them we have the vestiges of very ancient beliefs in which a clear distinction between men and animals was not recognized.

It is debatable whether these beliefs have been influenced by notions once prevalent in the Arctic and sub-Arctic where men, by means of mimetic performances and wearing or wielding skins or parts of animals, identified themselves with seals. They must be viewed in relation to the widespread swan maiden theme (see SWAN), according to which birds are seen to alight, doff their feather garments and reveal themselves as women to a watching man who, stealing a robe, makes one of the maidens his wife. The basic motif is similar and is certainly of great antiquity.

The earliest literary references to seal people are by Greek writers – Hesiod, Pindar, Apollodorus – but oral traditions may date from much earlier. The Phocians of Central Greece were said to be descended from seals. According to myth, Phocus (the name still used in the scientific classifications of seals) was a son of the Nereid or sea nymph Psamathe, who had been pursued by Aeacus and, in spite of transforming herself into a seal, was forced to submit to his



National Maritime Museum/Michael Holford

embraces. If, as has been suggested by Robert Graves, the dance of the 50 Nereids on the shore at the wedding of Thetis, and her return to the sea after the birth of Achilles, was a fragment of the same myth this would increase the story's resemblance to northern versions.

One such story told in the Faroes is about a young man who stole a seal maiden's skin while the seal people danced on the shore. This legend has a tragic ending as, in spite of the warning given by the seal maiden in a dream, men kill her seal husband and children and a curse comes upon the islanders so that many are killed on the cliffs or drowned at sea. The theme of kinship with man which underlies many of the seal traditions has not prevented their ruthless

exploitation: nine species are thought in danger of becoming extinct.

In 1616 a Scottish woman was brought before a court on a charge of offering a man's fingerbone to be used in order to cause butter to come more readily in the churn. She was convicted although she said that the bone came from a seal. It is doubtful, however, whether seals have ever been connected with witchcraft.

A story said to have been current in 19th-century Greece seems to be a recent fabrication. A swimmer, venturing too far out to sea, might be seized and strangled by a seal. The creature would then carry the corpse to the shore and weep over it. Thus arose a saying that when a woman wept false tears she 'cried like a seal'.
E.A. ARMSTRONG

Enthusiastic belief in the imminence of the return of Christ to earth has not been extinguished, despite the tendency of orthodox Christianity to see the Second Coming more as a spiritual enlightenment than as a bodily return

SECOND COMING

EVER SINCE Jesus announced that he would come again to earth, Christians have looked for his return, the Second Advent or Second Coming. The internal evidence of the New Testament suggests that this was a lively expectation among many of the Christians of the 1st century, and St Paul, while clearly believing that Christ would return, had explicitly to counsel some early converts that this event might not occur quite as quickly as they desired. There is little doubt that the promised return of the Messiah was itself a very important element in the spread of Christianity, which had its earliest converts precisely among the urban working and slave classes who had most to hope for from a dramatic change in social organization.

The coming Messiah was, of course, a Christian inheritance from Judaism. The Jews had looked forward to a saviour (whom they had expected, naturally enough, to emerge from the royal line) during their captivity in Babylon, and in doing so showed a disposition that has since been found among other oppressed and underprivileged peoples. In Christianity, belief was emphatically in a spiritual leader who would return again to save his self-selected voluntary adherents. Undoubtedly many of those who believed in the Second Coming of Christ believed that on his return he would come with an army of angels and in triumph, as much a military saviour as a disseminator of religious truths. His kingdom was, for many of them, to be earthly as much as heavenly, and he was to combine the guarantee of paradise for his followers on this earth with a prospect of eternal life hereafter. Even some of the Church Fathers, in their depiction of life in the millennium, the 1000 years of peace which Christ was to institute, entertained very material ideas of what this paradisaical state would be like.

But ideas of a Second Coming were clearly potentially highly disruptive of any

stable social order. As the Church itself became established and thoroughly integrated with political and civic institutions, it was itself threatened increasingly by the type of enthusiasm to which ideas of the return of Christ might give rise. The idea of the millennium was spiritualized, particularly by Origen and St Augustine, and the idea of Christ's return to earth was pushed back to at least the year 1000 AD.

As the Church discovered that more spiritualized and less material conceptions of salvation, and heavenly, rather than earthly, prospects of bliss were better guarantors of social order, an alternative strand in Christian eschatology became emphasized. Christians were increasingly taught to expect a new life in heaven to begin at some time after death, and after the penalty for sins had been paid, and provided that the individual had lived on earth in obedience to the Church, and had sought forgiveness of sins in confession.

The Returning Emperor

Second adventism never disappeared, however, and the appeal to the scriptures was enough to ensure its credibility. In the disturbed centuries of the Middle Ages a number of movements occurred in which the lively expectation of Christ's return, or sometimes of the return of surrogate or deputy Christs, produced severe social disorder. The votaries of these movements were largely the new landless urban classes who, being gathered in the growing towns, escaped traditional means of social control, and felt something of their own strength as a class. Among them messianic ideas quickly took root in periods of civil unrest or during catastrophes such as plague, famine, prolonged warfare or invasion. In north-eastern France, Belgium and the Rhine valley a series of millennial movements, and beliefs in the Second Coming of Christ or some other saviour, persisted from the 11th to the 14th centuries in one form or another. Sometimes these movements arose in anticipation of the returning saviour: more commonly, some self-styled hero proclaimed himself as Christ.

One of the most celebrated of such pretenders was Tanchelm, a man who had been a notary at the court of Robert II, Count of Flanders. Echoing popular sentiment and papal injunctions against the

worldliness of the clergy, many of whom lived in open concubinage and some of whom had bought their appointments or owed them to nepotism, Tanchelm gathered a following of peasants. He dispensed them from paying tithes to the Church, and as his hold over his following grew he began to claim for himself first the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, and then the attribute of deity. For several years, until he was finally killed by a priest, Tanchelm commanded a wide following throughout Brabant and the area of Utrecht, and in Antwerp. He was revered as God and is even reported to have distributed his bath-water to be used in place of the Eucharist.

The centuries of the Crusades provided a number of living warriors around whom legends accumulated: they were returned heroes, or were the nominees of Charlemagne, who was also to arise to lead Christians against the Moslems. Emico, Count of Leiningen, claimed stigmata on his back which were supposed to represent the Cross, and which he took as a designation of his destiny as emperor in the Last Days. Popular legends ascribed a similar role to Louis VIII of France and, after the death of Frederick Barbarossa on the third crusade in 1190, his return was widely expected among the German peasantry; the legend of a returning warrior saviour was subsequently transferred to his grandson, Frederick II, especially after his conquest of Jerusalem. While popular second adventism had always drawn in a very general way on Christian tradition, by the beginning of the 13th century it had been powerfully reinforced by the prophesies of Joachim of Fiore, an abbot who had drawn scriptural support in favour of a version of history that was itself to be regarded as the gospel for the Last Days. The year 1260 was foretold as the end of the age, and was marked by the first outbreak in Italy, of the self-scourging of the Flagellants, who went in procession from town to town, where they beat themselves and cried for mercy before the wrath

The promised return of the Messiah was an important element in the spread of Christianity but it was also highly disruptive of a stable social order, and the Church increasingly emphasized a future of heavenly bliss rather than of salvation on earth: *The Second Coming of Christ*, Spanish, completed 1109

One King Over All

It was not as an ordinary king but as a Messiah of the Last Days that Bockelson (John of Leyden) imposed himself... The new king did everything possible to emphasize the unique significance of his accession. The streets and gates in the town were given new names; Sundays and feastsdays were abolished and the days of the week were renamed on an alphabetical system; even the names of new-born children were chosen by the king according to a special system. Although money had no function in Munster a new, purely ornamental, coinage was created. Gold and silver coins were minted, with inscriptions summa-

rising the whole millennial phantasy which gave the kingdom its meaning. 'The Word has become Flesh and dwells in us' - 'One King over all. One God, one Faith, one Baptism.' A special emblem was devised to symbolize Bockelson's claim to absolute spiritual and temporal dominion over the whole world: a globe, representing the world, pierced by the two swords (of which hitherto pope and emperor had each borne one) and surmounted by a cross inscribed with the words: 'One king of righteousness over all.' The king himself wore this emblem, modelled in gold, hanging by a gold chain from his neck. His atten-

dants wore it as a badge on their sleeves; and it was accepted in Munster as the emblem of the new state. The new king dressed in magnificent robes and wore rings, chains and spurs made from the finest metal by the most skilful craftsmen in the town. Gentlemen-at-arms and a whole train of officers of the court were appointed. Whenever the king appeared in public he was accompanied by his suite, also splendidly dressed. Divara, who as Bockelson's chief wife was proclaimed queen, also had her suite and held court like her husband.

Norman Cohn *The Pursuit of the Millennium*



to come. The movement recrudesced at times of social and natural calamities – particularly at the time of the Black Death in Europe (but not in England) – for several decades afterwards (see **FLAGELLATION**).

Perhaps the most powerful expression of faith in the Second Coming in pre-Reformation Europe was that of the Taborites, the extreme wing of the Bohemian Hussite movement, which was embattled against the Church in the second decade of the 15th century. They believed that it was emphatically Christ who was to return again and bring peace and equity to the world, and at first February 1420 was to be the time of the apocalypse. Although the date passed, the Taborites, who instituted a communistic society of their own, took upon themselves the task of purging the world of evil in anticipation of the return and reign of Christ. In the new dispensation that was to come there would be neither sickness nor death, want nor privation. The clergy would be swept away and taxes would be unknown. In anticipation of the Second Coming they set up their own communistic society, and continued to conduct their war against the Catholic armies until Christ should descend with his angelic host to lead them to victory. Under their commander, John Zizka, the Taborites went into battle with a chalice raised up on a pole ahead of them, but were eventually defeated.

Battle of Armageddon

The radical sects that emerged during the Reformation, particularly the Anabaptist groups, different as they were one from another, shared a common expectation of the Second Advent. In the Hutterites, this faith in Christ's eventual return reinforced their insistence on orderly life, their pacifism and the sharing of goods in common (see **HUTTERIAN BRETHERN**). Among the much more aberrant Anabaptist sect at Munster, Westphalia, who seized the town in 1534, faith in the personal intervention of Christ in man's affairs led to a series of events unparalleled in history (see **ENTHUSIASM**).

Although belief in the Second Coming has frequently given rise to false claims by would-be messiahs, the idea remains theologically orthodox, even though it has been increasingly spiritually interpreted. In the 17th century, however, second adventism gained new respectability from the writings of the theologian Joseph Mede (1586-1638), who made plain the full scriptural warrant for the belief. Only a century later was this inconvenient and potentially revolutionary teaching accommodated into a new theological framework, when Daniel Whitby (1638-1726) of Trinity College, Oxford, formulated an interpretation of the concept which has been generally accepted by the established and orthodox churches.

Most literal biblicists, following Mede, and most of the fundamentalist sects of the 19th and 20th centuries in particular, have interpreted scripture in the traditional way. They believe that at an undisclosed time Jesus will return on earth. That event will be associated with the battle of Armageddon, usually depicted as a struggle between the forces of good and evil. After the triumph of



Christ, the earth will be granted a period of peace for 1000 years – the millennium. Whitby, however, suggested that the various scattered scriptural texts that are adduced as relating to the Second Coming indicated a different order of events. First there would be 1000 years of peace on earth, as men steadily accepted the Christian scriptures, and then at the end of this period Christ would reappear. This second interpretation was readily accepted by increasingly optimistic 18th- and 19th-century clerics, many of whom saw the missionary work among the heathen as the process of establishment of this millennium. Similarly, some of the early social gospellers of the United States believed that a practical application of Christianity was a type

of social salvation that would bring the millennium into being. The fundamentalist sects, however, have never accepted this reorganization of the texts and believe in a much more cataclysmic and earlier Second Advent.

The troubled events of the English Civil War gave rise to a number of extreme groups among the Puritans, some of whom were avowedly adventist. Some of these revolutionary groups, such as the Diggers led by Gerrard Winstanley, pinned their hopes much more to ethical precepts derived from the scriptures than to Christ's intervention on earth. Others, however, had the strong sense that they lived at the end of time, and saw their role as being to prepare the public, and to persuade the government to



Expectation of the Second Coming and the appearance of messianic leaders has been particularly marked in times of plague, famine or prolonged war. Left: Durer's vision of *The Day of Wrath* that would precede the 1000 years of peace of the millenium. Above: The Anabaptist leader John of Leyden with the orb and two swords symbolizing his claim to spiritual and secular power; in a short but fanatical rule, he was proclaimed king of the rebel town of Munster in expectation of the Second Coming

prepare, for the early return of Christ.

Prominent among these groups were the Fifth Monarchy Men. It would be a mistake to describe as a sect this party, who believed that the fifth monarchy described in the scriptures was now to be set up following the overthrow of the man of blood, Charles I. It was not sufficiently organized or coherent to merit that title. Those who believed in the fifth monarchy were diligent readers of the scriptures, or those prepared to be persuaded by a small group of preachers who actively canvassed this point of view. Chief among these was John Rogers, who vigorously counselled Cromwell about the parliamentary forms he should adopt. Undoubtedly most of the Fifth Monarchy believers were prepared to wait passively for the Advent to occur, but a small number twice lost patience and led riots in London. These supporters of the preacher Thomas Venner were scarcely a revolutionary force, however, and, after suppression in the early years of Charles II, the Fifth Monarchy enthusiasts eventually became convinced that the Stuarts were, if not the legitimate, the only immediately likely monarchs.

Messianic hopes continued sporadically throughout the 18th century, and belief in the Second Advent is usual among most sectarian groups in this period. Joanna Southcott believed that she was about to give birth to the new Messiah when, rather late in life, she developed a dropsical condition which had some of the appearances of a pregnancy (see SOUTHCOTT). The Shakers

came to believe that their leader, Mother Ann Lee, had been a type of second appearing of Christ (see SHAKERS). In the early 19th century, George Rapp, who led a group of pietists from Wurttemberg to Pennsylvania, taught a methodical and frugal way of life to his communistic followers as the proper preparation for the Second Coming, which he daily expected (see COMMUNISTIC RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS). The Mormons, although a many-sided movement with other preoccupations, were avowedly adventist (see MORMONS).

Seventh Day Adventists

The most significant development of second adventism in modern times, however, was begun in the early 1830s by William Miller, a farmer and Baptist preacher of up-state New York. Miller had become convinced from the scriptures that Christ was to return on a specified date in 1843. After nursing this conviction silently for some years he was induced to begin preaching. His scriptural exposition immediately found a receptive audience among the congregations of the Baptist, Presbyterian and Congregational churches of New York state, and in neighbouring states. A considerable number of ministers were convinced, and a campaign was launched by them to spread the news of the Advent throughout the area. When the designated date in March 1843 passed uneventfully, disappointment led to a belief that it had been wrongly calculated, and a date in October 1843, and then, later, a date in 1844, were predicted as the time of Christ's return.

When the last date passed, the second adventists, bewildered and disappointed, were nonetheless not entirely disillusioned. A period of re-assessment followed from which emerged the addition of several new articles of faith to the creed that some of the Millerites had espoused. In particular it was believed that the advent had not occurred because Christ had not finished his work as high priest in heaven – the work of blotting out sin. It was necessary for Christ to investigate the sins of men to determine who should be resurrected from the dead. Mankind had failed to recognize the biblical law set out in the Old Testament to which adherence was necessary if man was to be redeemed.

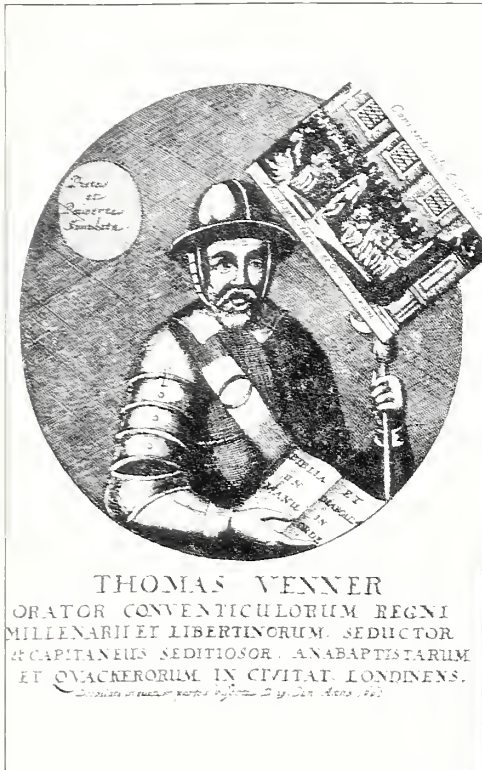
In particular, this group of believers came to accept that it was necessary to observe the seventh day as the sabbath, and to conform to the dietetic laws of the Old Testament. These prescriptions steadily became more and more accepted, and they were confirmed by further visions to one of their leaders, Ellen Harmon – later an important influence on the movement as Ellen White, after her marriage to an Adventist preacher and organizer. The sect that eventually organized itself formally in 1860 took the name of the Seventh Day Adventist movement, to emphasize the two principal items of faith. From that time on it became an active body for the evangelization of Christendom, canvassing in particular the adoption of the seventh day sabbath. Over the course of time the intense excitement concerning the Advent as such

has inevitably dimmed, but the urgency of inducing men to keep the proper sabbath is prompted by the fact that only when the seventh day is kept holy will one essential condition for the Advent be fulfilled. The Adventists presently extended their evangelizing beyond North America. In 1874 the first missionary was sent abroad, to Switzerland, and others were soon at work in other European countries, in Australia and New Zealand, and in time in Africa, Asia and South America. By the early 1990s the Adventists claimed a worldwide membership of more than seven million, with many recruits gained in eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union.

Although its origins cannot be traced directly to the Millerite enthusiasms, another sect that emerged in the same decade was the Christadelphians. The founder of this movement, John Thomas, had been a doctor who devoted himself to biblical study. He came to the conclusion that orthodox Christianity erred in many respects and he preached the literal Second Advent of Christ and the need for men to be baptized only after they fully understood the truths of scripture. Thomas rejected Christian conceptions of heaven, hell, the soul and the doctrine of the Trinity. He believed that nothing of a man survived death, but that it was in the power of Christ to resurrect the body at the time of his Second Advent. Apart from this, death was annihilation. No one unbaptized into the truth had any prospect of this resurrection and salvation, hence those who were not Christadelphian, even the unbaptized children of those in the sect, had no hope of future life. Nor would all Christadelphians be saved, since much depended on their obedience to Christ's injunctions.

Thomas set no date for the Second Coming, although he clearly believed it to be soon, and was disposed in the early years of his teaching to identify the existing principalities on the world scene with the various allegorical figures in the revelations of Daniel, Ezekiel and the book of Revelation, on which his prophetic exegesis was based. The movement that he called into being was more successful in Britain than in the United States, and from 1848 onwards little groups of believers sprang up in many British cities, most conspicuously in Birmingham. Although Christadelphians were periodically inclined to believe that particular years must see the coming of the Lord, they also stressed the text that the Lord would come as a thief in the night, and wherever the various reinterpretations of scriptural prophecy led, they refused to fix firm dates. The sect regards itself as in some way associated with the Jews, to whom God's Old Testament promises (which will surely not be disregarded) were made, and for some time they called their meeting houses 'synagogues'.

The largest adventist sect in Christendom is the Jehovah's Witnesses, which began under the preaching of Pastor Charles Russell in Pennsylvania in the 1870s (see JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES). Witness teaching has undergone many changes since Russell's death in 1916. He had preached that the



Left Contemporary engraving of Thomas Venner, the militant Fifth Monarchy leader: he and his followers believed they had a duty to prepare the public and the government for the early return of Christ as written in the scriptures **Right** Poster announces the defeat of an insurrection by the Fifth Monarchy Men in 1660; weary of waiting for the appearance of the Fifth Monarchy, they led riots in London against the government of Charles II

number of occasions. Because of the appeal of the Old Testament, with its stories of the oppression of the Jews under foreign conquest, for Africans, the returning Messiah has sometimes been seen more as Moses than as Jesus. The 'Israelites' who followed Enoch Mgijima, at Bullhoek in South Africa in the 1920s, saw themselves as oppressed Jews and their leader as a returned prophet who would protect them from the whites. Adopting the name Israelites and a number of Israelitish practices, this group settled in a prohibited area in open defiance of the government, disrupted local village life and eventually set itself in open hostility to government orders. Mgijima encouraged his following to threaten the South African police and later the troops with armed conflict, and in the subsequent clash a large number of the sectarians were shot.

A case of second adventism more clearly based on Christian examples was that of Simon Kimbangu, a Baptist catechist of the lower Congo who was imprisoned by the Belgian authorities in 1921 after he had become the centre of a healing cult (see NEW RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS). In Central Africa also, a number of local leaders arose who promised the coming of a black Christ, who would throw off the yoke of white oppression and institute a new dispensation. The most prominent of these were Mwana Lesa, a Jehovah's Witness who claimed to be God, and Elliot Kamwana of the Watchman movement, which derived its messianic ideas directly from the literature of the Jehovah's Witnesses.

The Second Coming is a recurrent theme in the history of less developed peoples, and particularly of those who have been exposed to Christian or Moslem influence, in each of which traditions the returning saviour is contained. It manifests a particular stage of cultural development in which men believe that their present woes and difficulties can

Advent had occurred in 1874, and expected the end of this dispensation in 1914. Subsequently these dates were revised under Judge Rutherford, Russell's successor, but the movement believes that Christ returned in 1914, and will manifest himself fully in the very near future.

The Return of Moses

The tendency of orthodox Christianity has been to see the promised return of Christ increasingly as a spirit-enlightenment of Christians rather than as a literal descent of God to earth. The idea has been less and less emphasized in recent times and, with the disappearance of the acceptance of the literal inspiration of scripture, many clergymen would today dismiss the literal belief in the Second Coming as misplaced. Faith in the return of a known saviour has, however, been common in new religions that have been affected by Christianity or that have arisen as local variants of it. In Africa in particular, the idea of particular leaders returning to lead their people – often to military victory – has gained currency on a

London's Glory ¹⁹¹⁹

O R,
The RIOT and RUINE
Of the Fifth Monarchy Men, and
all their Adherents.

Being a true and perfect Relation of
their desperate and bloody Attempts and
Practises in the City of London on Mon-
day, Tuesday, and Wednesday last,
Jan. the ninth, 1660.

Wherein by the Loyal and Valourous
behaviour of the Citizens in defence of
the Kings Majesty, their own Rights
and Priviledges; they gave a total
defeat to those bloody
T R A I T O R S.

Together with a perfect List of the
names of all those that are taken Prison-
ers, and secured in Newgate, the
Powlery Counter and other
prisons,

Printed for C. D., 1661.

be assuaged if only the right strong man, endowed with divine strength, can be found who will change things. It betokens a faith in the power of the exceptional individual which, while appropriate to a society in which social structural factors and the causes of natural calamities are misunderstood or unknown, becomes increasingly untenable in the highly rationalized and bureaucratic organization of modern society.

(See also MESSIANIC MOVEMENTS.)

BRYAN WILSON

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Second Sight

Ability to perceive things not visible to ordinary sight, in the future or at a distance; modern psychical research suggests that some people have this ability to a marked degree, and it may be latent in all human beings and possibly in other animals.

See CLAIRVOYANCE; EXTRA-SENSORY PERCEPTION; SPONTANEOUS PSI EXPERIENCES.

Selene

Greek moon goddess, of little importance in myth or cult; said to have been the sister or daughter of the sun; she fell in love with Endymion, who fathered on her 50 children, the 50 months between each celebration of the Olympic Games; other, more important, goddesses connected with the moon were Hera, Artemis and Hecate.

See MOON.



Renouncing other men's goals of pleasure, possessions and worldly ambition, the ascetic seeks spiritual strength through self-denial and even self-torture

SELF-DENIAL

WHEN ALEXANDER THE GREAT invaded India in 327 BC he was curious to see the famed Indian yogis, and he took the opportunity of visiting one of their retreats. He found them sitting motionless and silent, emaciated by long fasts and blackened by exposure to the elements. Through an interpreter the world conqueror asked them what they desired, and whether he could do anything for them. In answer, one of the naked sages, without deigning to look up, waved his hand to indicate that he just wanted Alexander and his entourage to get out of the way of the sun.

Such supreme contempt for worldly comforts was by no means confined to Hindu ascetics. Throughout recorded history men and women in all parts of the world have scorned contentment, luxury and fame, and have deliberately cultivated as virtues and adopted as part of their lives, practices that are by nature difficult, disagreeable and even painful. When it is within a man's power to enjoy what is pleasurable, it is strange to find that he often chooses the harsher alternative. Yet that, in the form of asceticism, has indeed been part of the religious ideal of many stalwart souls through the ages.

The term asceticism comes from a Greek word meaning training, discipline or self-denial, undertaken to acquire skill and stamina for victory in athletic games. The Roman philosophers known as the Stoics gave it a more austere significance. To them it implied a complete disregard for worldly success, for popular praise and physical pleasures. And they were not alone in recognizing the need for personal discipline and self-denial. The Spartans among the ancient Greeks, the Samurai warriors of medieval Japan, Tibetan monks sitting in solitude in icy Himalayan caves, are all representatives of this stern tradition.

All forms of self-denial entail the development of the will which is the motive element in human beings. Mostly the will prompts a man along the line of least resistance, for people generally prefer not to exert themselves more than necessary. They do not will, but merely wish, and their wishes are vague pleasurable day-dreams that do not call for undue effort of any kind. But when controlled and directed the will can become the focus of tremendous power. A will that is fixed on its goal, and inflexible and unwearied in its purpose, must attain what it seeks, for obstacles appear to melt away before its impetus. In confrontation with others it exercises a masterful and almost

hypnotic power, so that few can resist its impact. But to develop such a will demands long preparatory training in self-denial, asceticism and self-punishment.

There have always been men and women who have willingly accepted pain and sought punishment; some from a sense of personal guilt, some in an endeavour to purify their souls, but many as a deliberate discipline to strengthen the will. When rigorously and consistently maintained, such disciplines are thought to increase man's spiritual strength and open up a world of limitless possibilities. The body becomes infused with a dynamic force and an attractive energy that irresistibly draws others.

The extraordinary means that men have resorted to in order to punish themselves are among the curiosities of religious history. In early Christianity these were the celebrated ascetics of the Syrian and Egyptian deserts of the 4th and 5th centuries. One of them loaded himself with so many chains that he had to crawl about on all fours; another never lay down, even to sleep; yet another lived only on seeds like a bird. One lived in a dried-up well, and one on the top of a pillar 60 feet high (see SIMEON STYLITES). Yet another, having in a fit of temper killed a troublesome mosquito, expiated the sin of his anger by spending the remainder of his life near a mosquito-infested swamp so that his body was bitten all over by the insects and was covered with lumps and ulcers.

Hindu ascetics have aroused the curiosity of travellers from earliest times. The *sadhus*

or holy men remain half-immersed in water for weeks at a time; lie on beds of thorns or nails; keep one arm lifted up till the muscles stiffen and the limb is permanently immobilized in an upraised position. Others gaze upwards or downwards until the neck muscles stiffen in the same way. Yet others keep the fist permanently closed so that the nails grow into the flesh of the palm.

There have been fanatical religious sects whose members have subjected themselves to bodily torture, to starvation, mutilation, burning, burial alive, crucifixion, in order to secure the salvation of their souls. Occasionally some special form of self-punishment caught the popular imagination and caused an 'epidemic', as in the case of the Flagellants (see FLAGELLATION). This Christian sect came into prominence in the 14th century and rapidly spread through Germany, France, Spain, Italy, Austria and Hungary. Large numbers of barely-clad people, young and old, men and women, nobles and serfs, rich and poor, used to go about in groups and lash their bodies with whips, rods and chains. They looked upon their self-punishment as a fresh baptism of blood. The sect died out in Western Europe but was revived in Russia among a group of people known as Khlysts, who danced ecstatic dances, beat themselves with whips, fell into trances and believed they were possessed by the Holy Ghost. A variant of this sect known as *Skoptsi* had a corps of elite leaders who even castrated themselves (see SKOPTSI). Both sects practised complete abstinence from sexual relations.



Buddha taught his followers that suffering ends when craving ceases as part of the Way to Enlightenment: the emaciated Buddha receives food from the daughters of Sana after undergoing extreme austerities

The Spiked Belt

In no part of man's life, it is thought, does self-restraint need greater vigilance than the sexual. For the sex instinct is the most pervasive, the most insistent, and the most difficult to control. In the Hindu tradition extraordinary virtues are claimed for *brahmacharya*, or continence. Great spiritual power is said to be raised by chastity. According to Hindu mythology nothing caused greater consternation in heaven than the knowledge that a *rishi* (sage) had started on a course of austerities involving abstinence from sex and sexual thoughts. The heavenly abodes were put into a state of turmoil, for the gods knew that with the power generated by the rishi vibrations were set up in the higher spheres that reverberated through the cosmos and disturbed the peace of the world order. The longer the rishi remained celibate, the more compelling became his power, and he could even bend the gods to his will. Vishvamitra, a famous yogi of Hindu mythology, once began creating universes of his own by means of the energy he had conjured up by sexual restraint. The usual counter to this manoeuvre was for the gods to send a heavenly nymph to tempt the ambitious celibate, which often proved successful and peace was restored again.

Among certain Christian denominations chastity has also been held up as an ideal and has often been made a prerequisite to the higher life, priests being forbidden to marry largely so that they might devote themselves wholly to their calling without the distractions and responsibilities of family life. Certain Puritan sects, while permitting marriage, advocated a strict control over the sexual act. The bond of marriage did not entitle a couple to indulgence in sex whenever they desired. In fact, excessive love for one's husband or wife, in their belief, constituted adultery.

Whenever any higher aspiration is sought, a tight reign on the sexual appetites is very frequently regarded as essential. The clamour for sexual expression can only be heeded, it is felt, at the expense of the spirit. The controlled sexual impulse, on the other hand, can be utilised for a variety of purposes and find expression in 'sublimated' form in religion, literature, art, science or philosophy. Gustave Flaubert, the French novelist, suggested that artists should subjugate their sexual instincts so as to lend a more intensive drive to the creative impulse in their work. Freud confirmed the view that people engaged in intellectual work would benefit by sexual abstinence.

Many men of high intellectual calibre have been driven to the same conclusion. Blaise Pascal, mathematician and philosopher, became convinced that carnal desires were pitfalls, the pleasures of the table a trap, and the joys of love-making a stratagem of Satan to lure people to destruction. So in order to develop the will-power to resist the temptations of physical pleasure, he actively sought pain and privation. He wore a belt with spikes, which were turned inwards, and if he found himself taking an undue interest or pleasure in food, in conversation or the company of others, he would

secretly press the belt so that the spikes would prick his flesh. Pascal regarded wealth as one of the prime evils and poverty a blessed condition, since it limited the area of Satan's operations in his assaults on the body of man.

In religion the exercise of discipline over the bodily appetites is often found to arise from the belief that a twofold principle governs the universe (see DUALISM). A spiritual reality underlies the world, and this reality has a dual nature which is in constant opposition. The antagonism between these two principles is symbolized as a struggle between God and Satan, Good and Evil, Light and Darkness, and the opposition between the ideals of self-denial and self-indulgence may be said to represent the battle of these dualistic principles being fought out on the material plane. Sensuality springing entirely from the physical body represents evil, because in the earthly conflict the base or physical self is the enemy of the soul, which must be subjugated and denied expression.

Countless men and women, believing in this philosophy, have given up status and wealth to embrace the life of self-denial



and harsh abstinence once they have been convinced of the shortcomings and indeed the incipient dangers of a life of ease and luxury. Material comfort and the satisfactions of the flesh can breed increasing appetites that are never satisfied and in their wake bring moral sluggishness and spiritual degradation. To such persons physical self-fulfilment, for all its so-called benefits, has serious drawbacks. It pacifies, soothes and above all softens and weakens the spirit in its struggle against the powers of evil. Mystics have said that one of the greatest obstacles to the evolution of the soul is the pursuit of pleasure. Nothing so effectively obscures the interior mirror in which we might 'witness the Higher Self' as worldly success and sensuality. Not self-expression but self-denial should therefore be the aim, for the self that seeks expression may be, and usually is, the lower self, and the ways in which it seeks expression are spiritually injurious.

The Ideal of Indifference

Besides sex there are several other desires that crave satisfaction, and all these must be carefully watched. In most ascetic and mystical cults the pupil is warned to resist the desire for fame and popular esteem. All good deeds should be anonymous. He should conceal his virtuous acts as if they were evil deeds. The 4th century Christian saint, Macarius, who settled in the desert to practise austerities, was accused by the nearby villagers of making a girl pregnant and was almost killed by them. He did not say a word and made no effort to defend himself. Later, when the real culprit was found, the villagers came to Macarius to apologize, and praised him for his saintliness. Again he said nothing. He had made it a rule of his life not to care one way or the other what people thought of him. He remained quite unmoved by praise or blame.

In ancient Greece the ideal aimed at was called *ataraxia*, freedom from all violent and disturbing emotions, a passionless indifference that leads ultimately to inner harmony. The Roman Stoics too regarded it as one of the great virtues, and one that was sorely needed in their excitable age which sought satisfaction in vulgar appetites that were being progressively stimulated as Rome's wealth increased.

'He who is rid of desire,' says a Chinese classic, 'has an insight into the secret essence.' The ideal of the Hindu yogi was 'uncolouredness', the state of being untouched by the storms of passion and prejudice. The virtues he cultivated were patience, endurance, forbearance, and the

All forms of self-denial entail the development of the will, and by rejecting material and bodily pleasures the will can become the focus of tremendous power. *Left* Abbot John of Rila who died in 946 AD spent 60 years of his life in the mountains of Bulgaria and founded the great monastery of Rila: *Right* Grunewald's *The Temptation of St Anthony*: as a young man he overcame great spiritual and physical temptations and went away into the desert where he was followed by those seeking his advice



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acceptance of one's lot, and a total detachment unperturbed by pleasure or pain, fame or contempt, success or failure, poverty or plenty, sympathy or scorn, love or hate, praise or blame.

The Buddhists also regarded as sinful the encouragement of anything likely to excite envy, desire, anger, lust, greed, or even admiration. They sought to make no distinction between the world conqueror and the penniless beggar. They condemned any preoccupation with things that were beautiful or enjoyable. To take a literary example, a thesis presented in a beautifully-written style was suspect, for the manner of saying it might deceive one into believing that because it was well expressed it was also true, whereas in reality it might contain much falsehood. Again, the appreciation of beauty is largely a sensual matter and a concession to the lower self. Buddhist legend tells of the monk Chittagutta, who lived in a monastery adorned with beautiful murals of a religious nature, yet who never let his glance stray upward lest he be misled by the charm of the paintings and forget the message they were meant to convey. The Christian monk St Bernard shielded his eyes from the sight of the wonderful Swiss lakes and mountains lest he find too sensual a joy in their beauty.

Shedding Excess Baggage

The deceptive attraction of worldly success and power must also be avoided. Success can be degrading. Possessions can contaminate. Anthropologists have shown that when primitive peoples are suddenly brought into contact with an advanced culture they soon become demoralized. The cargo cults of the Melanesians (see CARGO CULTS) provide a good instance of the progressive phases of perplexity, reaction and revolt against the good things imported into their islands from the Western world. Sociologists have not been slow to point out that in a sense even civilized man finds the impact of worldly abundance and the growing complexity of his own culture becoming more and more alien to him and more difficult to bear, and he ultimately suffers the same phases of

A Hindu holy man lies in a trance on a bed of thorns on a Jaipur pavement; the ideal of the Hindu yogi was 'uncolouredness', being untouched by passion and prejudice



bewilderment and demoralization as his brother in the South Seas.

Most observers of contemporary society feel that there is a definite need to shed the excess baggage carried by the affluent, and not continually to strive for more and more. Probably no single book has expressed this idea with greater clarity than the *Tao Te Ching*, one of the great classics of Chinese philosophy (see TAOISM).

Self-denial means learning to do with less, to thin out and attenuate. Henry Thoreau, the American backwoods philosopher, once said that a man should so live that he could flee a burning city and be none the poorer. So many people have far more than they can cope with, and the real need is to jettison some of the unnecessarily heavy loads we carry about with us.

From Greece, Rome, China, Arabia, North and South America, and many other places, we have records of the deliberate sacrifice of valuable possessions as part of a rite of liberation from material bondage. For example, the Celtic tribe of the Cimbri after a great victory in 105 BC destroyed their victory booty. A strange form of orgiastic celebration found among the American Indians is known to anthropologists as a potlatch, in which huge quantities of stores, money and property are wantonly destroyed after a ceremonial feast (see PACIFIC NORTH-WEST INDIANS).

Perhaps the most vivid example comes from ancient Greece, when the people of Croton were having trouble with the neighbouring city of Sybaris, both in the Bay of Tarentum in Italy. The Sybarites were extremely wealthy and powerful. They had the distinction of being the first people to use chamber pots at banquets, and were responsible for introducing hot baths to the Western world. Luxury-loving in the extreme, they made a fetish of refined foods and titillating wines, and the exciting rhythms of the most sophisticated music. They decorated their cooks with crowns of gold and presented their sexual partners with jewelled sceptres. The philosopher Pythagoras (see PYTHAGORAS) advised the people of Croton, who had hitherto tried to copy the refinements of the Sybarites, to surrender their luxuries if they wished to draw down from heaven the strength that would enable them to overcome their enemy. Costly urns full of jewels, beautifully

wrought statues, priceless paintings and works of art, wonderful fabrics and carpets were brought from their homes and laid at the altar of Juno, and then systematically destroyed, burned, torn up, ground to powder, or sunk in the deep river. It was as though the people were purified from a feverish plague, relieved of an incubus that had settled its dragging load permanently on their shoulders. They went forth against the Sybarites, conquered them, razed Sybaris to the ground, and diverted the waters of a nearby river so that it submerged the hateful city.

Bonfire of Vanities

Two thousand years later, in May 1497, the Dominican monk Savonarola preached against the luxuries of the 'sybaritic' city of Florence. Like an Old Testament prophet he raised his voice against its decadence and its vices. As a result of his preaching the citizens carried to the marketplace of Florence hundreds of rare books of art, profane literature by the cartload, licentious poetry, precious manuscripts, ladies' ornaments and trinkets, costly pomades, lotions, eye salves and beautifiers of every kind, as well as musical instruments, chess boards, cards and hundreds upon hundreds of costly items of clothing. All this, forming the 'boils and sores' of Florence, was piled in a great heap. A trumpet was sounded and amid the acclamations of the mob, Savonarola applied a torch to this, perhaps the most expensive 'bonfire of vanities' ever.

In the view of the ascetic, men and women could always do with less. The barest minimum is the ideal possession, and poverty the ultimate aim. St Francis of Assisi (see FRANCIS OF ASSISI) was one of that noble band who embraced poverty. He gave up his patrimony, exchanged his rich clothes for the rags of a beggar and mortified himself by severe penances. He was only one of countless numbers who have preferred self-denial to self-indulgence. Suffering is basic to asceticism. We do not know why suffering exists or who is responsible for it. Mystics regard it as having its roots in the cosmic process. Thomas à Kempis (d 1471) called suffering 'the gymnastic of eternity'. The mystics say that it is a great delusion to imagine that man is born for happiness, or that pleasure is his birthright. The fact is that no human life can be free from suffering, and its value can only be seen in retrospect. Human life is meant to be enriched by suffering. So we find through the ages that men and women have not only passively accepted suffering when it came, but actively sought it out. Ascetics have inflicted punishments on themselves, mutilated their bodies in various ways, denied themselves the necessities, in order to test, train, strengthen or purify their souls.

(See also FAKIR; MUTILATION.)
 BENJAMIN WALKER
 FURTHER READING: O. Chadwick, ed., *Western Asceticism* (Westminster, 1979); R. Clay, *Hermits and Anchorites of England* (Gale, 1968, c1914); J. Lacarriere, *The God Possessed* (Allen & Unwin, 1963); Wayland Young, *Eros Denied* (Weidenfeld & Nicol.).



Seraph

A type of angel; when Isaiah saw a vision of God on his throne, the seraphim hovered above him calling 'holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts'; each had six wings and, apparently, a human face, hands, feet and voice (Isaiah, chapter 6); because the name was thought to be derived from the word for 'to burn' the seraphim were believed to be consumed with the ardour of love and are often represented clothed in red.

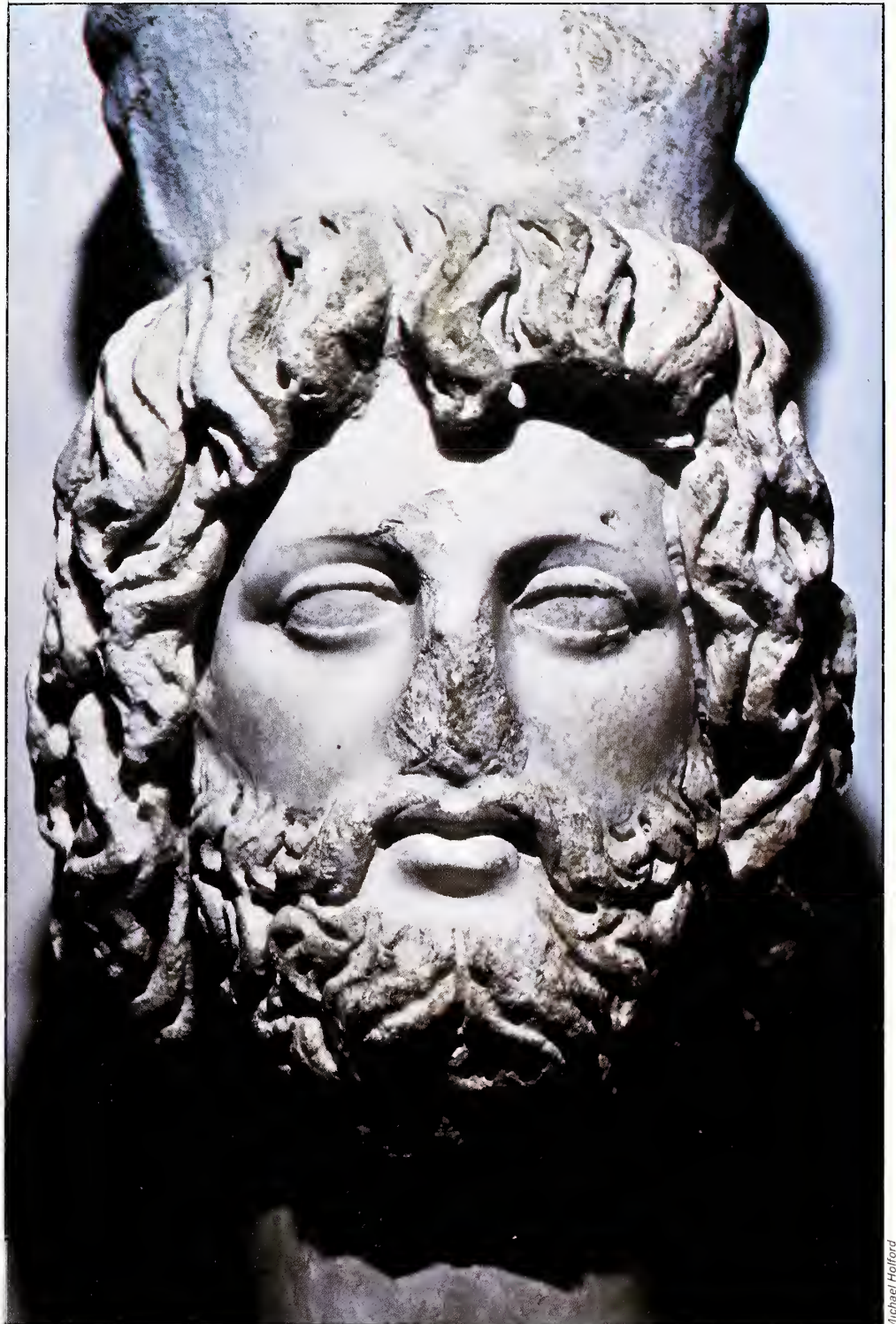
National Gallery, London

SERAPIS

THE GOD of Alexandria and the chief deity of Ptolemaic Egypt was Serapis or Sarapis, about whose origin there was much speculation in the ancient world. According to the Roman historian Tacitus, writing in the 1st century AD, Ptolemy I, the first Greek monarch of Egypt (305–283 BC), was instructed in a dream to send to Sinope, a city on the shores of the Black Sea, for the statue of the god of that place. Ptolemy consulted the Egyptian priests about his dream, but they could not interpret it. It was eventually interpreted by an Athenian named Timotheus who, significantly, was connected with the Eleusinian Mysteries (see ELEUSIS). He identified the god of Ptolemy's dream as Pluto (see PLUTO), who was associated with the underworld goddess Persephone at Sinope. After some difficult negotiations, the statue was obtained and brought to Alexandria. Tacitus adds some further explanatory details about Serapis: 'The god, himself, on account of his healing art, is called by many Aesculapius; by others, Osiris, the most ancient deity of the country (Egypt); and many give him the name of Jupiter, as lord of the universe. But the most maintain that he is Pluto — either from tokens which are discernible in the deity himself, or by a circuitous process of probable reasoning.'

This account of the origin of Serapis is not accepted by scholars today. But it is recognized as probable that Ptolemy I did promote the cult of Serapis as a means of uniting his Greek and Egyptian subjects in the worship of a god whom both could appreciate. This god was a hybrid conception of Egyptian origin, venerated already by some Greeks resident in Egypt. The origin and development of the conception provide a curious example of religious syncretism. At Memphis, the ancient capital of Egypt, there had existed from a remote period the cult of the Apis bull as a symbol of divine procreativity. When one of these sacred animals died, it was identified with Osiris, the god of the dead (see OSIRIS), and named

Head of the god Serapis, from Carthage: he was represented as a bearded Greek god, looking like Zeus, but his origins lay in the Egyptian cult of a divine bull



Michael Holford

Oserapis, that is Osiris-Apis. The body of each Apis was mummified and buried, amid public lamentation, with the bodies of its predecessors in the Serapeum, a vast subterranean labyrinth at Sakkara.

The story which Tacitus tells of the dream-revealed image certainly relates to the form under which Serapis was presented in Alexandria, which was essentially a Greek city. The identification of the Egyptian Oserapis with the Greek god Pluto would have been easy; for both Osiris and Pluto were rulers of the underworld. In the magnificent temple, which was built in Alexandria for the new deity and known as the Serapeum, the cult statue showed Serapis as a bearded Greek god, similar in features to Zeus, seated

on a throne. His underworld character was symbolized by an accompanying image of Cerberus, the three-headed dog of Hades, and by the *kalathos*, 'basket', upon his head, which was a symbol of fertility.

Serapis, through his derivation from Osiris, became associated with the great goddess Isis (see *ISIS*), and the prescribed oath in law-courts and for legal transactions in Ptolemaic Egypt was, 'by Serapis and Isis and all other gods and goddesses'. He also inherited from Osiris the character of a saviour god connected with the afterlife, and his cult, in some of its forms, constituted a Mystery religion. His association with Asclepius (see *HEALING GODS*), which Tacitus mentions, is interesting. But it was

not from the Greek healer god that Serapis acquired his reputation as a divine healer, but from the ancient Egyptian deified sage Imhotep (see *IMHOTEP*), whose sanctuary at Sakkara, was an Egyptian 'Lourdes' and called an Asklepieion by the Greeks.

From Alexandria the cult of Serapis spread into the Graeco-Roman world, and enjoyed a considerable popularity, doubtless through its combination of the religious traditions of Egypt and Greece. Serapis became identified also with both the time god Aion and the sun as Zeus Helios. The importance of his cult was such that the Christian destruction of the Serapeum in Alexandria dramatically symbolized the victory of Christianity over paganism.

SERPENT

THERE IS probably no creature which is found more widely distributed in the mythologies of the world than the serpent. Snakes occur even in the myths of lands where there are no snakes – such as among the Eskimo of the far north, perhaps recalling long-past days in warmer regions. St Patrick may have driven the snakes out of Ireland but could not cleanse the isle of snake legends, including his own.

In the modern West most people, especially those who share the widespread abhorrence for this creature, might instantly think of the mythical serpent in its biblical role, as the tempter of Eve, and as the embodiment of evil whose head is to be forever bruised by mankind. But in the older mythologies the serpent is not always an evil being. It is, however, invariably one thing – an unswervingly, chthonic being, as C. G. Jung makes clear, a being of the primordial, dark, earthbound, underworld ways. As such, in the religions of man, it may pre-date even the primeval cults of the Earth Mother; certainly it has some connections with those cults, but with its own fertility and phallic implications.

At the dawn of history, or at least in its early morning, the age-old chthonic religions faced invasions by new cultures worshipping sky gods, gods of light. As the two groups of people met and fought, so their religions came into conflict as well. In India one outcome of such a conflict was that prehistoric snake cults were not entirely lost but were assimilated into the religion of the invading Aryans and survived in the later Hindu myths of semi-divine beings with serpent bodies, called the Nagas.

In many folktales the Nagas are not evil but act beneficently, and a female Naga or Nagini may often marry a mortal. But they are vengeful and terrible if harmed, and so exhibit a considerable share of demonic aspects. Hindu gods and heroes, including Krishna, often come into conflict with them; but elsewhere, Nagas play valuable parts in the mythic structure. Much outright snake worship remains in parts of India,

Kaliya, the king of the serpents, is overcome by Krishna who dances on the serpent's head until his power is broken



including that of the snake goddess Manasa in Bengal, who is identified as a most high-ranking Nagini.

Ousted by Apollo

In Western myth, the clash between old chthonic gods and incoming sky gods appears, predictably, as a straightforward battle. It is especially so in Greek mythology where in two crucial instances the serpent motif appears on the side of the old gods. Apollo, the brilliant new sky god of the Hellenes, displaces a pre-Hellenic worship (probably a snake cult) in the myth of his combat with Python, a serpent monster (see APOLLO). The god killed the serpent on the slopes of Parnassus, in its lair at Delphi. There his temple was established; there the Delphic oracle under his patronage grew to its later position of considerable power in the Greek world (see ORACLES). And the priestess who delivered the oracles when possessed with the god was called the Pythia.

In Egypt the god Seth (see SETH) at a late stage of development took on the attributes of an evil god and was identified with another serpent monster of Greek myth, Typhon, who was defeated in a great battle by Zeus. This creature was the last of the fearsome old gods, children of Mother Earth, who resisted the incursion of the gods of Olympus. In some versions of the myth of Apollo's battle the consonants of his enemy's name are reversed, and Python is called Typhaon. The etymological similarities are clear. Typhon, in the Zeus myth, was formed of coiled serpents from the thighs down, with arms and hands composed of hundreds of snakes. Zeus, the supreme sky god, fought this chthonic horror and was finally victorious.

Superman Against Serpents

These battles against snake creatures are myths of central importance, signalling major religious upheavals and transitions. But they are also representatives of one of the most widespread hero myths. It seems that every hero in myth and legend must at some time confront a monster which is usually reptilian (though not always a snake — see DRAGON). Hercules, for example, strangled two serpents while he was still an infant, and later killed the hundred-headed water serpent Hydra (see HERCULES). Krishna also killed snakes in his infancy; Japan's hero Susanoo fought a multi-headed serpent. Perseus slew his share of serpents, including those on the head of Medusa (see GORGONS). Sigurd of Scandinavian myth fought the giant serpent Fafnir, and Maui of Polynesian legend did battle with a monster eel. And in Norse myth Thor was constantly fighting with the world-encircling Midgard serpent, though he could not defeat it, or be defeated by it, until the world's end (see SCANDINAVIA; THOR).

Thor's combat may be another instance of the displacement of an older, chthonic divinity, but it also overlaps with another mythological motif of great antiquity, that of the 'cosmic snake'. The Midgard serpent may be the best known, but there is also



Musée Gomet/Michael Holford

In Hindu mythology, Nagas were semi-divine beings with serpent bodies; sometimes they were beneficent but if they were harmed they were vengeful and terrible: 12th century bronze statuette of a Naga, Angkor Wat, Cambodia

the great Naga lord of Hindu myth, the many-headed serpent Sesha, who supports the world and on whom Vishnu sleeps during peaceful epochs.

None of these cosmic snakes is evil — not even the Midgard, in its world-girdling aspect, though it may be seen as malevolent in its role as offspring of Loki and adversary of Thor. Of course, no one would deny that in myth, the snake has been used often enough as a handy container for evil forces, the serpent of Eden being an example (see EVIL; FIRST MAN). But it is clear that world mythology does not regard the serpent motif as invariably a symbol of evil.

The younger cultures, like that of the Hellenes, with their bright new sky gods, seem to have justified their conquests by projecting an evil image onto the displaced gods. And because so many of the displaced were snakes, that creature acquired more than its share of evil. Perhaps the bluntest, most explicit image of this defeat occurs in the *Iliad* of Homer, when the combatants look up and see an eagle carrying in its claws a wounded snake — a terrible omen, symbolizing the victory of the Achaeans over the old earth-oriented Asian ways.

Union of Earth and Sky

The Nagas of India show that the confrontation of dark against light, earth against sky, need not always mean total war and the triumph of the latter. It can lead to a peaceful blending or assimilation, a reconciliation of opposites. And this notion even managed to creep into Greek mythology. There, as elsewhere, its usual symbolism

makes use of a combination of the bird and snake motifs.

The combining of earth and sky motifs occurs in the myth of the Olympian god Hermes (see HERMES); with his winged sandals and snake-entwined caduceus, he was the intermediary between heaven and the underworld, and acted as guide to the souls of the dead. Similarly, in the myth of the Graeco-Roman god Asclepius (see HEALING GODS), founder of medicine; as the son of Apollo he shared the god's association with the sky, yet his symbol was the snake. The symbol may have come from another pre-Hellenic snake cult and oracle (a minor version of Delphi) taken over by the Asclepian cult. It would be reinforced by the symbolism of renewal in the snake, which casts its skin each year. Of more importance, the priests of Asclepius performed diagnoses and cures by a technique that began with dreaming. The Greeks saw dreams as issuing from the underworld (a concept not unlike that of the unconscious mind) and so the snake, as inhabitant and symbol of that region, naturally became the symbol of the god who healed by dreams. And the snake still appears as the chief emblem of the medical profession today.

A more striking instance of the reconciliation between earth and sky can be found in a great mythological motif held in common by all the principal religions of Central America, Mexico and even the south-west of the United States. This is the concept of the plumed serpent, the androgynous combination of bird and snake. It can be seen in a major divinity of the Maya, the feathered serpent god Kukulcan. But it can best be seen in the glory of the Toltec deity Quetzalcoatl (see AZTECS). He was a sky god, sometimes identified with the wind and at other times with the morning star. But he rose to dominate the Toltec religion as a sun divinity, a major creator, a divine king. His rule, and his manifestation as the plumed serpent, spoke of reconciliation, harmony and peace.

This theme, the reconciliation between underworld and heaven, occurs also in the image of the rainbow (see RAINBOW), traditionally and obviously seen as a bridge between earth and sky. But in myth and symbol rainbows are also often considered to be snakes. The concept can be found in ancient Persian myth, in folktales of Brittany, in Australian aborigine myth, in West African myth, in North and South American Indian myth, and elsewhere. In Australia the rainbow snake is an especially important deity, a culture hero and creator with wide fertility implications.

One of the most remarkable of the world's serpent deities is the god Da or Dan of Dahomey in West Africa. He is usually seen as a snake with tail in mouth and therefore resembling a cosmic snake like that of Midgard, but also a rainbow and water snake with fertility associations; he has another role again in oracular divination. Da was exported with West African slaves and became gradually translated into Damballa, one of the principal deities of the New World's *vodun* or Voodoo religion (see VOODOO). Yet even there he retains the

Serpent

Dahomean form of rainbow snake, intermediary between heaven and earth.

Similarly, the rainbow is a water serpent in Arawak myth in South America, and is an earth or underworld spirit gone to drink at the sky in Malayan and in Yoruba myth. In the arid south-west of the United States the water snake motif diminishes somewhat, but the earth-sky reconciliation remains: the Mohave of southern California tell of a giant rattlesnake who is a sky spirit. And an important Pueblo snake god (who is also sometimes a plumed serpent) figures in a major Hopi ritual that is a rain-making weather magic.

Snake-Handling Cults

The Hopi shamans underline their appeal to the rain by holding venomous snakes in their mouths while performing; again the underworld snake becomes a sky symbol. The performers are members of the Snake clan, and are confident that they will not be bitten. Similar dances occur among the Comanche; and most south-western Indians have some form of traditional magic that protects against snake-bite and that involves the handling of rattlesnakes by the medicine-men. Californian tribal shamans have been said to invite rattlers to bite them, during snake-handling rites, in order to prove their resistance or their curative powers.

The white man, too, has his versions of these ancient rites, such as the ecstatic snake-handling Christian sects of the United States, in Tennessee and elsewhere (see SNAKE-HANDLING CULTS). Faith, apparently, is supposed to protect these cultists from being bitten by the usually poisonous snakes which unwillingly join in the worship. Perhaps it could be said that the snakes, in turn, symbolize the handlers' achievement of a higher spiritual plane.

Other North American Indians include snake gods in their pantheons, but these are generally lesser Nature spirits, no more important than other animal gods. Even so, they will have their own celebrations, usually in mimetic dances — 'follow-my-leader' chain dances or open-ended round dances — which emulate the sinuous movement of a snake. The Iroquois and Cherokee, among others, had this form of snake dance; and indeed it was once traditional, and may still occasionally be encountered, among North American college students at football rallies and other open-air festivities.

Among lesser snake gods in the mythologies of the world are Urcaguay, the Inca snake god who guarded treasure just as dragons do in European folktale; the Icelandic Nidhug or Nidhoggr, predominant among the countless serpents who gnaw the roots of the world tree Yggdrasill; the snake-legged Celtic god Cernunnos, horned and carrying a ram-headed serpent.

The snake appears in magic as prominently as in myth. A major mystic symbol

The snake is closely linked with the dragon and the sea-serpent, and in hero legends the hero frequently does battle with a serpentine monster: the combat of Morbidus and the sea monster, French, 15th century







is the ouroboros, the snake with its tail in its mouth like the cosmic snakes, strengthening the serpentine role in the 'reconciliation of opposites' by being half dark and half light, like the yin and yang symbol that has the same function in oriental belief. Alchemy has its share of encircling serpents; and it depicts the vital spirit-substance Mercury as a winged serpent, reflecting the Roman god of the same name, and the Greek Hermes, with winged sandals and snake-encircled caduceus. So the snake retains in magic and mysticism its symbolic role as an underground being who may nevertheless mediate with heaven. But then magic in Christian times also places the mantle of evil on the serpent – as when a 15th century cabalist named Joseph della Rayna conjured up two devils, who appeared as serpents. And Aleister Crowley wrote about a devil whom he summoned up, who appeared in various forms including that of a snake.

Snake-Skin for Rheumatism

Predictably, evil is also ascribed to snakes in the homelier magic of popular superstition; if a pregnant women is frightened by a snake her child is expected to have a snake-like constricted throat, and in Britain a live adder on the doorstep is a death omen. American superstition includes the delightful fantasy of the 'hoop snake', which takes its tail in its mouth like a kind of crazed ouroboros and rolls with great speed at its enemies. Folklore universally insists that all poisonous snakes can spit their venom, that all snakes have hypnotic powers, and that the poison is injected into a bite by the snake's tongue.

None of these beliefs have forestalled the wide use of snakes, or their parts, in folk medicine. The powdered rattles of a rattlesnake, in a drink, according to American backwoods belief, would assist a mother in a difficult birth. Kentuckians believed that the rattles worn as a hair ornament prevented headache, and rattlesnake skin worn round the affected part could cure rheumatism, as could adder skin in Britain. Even more positively, the dried skin of a snake hung over the hearth was said, in parts of Britain, to protect the house from fire and to bring good fortune to the family who lived there.

This bit of homespun magic parallels the more generous view of snakes held in places like Lithuania and Armenia, and among ancient Teutonic peoples, where a family might have its own 'house snake' as both a useful rat-catcher and a minor guardian house spirit. In this way European folklore bypasses the Christian projections of evil onto the serpent to retain the older, and somehow far more satisfying idea of it as a chthonic earth spirit, which is deserving of our veneration.

DOUGLAS HILL

The snake is generally an underworld being but by no means always an evil one, though in Christianity the serpent is associated with the Devil and the Fall of Adam and Eve in Eden: the damned writhe in the grip of serpents in this scene from a 14th century wall painting of the Last Judgement, from Cyprus

SETH



C. M. Dixon/British Museum

Seth had a chequered career in Egyptian mythology; once he was Lord of Upper Egypt, but was later made guilty of the murder of Osiris, and was identified with foreign invaders of Egypt: 19th Dynasty bronze statue of Seth

ONE OF THE MAJOR GODS of ancient Egypt, Seth was said to be the son of Geb and Nut and he is conspicuous on the monuments and in texts. In particular he is assigned a prominent role in representations of symbolic rites relating to the pharaonic state. The best known of these is the ceremony of 'Uniting the Two Lands', which is impressively portrayed on the limestone reliefs from Lisht near Memphis, now in the Cairo Museum. Seth is figured here facing the god Horus (see HORUS). Both are animal gods,

but here their bodies have human shape; only their heads retain their original form – the falcon head of Horus and the canine head of Seth. The two deities are shown tying the symbolic plants of Upper and Lower Egypt to the sign which connotes unity. In these reliefs Seth is clearly the representative of Upper Egypt.

There is little doubt that the scene mirrors an enacted ritual in which priests impersonated the gods. Seth is depicted too in other related ceremonies, such as those connected with the purification and the coronation of the pharaoh. In an oft-recorded rite which has been called 'the Baptism of Pharaoh' he is shown, together with Horus, pouring water over the king's head.

Unidentified Animal

Seth's original cult centre was very probably Ombos, the modern Naqada, where a figure of the Seth animal has been found amid vestiges of Naqada's earliest pre-dynastic culture, which derives from the middle of the fourth millennium BC. But what the Seth animal really was still constitutes a problem. Suggestions made include the ass, oryx antelope, the fennec (a small fox with huge pointed ears), jerboa (a rodent), camel, okapi, long-snouted mouse, giraffe and various types of hogs or boars. Another view is that the animal is fabulous, like the griffin or dragon. The narrow snout and upraised ears and tail suggest a canine type; perhaps the species was already extinct in Egypt in early times. In later phases of his development Seth was associated with the ass, the pig and the hippopotamus, and in these cases the interpretation of his character was usually unfavourable.

Indeed a striking fact in the history of the cult of Seth is that after the New Kingdom, from about 1000 BC, the god is involved for the most part in a position of increasing degradation. One reason is that the roles he occupies in mythology are inauspicious. In the legend about his fierce fight with the falcon god Horus, Seth is said to have been deprived of his testicles, and although he in turn ripped out one of the eyes of Horus, the final victory, including justification in the divine tribunal, went to his opponent. In the myth of Osiris the role of Seth becomes still more sinister: he is the murderer who felled Osiris in Nedjet (see OSIRIS). The opposing gods in each case were incorporated in the concept of kingship, Horus being identified with the living pharaoh, Osiris with the deceased one, so that Seth was fated from the start to follow a difficult course.

In relation to the living pharaoh, Seth's place in the official theology was at first protected, as we have seen, by the concept of reconciliation. If Seth represents Upper Egypt in a rite celebrating the unity of Egypt, this means that an early stage of disunity is reflected, when Seth was the patron god of a part of the country, espousing its strife against another part. But the retrospect is now a happy one, and the dominance of Horus in the royal theology does not deny Seth an honoured second place. Later, however, Thoth replaces Seth in some of the

symbolic rites, such as the 'Baptism of Pharaoh'. Seth is identified with the victim offered in sacrificial rites, and the slain offering is equated with the defeated enemy. The Book of Victory over Seth and the texts of the Temple of Edfu are virulently anti-Sethian, but they derive from sanctuaries of Osiris and Horus. It is true that even in the first millennium BC Seth was specially honoured by the Libyan Dynasty; and if the escalating popularity of Osiris told heavily against him, there were centres of Seth worship even in the Roman era.

In the legend which describes his conflict with Horus there are some clear pointers to a historical and political substratum. Cosmological explanations become prominent later, and one modern view would interpret the myth as being inherently of this type. Seth, however, is not easy to fit into such a scheme. As a god of heaven, Horus represents light, it may be argued; he is eventually equated with the sun god Re, and his eyes are the sun and moon. If so, what does Seth represent? He is not simply a god of darkness; sometimes he is a storm god, a thunderer, while at other times his name is linked with the desert. One recent writer H. te Velde, sees the polarity as that between light and sexuality. Seth is certainly endowed by the Egyptian texts with strong, if somewhat perverse, sexual powers. It is very doubtful, however, whether they are felt to be opposed to the cosmic concept of light. Nephthys, sister and partner of Isis, is usually named as his wife, but the union is not credited with offspring.

'A Kind of Satan'

Seth is himself sometimes equated astrally with the Great Bear, and in the texts and representations which portray the fight of Re against Apophis, the serpent demon of darkness, Seth is the champion-in-chief of the sun god. What contributed especially to his decline in status was the tendency to identify him with foreign invaders such as the Assyrians and Persians. In the magical papyri his position remains tremendously influential, even if he is often regarded now as a kind of Satan. By this time he has been identified with the Greek monster Typhon, likewise a challenger of the established divine order. Seth-Typhon is sometimes referred to as 'the headless demon', but this term is applied in the papyri to other gods too, including Osiris. Since the magician is anxious to deploy the powers of Seth-Typhon, his attitude to the god may be ambivalent. On the one hand he may address him with great respect and declare himself to be his partisan in the struggle against Osiris or Horus; on the other hand, he may call him 'the slayer of his own brother', just to remind him that the magician is acquainted with his crimes and will use his knowledge unfavourably unless the god is prepared to show sympathy in the matter which is the subject of his appeal.

One of the Gnostic sects (see GNOSTICISM) went by the name of Sethians, paying special honour to Seth, the biblical son of Adam and Eve. Suggestions concerning a second relationship involving the Egyptian god seem to be rather speculative.

J. GWYN GRIFFITHS

SEX





National Gallery, London

The overwhelming nature of sexual passion, in which people are swept away by a force in whose grip they seem helpless, has caused it to be worshipped as a deity or feared as evil and demonic

IT IS NO ACCIDENT that the words 'venerate' and 'venereal' are etymologically connected, both stemming from the name of the Roman love goddess, Venus, for sex has played a vital role in religion, magic, mysticism, occultism, symbolism and the whole range of human dealings with the supernatural. There are many myths which regard all life in the world, and indeed the world itself, as the product of sexual activity of the gods. According to an ancient Egyptian myth, for example, the god Atum began the creation of the world by masturbating (or, in a different version, by spitting) and so created a god and a goddess, who coupled together. From their union the earth and the sky were born, joined together in a close embrace from which they had to be separated to give the world its present shape.

In mythology, the process of creation does not end with the fashioning of the universe, for every year life is reborn from the ashes of winter. Every year Sky Father copulates with Earth Mother and impregnates her, and she bears her children. The mother goddesses of the ancient world, Ishtar, Isis, Cybele, Aphrodite, each had her lover who died and rose again in the form of the crops and plants of spring, and it is an old and rooted piece of phallic symbolism that the male 'dies' after orgasm and 'rises again' to renewed vigour and potency.

The need for a good harvest, for a plentiful supply of animals, whether to hunt or to breed, for an ample stock of children because so many died in infancy, these urgent human requirements lie behind the vast world-wide apparatus of religious and magical rites intended to secure fertility, including all the great seasonal rituals of seedtime and harvest, ploughing and reaping. For although fertility was in the gift of supernatural powers, these powers could be induced to create renewed life each year by human activity, at the simplest level by human sexual intercourse as an act of imitative magic. The Iroquois in North America used to celebrate a Naked Dance, during which a man and woman coupled to promote the fertility of the fields (see IROQUOIS). Down to the end of the 19th century in parts of Europe, peasants still copulated with their wives in the fields after sowing, to make sure of a good crop. (See also EARTH; FERTILITY; MOTHER GODDESS.)

Mystical Union

But sex is not merely the means of procreation, though the puritanically minded have sometimes tried to make it so. It is also the solvent of isolation, the experience through which a solitary human being, caged in the prison of himself, comes closest to escaping from his lonely cell through uniting himself with another. It is significant that among the longest-lasting of our innumerable terms for sexual intercourse have been 'knowing', 'possessing' and 'having', expressions which suggest that the real goal of

The experience of desire, of being swept away in an overwhelming torrent of feeling which smashes through propriety and convention, lies behind the belief that there is a supernatural element in sexuality, that to love is to be caught in the grip of a force from outside oneself
Facing page The centaur Nessus, crazed with longing for Deianeira, the wife of Hercules, carried her off, and Hercules killed him with an arrow: painting by Delaunay
Above The so-called 'Rokeby Venus', painting by Velázquez

sexual activity for most human beings is not procreation, or even erotic pleasure, but something more complicated and less physical, the discovery of and acquisition of another human entity who, if only momentarily and if only as an illusion, seems to become part of oneself.

If this is the major sexual goal, and if it can be gained only partially and fleetingly with a human partner, then it is quite natural to think of the lasting and blissful union of the soul with God in sexual terms, as many mystics have done. A passionate erotic poem in the Old Testament, the Song of Solomon, was interpreted by Jewish and Christian scholars as a commentary on the rapturous relationship of God as Lover and the soul as Bride. The Christian Church is 'the Bride of Christ', and there is the parallel Jewish concept of the Shekhinah (see CABALA). At the age of 18, St Catherine of Siena, who had vowed lifelong virginity, experienced a vision in which she was betrothed to 'the only husband she could accept, Christ himself' (see CATHERINE). One

The ecstasy of sexual union can be seen as a state in which man rises to the supernatural level

of the poems of St John of the Cross (see JOHN OF THE CROSS) includes the following lines, spoken by 'the soul in rapture at having arrived at the height of perfection' (in Roy Campbell's translation):

Oh night that was my guide!
Oh darkness dearer than the morning's pride,
Oh night that joined the lover
To the beloved bride,
Transfiguring them each into the other.

This concept of the soul's union with God as a sexual union is paralleled in the romantic ideal of love between human partners as an act of worship. In the Church of England marriage service the bridegroom says to the bride, 'with my body I thee worship'. The lover in poetry, and in common speech, 'adores', 'idolizes' or 'worships' the object of his longing. The theme is startlingly pictured in an Italian painting of the 15th century, which shows Sir Lancelot and other great heroes of romantic love adoring Venus: she hovers naked in the sky above them and rays of light stream between them and her genitals (see LANCELOT).

Overwhelming Eros

The experience of desire itself, of being swept away in an overwhelming torrent of feeling which smashes through propriety and convention and all the recognized rules and niceties of everyday life, has always suggested to human beings that there is a powerful supernatural element in sexuality, that to love is to be caught in the grip of a force from outside oneself. A man in love behaves like a madman, another person traditionally regarded as possessed by a god or a spirit. Lovers in orgasm behave as if they were 'possessed' by some non-human agency, quivering and shuddering, groaning and crying out, momentarily deaf and blind to everything around them as if they had mounted to some unearthly plane.

As a result, desire has been regarded as a deity, or as a great supernatural power in the face of which even the gods themselves may be helpless. The original Eros of the Greeks was not a pretty, mischievous boy, shooting his toy bow and arrows at the grown-ups, but an awe-inspiring universal force which, Hesiod says, 'unnerves the limbs and overcomes the mind and wise counsels of all gods and all men'. The love

goddess Aphrodite, who in mythology became the mother of Eros, was said to have been born from the foam which boiled up when the severed genitals of the sky god Uranus were thrown into the sea, perhaps a poetic image linking the foam of orgasm with the overwhelming tides of desire (see APHRODITE; EROS).

If desire is a supernatural force, then again the ecstasy of sexual union can be seen as a state in which man rises to the supernatural level, in which he is possessed by a god and mingles with the divine. The *orgia* of Dionysus, from which our word 'orgy' is derived, sometimes involved men as well as women, and were religious rites of this sort (see DIONYSUS). The frenzied orgy of the witches' sabbath, whether real or imaginary, appears to have been, or to have been thought of as, an ecstatic sexual communion with the witches' god (see SABBATH).

Sex has, in fact, frequently contributed to the implanting or confirmation of religious or magical belief. During the sexual act, especially if it ends in mutual orgasm, both parties achieve an intense, often uncontrolled state of temporary brain excitement, which continues on to a state of sudden temporary nervous collapse and transient brain inhibition. The same physiological process has been observed in cases of apparent 'demonic possession' and in many modern psychiatric case-histories (see POSSESSION). It can create states of greatly increased brain suggestibility, in which feelings of possession from outside, or mutual possession of each partner by the other, can become very strong. Relief from the accumulated tension of everyday life is also frequent in the phase of final sexual collapse, when the brain's slate is wiped clean, so to speak, and left blank for new impressions and influences to write on. New loves can readily spring up, or old hates be dissolved, in states of aroused sexual tension and in the final orgasm.

It is this which lies behind the use of sex as a means to possession by or union with a god, and behind some experiences of conversion. Fundamentalist revival movements in America, for example, have sometimes encouraged worshippers to 'come through' to Jesus, and have taken the occurrence of orgasm as the sign of the Holy Ghost entering a person's life. Erskine Caldwell's book *The Journey Man* describes this partic-



Greek phallic protective amulet

ular aspect of revivalism in the American South very well.

The physiological act of sex and orgasm greatly increases suggestibility, which may then fire off further sexual excitement. Repeatedly induced orgasmic collapse can produce, and has been used to produce, states of deep hysterical trance. And conversion to, or bolstering of, religious faith by techniques of this sort is usually best achieved in groups, rather than by people working in pairs or alone, hence the sexual orgy as a religious rite.

Sexual Magic

In many traditions the world is thought to be made up of polarities or opposite forces, among which are male and female, active and passive, positive and negative, good and evil. In China, for instance, the two great principles Yin and Yang, which are respectively male and female, run through the whole universe, and everything which exists depends on their interplay and their combinations with each other. In some forms of Hinduism the universe consists of the interplay of two great forces, personified as male and female deities, Shiva and Shakti. In European number mysticism, each number is classified as male or female and has characteristics accordingly.

But the two great forces in the universe are generally regarded as parts of something greater, of a sublime and mysterious One which unites and transcends them. In human beings, the division into male and female is a mark of incompleteness, of inadequacy, and the real Fall of Man, in some mystical writers, is connected with the division into the two sexes (see FIRST MAN). The ideal human being would be bisexual, a hermaphrodite in whom this division had been healed (see HERMAPHRODITE; OPPOSITES). Benjamin Walker states the view, in *Sex and the Supernatural*: 'As halves we seek to be made whole. The mutual attraction of the sexes is the craving of an incomplete being to be made complete... The sexual act restores the original oneness of the human being.'

The account of the creation of woman in the book of Genesis, with Eve being made from Adam's rib, was long taken as an indication that in the divine plan woman

Focus of the Will

Interestingly enough the phallus was thought, both by primitive and civilised peoples, to have a separate and independent existence, beyond the jurisdiction of the human will. An aboriginal tribe in East Africa believed that the phallus was the abode of a disobedient animal that directed its actions. A tribe of Indians in Brazil thought that a snake dwelt in the penis. And men of more exalted intellect have expressed the same conviction about the 'unruly member' in different terms. 'In man,' writes Plato, 'the nature of the genital organs is disobedient and self-willed, like a creature that is

deaf to reason, and it attempts to dominate all because of its frenzied lusts.' In his Epistle to the Romans, St Paul said, 'I see another law in my members warring against the law of my mind'. Schopenhauer felt that 'the genitals are the real focus of the Will and thus opposite to the brain which represents Idea'.

Medieval tradition regarded the male organs as being within the province of the Devil and there was a popular belief that Satan kept a store of such appurtenances which he dispensed to his followers for distribution to the faithful. One

story has it that a young man wished to attend the sabbat and, feeling that he was insufficiently endowed by nature, went to a witch and asked for the loan of one from her store. She told him to climb a tree and help himself from the nest in which they lived and moved about and where she fed them on corn. Rather too ambitiously the youth picked up an outsize specimen but when the witch saw it she told him to put it back. He could take any one he liked, she said, except that one, because that was reserved for the parish priest.

Benjamin Walker *Sex and the Supernatural*

was meant to be subordinate to man. But alternatively it could be taken to mean something subtler, that the original Adam contained the potential female in himself. This is the interpretation which magicians tend to put on the story, for in magical theory the opposites which exist in the universe at large exist equally in man, who is a microcosm or miniature copy of the universe. Each human being contains all the opposites – male and female, good and evil, and the rest – and the road to perfection and power lies through the balancing and reconciliation of these opposites so as to achieve a higher unity. In practice, this means that acts of heterosexual magic are regarded as the reconciliation of the two opposites involved, the man and the woman, and acts of homosexual or auto-sexual magic are attempts to bring into balance the opposites within the magician's own being.

Peacock in a Mirror

In the West the strong strand of hostility to sex in Christianity led to the playing down or explaining away of the erotic language of mystics, and to the automatic association of orgies and deviant sex practices with heresy. And until very recently little was known in the West of the tantric cults of India, which are frowned on by many Hindus and Buddhists. Tantrism is concerned with far more than sex but among the activities regarded as essential to tantric worship are 'nudism, sexual freedom, group sexuality, adultery, incest and, on the higher planes, intercourse with elemental creatures, demonesses and goddesses', and the supreme goal of tantric sexual ritual is 'to apprehend the ultimate Unity' (see TANTRISM).

In his book on *The Tantric Tradition* Aghananda Bharati explains that tantric rites involve long and complicated procedures before the sexual climax of a ceremony is reached. Mantras (see MANTRA) are repeated over and over again, with a hypnotic effect on the worshippers, and hashish may be taken. In some rituals men and women sit in pairs, forming a circle, and intercourse is ritually performed by the group while special mantras are recited. One of the functions of the mantras is as an aid to breath control, which creates the 'euphoric effects accompanied by mild

A female figure with a phallic design, from an Assyrian seal, c 3500 BC: in many traditions male and female are regarded as two great opposite forces which pervade the entire universe, and everything which exists depends on their interplay and their mingling with each other. Magical power is thought to reside in the male and female organs of sex, and to represent them in images is to invoke their beneficent power to create abundance or to ward off evil and ill-luck



hallucinations' that Bharati describes. The sex rituals, he says, 'engender the intensive, euphoric, oftentime hallucinatory and perhaps psychopathological feelings which go with religious experience or which is religious experience . . . the immediate aim of the tantric is to achieve ecstasy.'

In this century tantric theory and practice has spread to some magical groups in the West. Aleister Crowley (see CROWLEY), a persistent seeker after the means by which a man puts himself in contact with the inhabitants of the spirit world and commands gods and devils to do his bidding, made a close study of Indian mysticism and tantrism as a young man. He eventually developed a sexual trance technique, which he called 'eroto-comatose lucidity' and which helped him, he thought, to break down the barriers between himself and the supernatural world. Where medieval ritual magicians had recommended chastity and fasting as a way of introducing the abnormal condition of mind necessary for communing with spirits (see RITUAL MAGIC), Crowley prescribed the opposite methods. 'The candidate is made ready for the ordeal by general athletic training and by feasting. On the appointed day he is attended by one or more experienced attendants whose duty it is to exhaust him sexually by every known means. The candidate will sink into a sleep of utter exhaustion but he must be again sexually stimulated and then again allowed to fall asleep. This alternation is to continue indefinitely until the candidate is in a state which is neither sleep nor waking, and in which his spirit is set free by perfect exhaustion of the body . . . (and) communes with the most Highest and the Most Holy Lord God of its Being, Maker of Heaven and Earth.'

In view of the physiological effects of this process, it is not surprising that by means of this sort Crowley obtained visions and communications from 'gods' and 'spirits'. In Paris in 1914, for instance, he conducted a series of magical experiments, using homosexual techniques, with himself in the female role and the poet Victor Neuburg as his partner, and putting Neuburg repeatedly into states of trance and 'possession'. 'We invoked the gods Mercury and Jupiter; and obtained many astonishing results of many kinds, ranging from spiritual illumination to physical phenomena.' Crowley kept a record of these



Sex has frequently contributed to the implanting or confirmation of religious and magical beliefs, since the sexual act creates states of increased brain suggestibility, in which feelings of possession from outside can become very strong *Above* Pubic shield from Australia with phallic creatures, including a snake, a fish and a fish-headed human *Right* Australian aboriginal painting showing love-making and totemic animals



Human Museum/Chris Barker

An increasing number of people consider sexual activity to be good, not just because it is pleasurable, but because it will somehow, magically and mystically, promote general peace and harmony

striking results, for example: 'The temple opened at 10: the Rite being done . . . We beheld the Universe of the most brilliant purple and Jupiter seated on his throne surrounded by the Four Beasts . . . Subsequently appeared a great Peacock . . . The peacock is now crowned, and regards himself in a mirror.'

By this time Crowley had become a high-ranking member of the O.T.O. (Order of Templars of the Orient), a German occult society founded at the beginning of the century. According to the *Oriflamme*, the society's journal: 'Our Order possesses the KEY which opens up all Masonic and Hermetic secrets, namely, the teaching of sexual magic . . .'

The magical view of sex as a way of

apprehending and achieving unity, not only in human beings but in the world at large, is not confined to practising magicians. Writers like D. H. Lawrence have put sex on a high spiritual pedestal as an activity in which men and women link themselves with the great forces of Nature and the underlying rhythms of the universe. By an increasing number of people sexual activity is considered good, not just because it is pleasurable, but because it will somehow, magically and mystically, promote general peace and harmony, friendship, happiness and blessedness on earth, a view which brings up to date the old principle that by imitative magic human sexual acts promote the beneficent activities of the gods, bringing fertility and forestalling dearth,

maintaining order and preventing chaos.

Besides these high aims, sex magic is also used for more down to earth purposes. The principle is that, by concentrating his will on the object of the operation, the magician can bring the powerful physical and psychological energy which he conjures up in himself through sex magic to bear on people and events around him. Among the aims of Crowley's sexual rituals were money, eloquence, success, wisdom, inspiration, youth, understanding and health.

In magical theory a sexual working has no hope of success if the magician allows himself to be swept away in the thundering surf of desire and orgasm. Unless he remains the master of the force he has aroused, he cannot direct it at his objective. In



Figure of Eros burning a butterfly, 1st century BC: a butterfly is frequently a symbol of the soul, and the original Eros of the Greeks was an awe-inspiring universal force of desire which unnerves the limbs and overcomes the mind...

general in religious and magical sexual rites the element of pleasure is secondary. It is the means to a goal, not the goal itself.

Few human beings, it seems, have been able to treat sex as a physical pleasure and nothing more. If from one point of view it is a way of escaping from the isolation of the self and sharing in a greater reality, from another it is something evil and dirty, which arouses feelings of intense shame and guilt. Powerful taboos surround sex outside marriage, perversion, menstruation, nudity, homosexuality, the taking of a woman's virginity, taboos which still exercise great influence even in the so-called permissive societies of the West. Mutilation of the sex organs is common in many societies, especially at puberty when a boy or girl comes of age sexually and is initiated as an adult (see INITIATION; MUTILATION).

The fact that the organs of sex are so close to those of excretion has helped to create a connection between sex and dirt. The belief that vital energy is lost in orgasm (implied in the term 'dissipation' for sensual indulgence) has contributed to fear of sex. The tendency of many Christians to distrust the body and its passions and to regard sexual pleasure as inherently sinful and demonic, and the high value which Christians have placed on virginity and celibacy, have left their mark on Western attitudes, but all over the world some men and women have strenuously denied their bodies for the good of their souls (see SELF-DENIAL). That the same physiological process should be able to raise a man to the height of spiritual exaltation or plunge him into the depths of guilt-ridden misery is another of the facts of human experience which have given sex a role of such enduring importance in religion and magic.

(See also BODY; BREATH; BULL; HORNS; INCEST; INCUBUS; KUNDALINI; LANDSCAPE SYMBOLISM; LOVE MAGIC; NUDITY; PHALLIC SYMBOLISM; SYMBOLISM; WOMAN.)

WILLIAM SARGANT

FURTHER READING: Benjamin Walker, *Sex and the Supernatural* (Macdonald, 1970); G. Wellesley, *Sex and the Occult* (Souvenir).

Michael Holford

SHADOW

IN MANY PARTS of the world, a man's shadow was, and in some areas still is, believed to be his soul, or if not quite that, then at least an integral part of himself, so intimately bound up with his life and being that whatever happened to it was instantly felt by him as though it had happened to him in the body. A number of languages have only one word to express the ideas of 'shadow' and of 'soul'. The Zulus, for instance, use the word *tunzi* to describe both a man's spirit and his shadow; among the Algonquin Indians, *otahchuk* has the same double meaning, as *natub* has in the Quiché tongue. Even in English, the poetical expression 'shade' is occasionally applied to a ghost, or a spirit dwelling in the underworld.

Just as a reflection in a mirror or in water was often deemed to be the living soul of its original (see MIRROR), so also, and perhaps more generally, was the shadow, that strange and lively image which at certain times follows its owner everywhere and faithfully copies all his actions, and at other times is nowhere to be found. In both these forms, the soul was thought to be visible because, at that moment, it was out of the body and at large.

The Wandering Soul

It was an accepted belief of most primitive peoples that a man's spirit could leave him temporarily without causing his death. Most often when he was asleep, but occasionally at other times also, it escaped through the mouth, or the nostrils, and travelled abroad on its own mysterious errands. This could be dangerous, but it was not necessarily so. If all went well, the wandering soul, however far it roamed, came home in the end. So long as it remained unharmed, the man in whose body it normally dwelt was safe; but if it was injured in any way during its absence, he too was injured, and if it was somehow prevented from returning to him, he died.

Thus it was with the shadow-soul, both in its visible form, and when it was unseen. If it was lost for good, as it might be by accident or through the malice of sorcerers, its owner died. If it was damaged or ill-treated, he felt the effects immediately in his own person. Among the Northern Bantu, and in some parts of India, it is said that a man can be killed by driving a spear into his shadow.

So, too, one of the legends of ancient Ireland relates how the hero Finn slew an enemy in precisely the same way. He pursued him relentlessly until 'he saw before him Cuirrech's shadow, and through the shadow he hurled a spear, chanting a spell over its head, striking it into Cuirrech, who fell thereby'.

Sir J. G. Frazer says in *The Golden Bough* that certain magicians on the island of Wetar (in the Moluccas of Indonesia) could cause their victims to fall ill simply by stabbing their shadows with pikes, or hacking at them with swords. A curious reflection of these primitive beliefs is seen in the modern

superstition, still found in many parts of Great Britain, that to walk or trample on a person's shadow will bring him bad luck. In his *Book of Folk-Lore*, Sabine Baring-Gould remarks that he had known children to be seriously upset if another child struck or stamped on their shadows. They said that it hurt them, or that it was an insult.

Until at least as late as the end of the 19th century, and perhaps later, it was commonly believed in Greece and some other countries of south-eastern Europe that a man's shadow could be stolen from him without his knowledge, and be used in a form of foundation sacrifice to ensure the stability of a new building. Master builders, or their workmen, did this by persuading some unsuspecting individual, preferably a stranger to the village, to visit the building site on a bright sunny day, while the work was in progress.

He was then induced to stand, all unknowingly, in such a position that his shadow was thrown by the strong sunlight on to the place where the foundation stone was to be laid. Or, if it was possible, that stone was laid directly on the shadow as it rested on the ground; or else the shadow was secretly measured, and the rod or cord used for the purpose was buried in the foundations.

By any of these methods, the builders' object was achieved. The shadow-soul was captured, and with it, the victim's life. He felt nothing at the time and did not know what had happened to him, but he died within the year, or according to a Romanian tradition, within 40 days. The safety of the building was thus secured, as in ancient times it had been secured by immuring a living person in the walls, or burying him alive under the foundation stone (see BUILDERS' RITES).

In China, it was considered dangerous for anyone attending a funeral to stand too close to the coffin at the moment when the lid was being fastened on it. His shadow might fall across it and be enclosed with the corpse. Similarly, it was better not to go too near the open grave as the coffin was lowered into it, for there too the shadow might be trapped. If this happened, the result was misfortune of some kind, usually ill-health. Hence, it was customary for all but the nearest relatives to withdraw a little way during these parts of the ceremony. The bearers and the grave-diggers could not, of course, do this, but they made their shadows fast to their persons by tying pieces of cloth tightly round their waists.

Summoning a Shadow

A widespread European folktale relates how a stranger comes to a village, and seems to be like other men until it is noticed that he casts no shadow in sunlight or lamplight. Somehow or other, he has lost that faithful companion, that soul manifestation, which everyone else has, and consequently he is feared and avoided. The shadow may have been stolen from him by some enemy or by witchcraft, but equally its absence may be due to the fact that he has sold his soul to the Devil, or forfeited it by some great sin. There are variants of the 'Devil take the

hindmost' type in which Satan, having agreed to build a bridge or perform some other service in exchange for a fee of the last man in a race or flight, takes only the shadow, and lets its tardy owner live on without it. This is usually told as an example of the Devil's stupidity and the ease with which he can be cheated; but since the shadow was originally held to be the soul of the man concerned, it may be that he is not quite so stupid as he seems, and has good reason to be satisfied.

In S. O. Addy's *Household Tales* (1895), there is a story of a Lincolnshire wizard who was able to summon a man's shadow and make it appear on the wall of a room, though its owner was not in the house at the time. This wizard was consulted by a farmer who had been robbed, and wished to discover the identity of the thief.

In fact, there were two men concerned in the robbery, both of them servants on the farm. By means of a spell, the first was forced to come in person to the house, and thus his guilt was proved; but in the case of the second, the wizard contented himself with calling his shadow. It came, and was clearly seen on the wall. The farmer instantly recognized its owner, and both thieves, we are told, were subsequently arrested.

The Shadow of Death

Of the many forms of divination once practised at Christmas or New Year in order to see who would die in the following twelve months, a Welsh variant was by the observation of shadows. On Christmas night, when all were gathered round the fire, the shadows thrown by the firelight on to the wall were carefully noticed. If any appeared without heads, the individuals to whom they belonged would not live to see another Christmas.

A somewhat similar superstition in North Carolina, though less directly personal and not connected with any particular date, was that the shadow of a coffin shape seen on the ceiling was a death omen for someone in the house.

A shadow tradition of a quite different type and origin is still remembered in Worcestershire. Near the southern end of the Malverns there is a hill called the Raggedstone. At certain times, not regularly nor often, but at what would seem to be unpredictable intervals, the shadow of its rocky summit is thrown on to the valley below. If it falls directly upon anyone, that person will die before his time or, at least, he will suffer great misfortune during the course of his life.

Local legend says that Cardinal Wolsey's unhappy end was thus literally foreshadowed many years before it happened, when he was living at Birtsmorton Court near Tewkesbury as a young man. A story sometimes told to account for this singular form of warning is that the hill was cursed by a monk in the Middle Ages. A more probable theory is that the long-lived tradition has its roots in confused folk memories of pre-Christian ritual and sacrifice connected with the hilltop.

CHRISTINA HOLE

Horrified by the 'evil propensities of a carnal nature', the Shakers forbade all sexual intercourse; looking forward to the Second Coming, they danced to the glory of God and shouted for the downfall of Satan

SHAKERS

AMERICAN SHAKERISM dates from the last quarter of the 18th century, flourished in the middle of the 19th century, and has all but died out in this century. Surprisingly, in 1962 five Russians, described as Shakers, were gaoled at Novosibirsk, according to a report in *The Times*. In true Shaker style, they said that they had no fatherland on earth; that was why they had told their brethren, who had been called up for military service, not to take the army oath of allegiance – a problem which did not arise in America, where Shakers were exempted.

To the Shakers, God was not three but four persons, the fourth being their foundress, Ann Lee (sometimes spelt Lees) or Mother Ann. With Ann's birth in Manchester, England, in 1736, Christ had returned to earth, and therefore the millennium, the long-predicted rule of Christ on earth for 1000 years, had begun. The female component in this fourfold godhead helped to produce 'perfect equality of rights' between Shaker men and women, an equality which was not disturbed by sexual involvements because there were none. Sex was 'the root and foundation of all human depravity'; it was the forbidden fruit which had driven our first parents from the garden of Eden. It followed that the Shakers had no children of their own; instead they adopted them from 'the world', in many cases foundlings; they also took in whole families. Men and women ceased to be husbands and wives, as soon as they put foot in the millennium.

The 'orders' of Shaker behaviour reveal this abhorrence of sex. All private union between the sexes was of course prohibited. A brother and sister must not be together, alone, at any time; must not have private talk together; must not work together, give each other presents, write to each other, pass each other on the stairs; they must not, of course, shake hands, nor must any brother or sister sit cross-legged. And, needless to say, no one might look at beasts when they copulated, or possess watches or umbrellas, or play with dogs or cats.

The Elders were always on the look-out for symptoms of 'the evil propensities of a carnal nature', and in spite of the strict orders, these were sometimes in evidence. At Niskayuna in New York State (now called Watervliet) in about 1793, three young Shaker women 'amused themselves by attending to the amour of two flies in the window'. Unfortunately for them, they were observed by Eldress Hannah Matterson who ordered them, 'for thus gratifying their carnal inclinations', to take whips, strip themselves naked, and whip one another. Elders Timothy Hubbard and Jonathan Slosson were present to see that the punishment was properly carried out. 'Two happened at once to strike the third, when she cried *murder!* they were then ordered to



Shaker Evans with his flock at New Lebanon, dancing to trample down sin: illustration from *The Graphic*, 1870

stop and plunge into a brook near by.'

In the early years of the 19th century, the Shaker communities thrived and expanded westwards into Maine and Kentucky. They bought and reclaimed the land, grew crops, sold seeds and medicinal herbs, honey, pickles, maple sugar and the vegetables and fruit produce which they did not themselves consume, and a variety of manufactured goods, such as brooms and brushes, saddles, saddlebags, stockings, gloves, cushions, mops, and furniture which, because of the simplicity of its design and lack of fussy ornament, is highly prized today.

Dancing to Trample Sin

The Shakers' main mode of worship was dancing. It was as much a march as a dance, the men at one end of the hall, the women at the other. They faced the other sex and danced or marched with swinging arms backwards and forwards, singing a hymn as they went; then they faced the wall and marched forwards and backwards. Finally, they formed two circles, the smaller one in the centre composed of women who were the principal singers, the outer circle of men, and round and round they went, singing, swinging, marching; they were symbolically trampling sin underfoot as well as praising God. Their Bible reference for this mode of worship was a verse from Psalm 47: 'O clap your hands, all ye people; shout unto God with the voice of triumph'.

In addition to communal dancing, there were operations of shaking, trembling, stamping and whirling – hence the name Shaker. Thomas Brown, who joined the Shakers in 1799, and wrote an account of the sect, witnessed a young woman whirl round like a top for as long as half an hour;

then she broke out into an unknown tongue. She had seen angels and damned spirits in torment, she said to Brown, and other spirits in lesser torments for they were receiving the gospel, and she was not made a bit giddy by her whirlings. Brown himself experienced the shaking and the gift of speaking in an unknown tongue; this outbreak was involuntary, and Brown was sad to think that neither he nor any one else knew what he had said.

Another gift was the involuntary raising of one's arm, accompanied by the compulsion to follow the direction in which the finger pointed. An Elder called Ebenezer Cooley once felt his arm rise in the air and was constrained to follow his finger to a house in which there was a man who had fallen downstairs and was lying unconscious with three ribs broken. Cooley's hand led him 'into the house and to the place where the man lay and finally stopt on the broken ribs; the man immediately felt an healing power, and was restored whole in a few minutes.'

In 1838, a Shaker called Philemon Stewart came to the meeting 'so agitated that he needed the support of two brethren' and delivered himself of the first direct communication from the Heavenly Parents (Jesus and Mother Ann). The 'instrument' or medium of these divine revelations would sometimes fall on the floor in a deep trance after he or she had delivered the message, or be thrown into convulsions, with loss of speech. The spirit messages were for the most part trivial – calling the brethren to task for borrowing tools, for leaving broken glass about, or neglecting to clean muddy boots. Communications were also made by the spirits of departed Elders. The Shakers can therefore be said to have been in at the start of modern Spiritualism.

The Shakers derived from the French refugee Camisards (see CAMISARDS), who

appeared in England in 1706, and whose entranced utterances and grotesque postures were a source of interest and amusement. With their English followers, the Camisards spread out to Oxford, Manchester, Dublin and the Protestant parts of the Continent, their activities finally dying away at the end of Queen Anne's reign in 1713.

Some 30 years later, the English disciples of these French prophets reappeared in Manchester; they held their meetings at the house of a rich bricklayer called John Townley. Later they were joined by a small group from Bolton, led by James Wardley, who became the leader of these Manchester Shakers. Wardley was a member of the Society of Friends, but he believed that the millennium, or Christ's Second Coming, had actually commenced, and that Antichrist, by which he understood all the Protestant Churches as well as the Church of Rome, would soon be overthrown.

They would sit for a while in silent meditation; then they would begin to tremble, and while under this emotion would express 'God's indignation against sin'. They would also shout (for the downfall of Satan), sing, or walk the floor and jostle one another, 'swiftly passing and re-passing, like clouds agitated by a mighty wind'. It was not surprising that they were called Shakers, or Shaking Quakers, also Shiverers and Jumpers. The only formal institution they adopted was that of confession of sins, which was made to Wardley's wife, Jane, whom they called Mother.

In 1758, they were joined by a 23-year-old woman of abundant energy and creative ideas: Ann Lee, daughter of John Lee, blacksmith. In spite of being 'entirely destitute of school education', she held views, especially on the upbringing of children, which were in advance of her time. Four years after joining the Shakers, she married Abraham Standley, also a blacksmith. She gave birth to four children but they all soon died, a common fate of children in those times. The birth of her last child was difficult and forceps had to be used. She lay for several hours apparently dead, and on her recovery declared that she would never again have sexual intercourse. She was overwhelmed with guilt and cried to God for forgiveness. This was called 'labouring in the works of God' and 'travailing in the way

of God'. Sometimes she laboured and travailed the whole night long.

The Shakers believed that Christ, whose Second Coming is foretold in the book of Revelation, would appear in the form of a woman. And slowly it dawned upon them that Ann Lee, through her suffering and labouring for the lost state of mankind, had so purified and prepared herself that she had become the vehicle for this divine female spirit which the Shakers called 'Mother Spirit in Christ, an emanation from the Eternal Mother'. Ann's leadership of the society inevitably followed, and confession of sins was now made to her.

In 1774, Mother Ann and eight other members of the group set out to establish the faith in America. 'I knew,' said Ann, 'that God had a chosen people in America I saw some of them in a vision; and when I met with them in America I knew them.'

A Visit with the Shakers

A 'Mr Stallybrass' visited the Shakers at Niskayuna in the winter of 1842, partly out of curiosity about the sect and partly to escape worldly troubles. On inquiring what were the conditions for receiving new members, he was told by one of the Elders that all newcomers had a week's trial to see how they liked it. Stallybrass expressed his satisfaction with this; he was more than willing to turn his back on the Devil and the flesh, and to take up his cross. The Elder then informed him that he would have to confess his sins - all the wicked acts he had ever committed. Stallybrass agreed to make a week's trial, and was asked to supper.

After a few days he was invited to prepare himself for confession. He was taken to a private confession room and before an Elder of mature years, to whom he briefly told the story of his life. He must have left out of his account the events which had led him to flee the world and the secular authorities, for after he had finished, the Elder observed: 'You have not been very wicked.' Stallybrass replied modestly, 'No, I have not abounded in acts of crime and debauchery.'

The Elder was not satisfied and he told Stallybrass about a number of persons who had not made a full confession, with the result that they could find no peace or pleasure until they had returned to the confession room and made a clean breast of everything. And he concluded by pointing out

that no wicked person could continue with them for long without being found out.

Stallybrass was, of course, holding something back, and he intended to continue to do so. He asked the Elder how such persons could be detected. The Elder replied by taking him to the window and pointing out the place in the grounds where Mother Ann had stationed four angels. 'These angels,' he said, 'always communicate any wickedness that is done here, or the presence of any wicked person among us.'

'But you cannot understand these things; neither can you believe them, for you have not yet got faith enough.' Still looking out of the window, Stallybrass said: 'I can see no angels!' 'No,' replied the Elder, 'you cannot see them with the eyes of sense, but you can see them with the eye of faith. You must labour for faith.' And as if he had an excellent sense of humour, he placed upon Stallybrass's nose a pair of glasses, described as 'a pair of spiritual golden spectacles', to make him see spiritual things. Instinctively Stallybrass put his hand up to touch them. 'Oh, you can't feel them; they will not incommode you, but will help you to see spiritual things.' After this he was integrated into the millennium.

According to Edward D. Andrews, the historian of the Shakers, the Society reached its greatest expansion in the decade before the Civil War (1861-65); it then had 6000 members and 18 centres in several states. Fifty years earlier its numbers had been no more than 1000, and 50 years after the Civil War it had sunk back to the 1000 mark.

The Shakers failed in a rapidly changing world to recruit a sufficient number of new members or to retain those they had. The millennium, with its strict celibacy, goods in common, and obedience to the Elders, did not appeal to the spirit of the new America with its emphasis on liberty and the acquisition of property. In addition, the United Society of Believers in Christ's Second Appearing had its economic roots in handicrafts; the power of modern industry and finance had simply left it behind.

JOHN SYMONDS

FURTHER READING: E. D. Andrews, *The People Called Shakers* (Oxford Univ. Press 1953); H. Desroche, *The American Shakers* (Univ. of Massachusetts Press, 1971); R. Whitson, ed., *The Shakers*, (Paulist Press).

SHAMAN

SHAMANISM is a religious phenomenon characteristic of Siberian and Ural-Altaic peoples; the word shaman itself is of Tungus origin. But shamanism, although its most complete expression is found in the arctic and central Asian regions, must not be considered as limited to those countries. The term 'shaman' has been widely applied to all those who have regular dealings with the spirit realm, whether in southeast Asia, Oceania, Australia, or among South and North American tribes. A distinction is to be made, however, between the religions dominated by a shamanistic ideology and by

shamanistic techniques (as is the case with Siberian and Indonesian religions) and those in which shamanism constitutes rather a secondary phenomenon.

The shaman is medicine-man, priest and psychopomp; that is to say, he cures sicknesses, he directs the communal sacrifices and he escorts the soul of the dead to the other world. He is able to do all this by virtue of his techniques of ecstasy, that is by his power to leave his body at will.

There are three ways of becoming a shaman: first, by spontaneous vocation (the 'call' or 'election'); second, by hereditary transmission of the shamanic profession and third, by personal 'quest' or, more rarely, by the will of the clan. But, by what-

ever method he may have been designated, a shaman is recognized as such only after having received two kinds of instruction. The first is ecstatic (for example, dreams, visions, trances), the second is traditional (shamanic techniques, names and functions of the spirits, mythology and genealogy of the clan, secret language). This two-fold teaching, imparted by the spirits and the old master shamans, constitutes initiation. Sometimes initiation is public and includes a rich and varied ritual; but a lack of ritual in no way implies a lack of initiation.

In Siberia, the youth who is called to be a shaman attracts attention by his strange behaviour; for example, he seeks solitude, becomes absent-minded, loves to roam in



A shaman dancing in a hut, from an account of an expedition to northern Russia, published in 1802: the main function of Asian shamans is magical healing, which involves finding the stolen or strayed soul of the patient and restoring it

A man may also become a shaman following an accident or a highly unusual event – for example, among the Buriat, the Soyot, the Eskimo, after being struck by lightning, or falling from a high tree, or undergoing an ordeal similar to an initiatory ordeal.

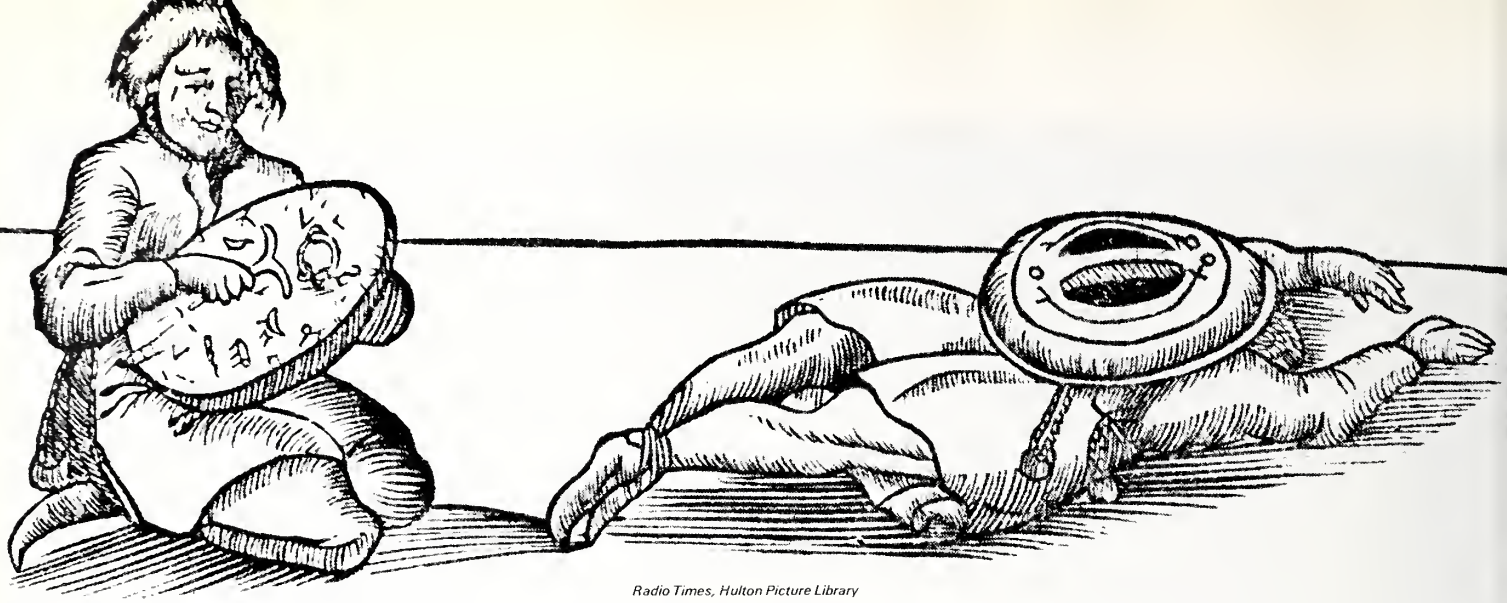
Solution of a Psychic Crisis

From the middle of the past century several attempts have been made to explain the phenomenon of shamanism as a mental disorder. But the problem was wrongly put. For, on the one hand, it is not true that shamans always are or always have to be neuropathics; on the other hand, those among them who had been ill became shamans precisely because they had succeeded in becoming cured. Very often in Siberia, when the shamanic vocation manifests itself as some form of illness or as an epileptic seizure, the initiation is equivalent to a cure. To obtain the gift of shamanizing presupposes precisely the solution of the psychic crisis brought on by the first symptoms of election or call.

But if shamanism cannot simply be identified with a psychopathological phenomenon, it is nevertheless true that the shamanic vocation often implies a crisis so deep that it sometimes borders on madness.

And since the youth cannot become a shaman until he has resolved this crisis, it is clear that it plays the role of a mystical initiation. The disorder provoked in the future shaman by the agonizing news that he has been chosen by the gods or the spirits is by that very fact valued as an 'initiatory sickness'. The precariousness of life, the solitude and the suffering, that are revealed by any sickness are, in this particular case, aggravated by the symbolism of initiatory death; for accepting the supernatural election finds expression in the feeling that one has delivered oneself over to the divine or demonic powers, hence that one is destined to imminent death. We may give all these psychopathological crises of the elected the generic name of initiatory sicknesses because their syndrome very closely follows the classic ritual of initiation. The sufferings of the elected man were exactly like the tortures of initiation; just as, in puberty rites or rites for entrance into a secret society, the novice is 'killed' by semi-divine or demonic beings, so the future shaman sees in dreams his own body dismembered by demons; he watches them, for example, cutting off his head and tearing out his tongue. The initiatory rituals peculiar to Siberian and central Asian shamanism include a symbolic ascent to heaven up a tree or pole; in dream or a series of waking dreams, the sick man chosen by the gods or spirits undertakes his celestial journey to the World Tree.

When speaking of the ordeals that they undergo during their initiatory sicknesses, all Siberian shamans maintain that they



Radio Times, Hulton Picture Library

'die' and lie inanimate for from three to seven days in their yurt (tent) or in a solitary place. During this time, they are cut up by demons or by their ancestral spirits; their bones are cleaned, the flesh scraped off, the body fluids thrown away, and the eyes torn from their sockets. According to a Yakut informant, the spirits carry the future shaman to hell and shut him in a house for three years. Here he undergoes his initiation; the spirits cut off his head (which they set to one side, for the novice must watch his own dismemberment with his own eyes) and hack his body to bits, which are later distributed among the spirits of various sicknesses. It is only on this condition that the future shaman will obtain the power of healing. His bones are then covered with new flesh, and in some cases he is also given new blood.

The following are a few significant episodes selected from a long and eventful autobiography that an Avam-Samoyed shaman confided to A. A. Popov. Stricken with smallpox, the future shaman remained unconscious for three days, so nearly dead that on the third day he was almost buried. He saw himself go down to hell and, after many adventures, was carried to an island, in the middle of which stood a young birch tree which reached up to heaven. It was the Tree of the Lord of the Earth, and the Lord gave him a branch of it to make himself a drum. Next he came to a mountain. Passing through an opening, he met a naked man plying the bellows at an immense fire on which was a kettle. The man caught him with a hook, cut off his head, and chopped his body to bits and put them all into the kettle. There he boiled the body for three years, and then forged him a head on an anvil. Finally he fished out the bones, which were floating in a river, put them together, and covered them with flesh. During his adventures in the otherworld, the future shaman met several semi-divine personages, in human or animal form, and each of them revealed doctrines to him or taught him secrets of the healing art. When he awoke in his yurt, among his relatives, he was initiated and could begin to shamanize.

It becomes clear that initiatory sicknesses closely follow the fundamental pattern of all initiations: first, torture at the hands of demons or spirits, who play the role of masters of initiation; second, ritual death,

A Lapp shaman with his drum and (right) lying on the ground in trance: it is in ecstatic trance that the shaman makes his journeys to heaven and hell; he is the man who can die and return to life again, many times

experienced by the patient as a descent to hell or an ascent to heaven; third, resurrection to a new mode of being – the mode of 'consecrated man', that is, a man who can personally communicate with gods, demons, and spirits. For initiatory death is always followed by a resurrection; that is, in terms of psychopathological experience, the crisis is resolved and the sickness cured. The shaman's integration of a new personality is in large part *dependent* on his being cured.

One of the specific characteristics of shamanic initiations, aside from the candidate's dismemberment, is his reduction to the state of a skeleton. This motif is found not only in the accounts of the crises and sicknesses of those who have been chosen by the spirits to become shamans, but also in the experiences of those who have acquired their shamanic powers through their own efforts, after a long and arduous quest. Among the Ammasilik Eskimo, the apprentice spends long hours in his snow hut, meditating. At a certain moment, he falls 'dead', and remains lifeless for three days and nights; during this period an enormous polar bear devours all his flesh and reduces him to a skeleton. It is only after this mystical experience that the apprentice receives the gift of shamanizing. The *angakuts* of the Iglulik Eskimo are able in thought to strip their bodies of flesh and blood and to contemplate their own skeletons for long periods. Visualizing one's own death at the hands of demons and final reduction to the state of a skeleton are favourite meditations in Indo-Tibetan and Mongolian Buddhism.

Ladder to Heaven

Among the public initiation ceremonies of Siberian shamans, those of the Buriat are particularly interesting. The principal rite includes an ascent. A strong birch is set up in the yurt, with its roots on the hearth and its crown projecting through the smoke hole. This birch is called *udeshi burkhan*, 'the guardian of the door', for it opens the door of heaven to the shaman. It will always remain in his tent, serving as distinguishing

mark of a shaman's residence. On the day of his consecration, the candidate climbs the birch to the top (in some traditions, he carries a sword in one hand) and, emerging through the smoke hole, shouts to summon the aid of the gods. After this, the master shaman, the apprentice, and the entire audience go in procession to a place far from the village, where, on the eve of the ceremony, a large number of birches have been set in the ground. The procession halts by a particular birch, a goat is sacrificed, and the candidate, stripped to the waist, has his head, eyes and ears anointed with its blood, while other shamans play their drums. The master shaman now climbs a birch and cuts nine notches in the top of its trunk. The candidate then climbs it, followed by the other shamans. As they climb they all pass – or pretend to pass – into ecstasy. According to one authority, the candidate has to climb nine birches which, like the nine notches cut by the master shaman, symbolize the nine heavens.

In the initiatory rite of the Buriat shaman the candidate is believed to go to heaven for his consecration. To ascend to Heaven by the aid of a tree or a pole is also the essential rite in the seances of the Altaic shamans. The birch or the pole is assimilated to the tree or pillar which stands at the centre of the world and which connects the three cosmic zones – earth, heaven, and hell. The shaman can also reach the centre of the world by beating his drum. For the body of the drum is supposed to be made from a branch taken from the cosmic tree. Listening to the sound of his drum, the shaman falls into ecstasy, in which he flies to the tree, that is, to the centre of the world.

Techniques of Ecstasy

The shaman or the medicine-man can be defined as a specialist in the sacred, an individual who participates in the sacred more completely, or more truly, than other men. Whether he is chosen by superhuman beings or himself seeks to draw their attention and obtain their favours, the shaman is an individual who succeeds in having mystical experiences. In the sphere of shamanism in the strict sense, the mystical experience is expressed in the shaman's trance, real or feigned. The shaman is pre-eminently an ecstatic. Now on the plane of primitive religions ecstasy signifies the soul's

flight to heaven, or its wanderings about the earth or, finally, its descent to the subterranean world, among the dead. The shaman undertakes these ecstatic journeys for four reasons: first, to meet the God of heaven face to face and bring him an offering from the community; second, to seek the soul of a sick man, which has supposedly wandered away from his body or been carried off by demons; third, to guide the soul of a dead man to its new abode; fourth, to add to his knowledge by associating with higher beings.

But the body's abandonment by the soul during ecstasy is equivalent to a temporary death. The shaman is, therefore, the man who can die, and then return to life, many times. Through his initiation, the shaman learns not only the technique of dying and returning to life but also what he must do when his soul abandons his body; and, first of all, how to orient himself in the unknown regions which he enters during his ecstasy. He learns to explore the new planes of existence disclosed by his ecstatic experiences. He knows the road to the centre of the world, the hole in the sky through which he can fly up to the highest heaven, or the aperture in the earth through which he can descend to hell. He is forewarned of the obstacles that he will meet on his journeys, and knows how to overcome them.

Because of his ability to leave his body with impunity, the shaman can, if he so wishes, act in the manner of a spirit; he flies through the air, becomes invisible, perceives things at great distances, mounts to heaven or descends to hell, sees souls and can capture them, and is incombustible. The exhibition of certain fakir-like accomplishments during the seances, especially the so-called fire tricks, is intended to convince the spectators that the shaman has assimilated the mode of being of spirits. The powers of turning themselves into animals, of killing at a distance, or of foretelling the future are also among the powers of spirits; by exhibiting them, the shaman proclaims that he shares in the spirit condition.

Descent to the Underworld

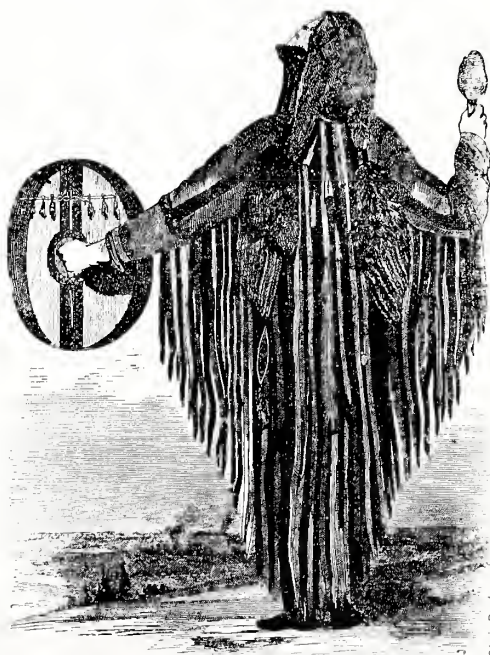
The Buriats, the Yakuts and other Siberian tribes speak of 'white' shamans and 'black' shamans, the former having relations with the gods, the latter with the spirits, especially evil spirits. Their costumes differ, being white for the former and blue for the latter. The Altaic white shaman himself sacrifices the horse offered to the god of heaven; afterwards he conducts, in ecstasy, the animal's soul on its journey to the throne of Bai Ülġän. Putting on his ceremonial costume, the shaman invokes a multitude of spirits, beats his drum and begins his celestial ascent. He laboriously mimes the difficult passing through heaven after heaven to the ninth and, if he is really powerful, to the twelfth and even higher. When he has gone as high as his powers permit, he stops and humbly addresses Bai Ülġän, imploring his protection and his blessings. The shaman learns from the god if the sacrifice has been accepted and receives predictions concerning the weather and the

coming harvest. This episode is the culminating point of the ecstasy: the shaman collapses, exhausted, and remains motionless and dumb. After a time he rubs his eyes, appears to wake from a deep sleep, and greets those present as if after a long absence.

The Altaic shaman's celestial ascent has its counterpart in his descent to the underworld. This ceremony is far more difficult, and though it can be undertaken by shamans who are both white and black, it is naturally the speciality of the latter. The shaman makes a vertical descent down the seven successive 'levels', or subterranean regions, called *puđak*, 'obstacles'. He is accompanied by his dead ancestors and his helping spirits. At the seventh obstacle he sees Erlik Khan's palace, built of stone and black clay and defended in every direction. The shaman utters a long prayer to Erlik, then he returns to the yurt and tells the audience the results of his journey.

These descents to the underworld are undertaken especially to find and bring back a sick person's soul, or to escort the soul of the deceased to Erlik's realm. In 1884 Radlov published the description of a seance organized to escort the soul of a woman 40 days after her death. The ceremony takes place in the evening. The shaman begins by circling the yurt, beating his drum; then he enters the tent and, going to the fire, invokes the deceased. Suddenly the shaman's voice changes; he begins to speak on a high pitch, in falsetto, for it is really the dead woman who is speaking. She complains that she does not know the road, that she is afraid to leave her relatives, and so on, but finally consents to the shaman's leading her, and the two set off together for the subterranean realm. When they arrive, the shaman finds that the dead refuse to permit the newcomer to enter.

Tartar shaman in Russia, clothed as a bird: 'the shamanic vocation often implies a crisis so deep that it sometimes borders on madness', and the candidate cannot become a shaman until he has resolved this crisis



Prayers proving ineffectual, brandy is offered; the seance gradually becomes more lively, for the souls of the dead, through the shaman's voice, begin quarrelling and singing together; finally they consent to receive the dead woman. The second part of the ritual represents the return journey; the shaman dances and shouts until he falls to the ground unconscious.

Magical Cures

The principal function of the shaman in Central and North Asia is magical healing. Several conceptions of the cause of illness are found in the area, but that of the 'rape of the soul' is by far the most widespread. Disease is attributed to the soul's having strayed away or been stolen, and treatment is in principle reduced to finding it, capturing it, and obliging it to resume its place in the patient's body. The Buriat shaman holds a preliminary seance to determine if the patient's soul has strayed away or if it has been stolen from him and is a captive in Erlik's prison. The shaman begins to search for the soul; if he finds it near the village, its replacement in the body is easy. If not, he searches the forests, the steppes, and even the bottom of the sea. Failure to find it indicates that it is a prisoner of Erlik, and the only recourse is costly sacrifices. Erlik sometimes demands another soul in place of the one he has imprisoned; the problem then is to find one that is available. With the patient's consent, the shaman decides who the victim shall be. While the latter is asleep the shaman, taking the form of an eagle, descends on him and, tearing out his soul, goes down with it to the realm of the dead and presents it to Erlik, who then allows him to take away the patient's. The victim dies soon afterward, and the patient recovers. But he has gained only a respite, for he too will die three, seven, or nine years later.

It is as a further result of his ability to travel in the supernatural worlds and to see the superhuman beings (gods, demons, spirits of the dead) that the shaman has been able to contribute decisively to the knowledge of death. In all probability many features of 'funerary geography', as well as some themes of the mythology of death, are the result of the ecstatic experiences of shamans. The unknown and terrifying world of death assumes form, is organized in accordance with particular patterns; finally it displays a structure and, in course of time, becomes familiar and acceptable. Little by little the world of the dead becomes knowable, and death itself is evaluated primarily as a rite of passage to a spiritual mode of being. In the last analysis, the accounts of the shamans' ecstatic journeys contribute to 'spiritualizing' the world of the dead, at the same time that they enrich it with wondrous forms and figures.

(See also DRUM; ESKIMO; FINLAND; LAPLAND; PRIESTS; SOUL.)

MIRCEA ELIADE

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— Gods, sorcerers and the Devil himself have been credited with the power to change form at will; even the ordinary man or woman in the Middle Ages ran the risk of being turned into a werewolf

SHAPE-SHIFTING

THE IDEA that it is possible, in certain circumstances, for men to change their natural bodily form and assume, for a time, that of an animal or a bird or some other non-human creature, is very old and was once practically worldwide. The gods of many regions were credited with the power of transforming themselves at will into anything, animate or inanimate, that they

chose. Sorcerers also, and some great heroes, were believed to have the same power, by virtue of magical knowledge or some innate quality; and so, though more rarely, were a few otherwise ordinary people who acquired the gift through possession of a charm or the performance of a ritual act. The medieval Icelandic historian Snorri Sturluson, in *Ynglinga Saga*, says that Odin often changed into a bird, or a wild beast, or a fish, or a dragon and travelled thus to far-off places in the twinkling of an eye (see ODIN). Zeus, in the course of his frequent amorous adventures, became a swan, a bull, a ram, a serpent, a dove, an eagle, and a shower of gold (see ZEUS).

Similar tales of self-transformation are told of various Celtic, Hindu and Egyptian

deities, and of spirits, heroes, sorcerers or magicians in the Far East, Polynesia and throughout the Americas.

Man Into Wild Beast

A widespread story with many variants is that of an individual, human or divine, who changes in quick succession into a number of different shapes during a fight, or in order to escape from some peril or difficulty. Homer relates in the *Odyssey* how the soothsayer Proteus was seized, as he lay asleep, by Menelaus, who had come to him seeking guidance. But Proteus would never give of his wisdom unless he was forced to do so, and now he instantly turned himself, first into a bearded lion, and then into a snake, a leopard, a bear, running water, and a



tree. Through all these changes, Menelaus held on firmly, until at last Proteus resumed his true form and consented to answer his adversary's questions.

In the Welsh legend of Taliesin's birth, Gwion Bach, flying from Ceridwen's anger, changed himself into a hare, and she pursued him as a greyhound. Then he became a fish in the river, but she turned into an otter and swam after him there. Hard-pressed, he became a bird, and found her hovering above him as a hawk. As she stooped upon him, he fell headlong into a heap of winnowed wheat on a barn floor and turned into one of the grains. That was the end of the contest (though not of the story), for Ceridwen transformed herself into a black hen which found and swallowed

that grain. There are other tales of this kind in which the hero's changes of form are not of his own choosing, but are imposed upon him by outside magic. In the Scots ballad *Tam Lin*, when Janet plans to rescue her lover from fairyland, he warns her that the fairies will change him in her arms into a variety of fearsome creatures. She must, he tells her, 'hold me fast and fear me not' until he becomes a burning coal, and that she must instantly douse in well-water. In the end, if her courage does not fail her, he will be freed from enchantment and become himself again.

The commonest form of the shape-shifting tradition was not, however, concerned with multiple change, but with transformation, voluntary or by compulsion, into one

particular type of wild creature. The belief that this could and did happen was very long-lived, and is the basis of countless legends of European werewolves and werebears, of Indian were-tigers, and of leopard-men or hyena-men in Africa. It was well known in the ancient world. Pliny mentions it in his *Natural History*, though he thought it a 'mere fable', and he quotes Euanthes' curious account of the Antaei in Arcadia.

The gods of many religions have been credited with the power to change themselves into anything they choose, animate or inanimate: the Hindu god Vishnu is said to have been incarnated as a fish, a tortoise, a boar, a man-lion, a dwarf and the Buddha; this 18th century Indian painting shows him as a white horse

C. M. Dixon



On the feast of Zeus Lykaios, a member of that family was chosen by lot and conducted by his kinsmen to the shore of a certain lake. His clothes were taken from him and hung upon an oak tree, after which he plunged into the water, swam across to the other side, and disappeared into the forest. There he became a wolf and ran wild with other wolves for nine years; but if, during that time, he managed to refrain from eating human flesh, he could then return to the oak tree, put on the clothes that hung upon it, and become a man again.

Herodotus, in the 5th century BC, reported that all the men of the Neuri, a Scythian tribe, became wolves for a few days in every year, and then resumed their human form. He found this very hard to believe, but he observed that the Neurians themselves constantly asserted that it was true, and were prepared to do so upon oath. It seems likely that here we have a record of a ritual transformation connected with an animal cult, in which the men concerned 'became' wolves for the time being by ceremonially putting on the skin or mask of a wolf, or by some similar rite.

A straightforward werewolf story of the time of Nero occurs in Petronius's account of Trimalchio's feast, in the *Satyricon*. Niceros, who was present at the feast, related how he went one night to visit Melissa, and persuaded an acquaintance to go with him for part of the way. As they came by some tombs, he was astonished to see his companion take off his clothes, lay them on the roadside, and make water round them. He then turned suddenly into a wolf and ran off, howling, into the woods. When Niceros went to collect the clothes, he found them changed into stone. Much alarmed, he hurried on to Melissa's house, and was told on arrival that a fierce wolf had been there before him. It had attacked the livestock, but luckily it had been driven off by a slave who had wounded it in the neck with a spear. Next morning, on his way home, he saw that the petrified clothes had disappeared, but the ground on which they had lain was stained with blood; and on going later to inquire for his companion of the previous night, he found him in bed, being treated by a surgeon for a severe wound in his neck.

That injuries suffered in the animal body were reproduced in the human body was a very persistent belief. Gervase of Tilbury remarks in *Otia Imperialia* (c 1211) that 'women have been seen and wounded in the shape of cats by persons who were secretly on the watch, and... the next day the women have shown wounds and loss of limbs'. Five centuries later, in 1718, the same idea appeared in evidence given at an enquiry held in Caithness. A certain William Montgomery, enraged and terrified by the nocturnal yowlings of cats which he believed to be witches, rushed out with a sword and a hatchet, killed two of the cats, and injured others. Soon afterwards, two local women were found to have died very suddenly, and a third, Margaret Nin-Gilbert, was so badly wounded in the leg that the limb subsequently withered and dropped off. Even as late as the 19th century, the guilt of women

suspected of turning into hares was often 'proved' when a hare was shot, and a woman was later seen to have some injury in the corresponding part of her body.

Werewolves with Human Speech

How, and for what reason, men were thus transformed was the subject of earnest debate in the Middle Ages. Many learned men rejected the whole idea of metamorphosis, and declared that any person thinking himself changed was really the victim of delusions inspired by demons.

The unknown author of the *Canon Episcopi*, a document first recorded by Regino de Prum in the early 10th century, stated clearly that even to believe a man could turn, or be turned, into a creature of another species was impious, since only God could alter that which he had created. Nevertheless, many did believe that shape-shifting was possible, as an effect of magic, or a curse, or by the help of Satan who was himself a shape-changer, or simply through kinship between man and beast.

St Natalis is said to have cursed all the people of Ossory so that, two by two, they were forced to become wolves for seven years at a time. In *Topographica Hibernica*, Giraldus Cambrensis describes how a priest met a wolf who was one of the saint's victims. The animal addressed him in human speech imploring him to come and shrive his dying wife, who also lay under the curse and was now a wolf.

A folktale from Ireland relates the power of changing oneself into a wolf to the ancient concept of the animal ancestor. A hunter took shelter during a storm in the house of an old man previously unknown to him. While he was there, two wolves entered and went into an inner room; soon after, two young men emerged and sat down

by the hearth. The old man said they were his sons, and that he and they, being descended from wolves, could assume that form whenever it pleased them to do so.

The actual change was commonly supposed to be effected by the use of magical salves, or by spells and incantations, or by putting on the skin of a wolf or a bear, or a girdle made from such pelts, or from human skin. Bjorn, in *Hrolfs Saga Kraba*, was struck by his stepmother with a pair of wolf-skin gloves, and thereafter became a bear by day, though he was a man at night. In *Volsunga Saga*, Sigmund and Sinfjolti found two men sleeping in a cabin, with wolfskins hanging on the wall above them. Sigmund and his son put on the pelts, and found they could not get them off again. They became wolves, and killed many men while the enchantment lasted, but when the day came round on which they could doff the skins, they burnt them, to prevent further evil.

These tales, and others like them, reflect the most usual form of the European tradition, in which actual bodily transformation occurred. The shape-shifter, voluntarily or otherwise, cast off his human attributes and appearance and, for the time being, really became an animal or a bird, though he sometimes retained his human eyes.

There was, however, another type of belief, better known in Asia than in Europe, but found in both continents, where no physical change took place. The man's soul passed into the body of an existing wild creature, while his own lay in a sort of cataleptic fit, sometimes quite still and lifeless, and sometimes tossing and violently moving in correspondence with the movements of the beast that temporarily contained his soul. Odin's shape-shifting seems to have been of this kind, for Snorri says that while he passed through the world in many different forms, 'his body then lay as if sleeping or dead'.

CHRISTINA HOLE

Two characters in a New Guinea myth, transformed into crocodiles



'Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world'; according to a tradition far older than Christianity, the lamb was a symbol of innocence which was especially appropriate for sacrifice

SHEEP

IN PREHISTORIC TIMES sheep were already domesticated; it may be assumed that they practically domesticated themselves, because a newly born lamb has so strong and undifferentiated an instinct to follow a large moving object that it may become attached to man. As in the nursery rhyme:

Mary had a little lamb,
Its fleece was white as snow,
And everywhere that Mary went,
The lamb was sure to go.

No doubt a few such lambs, led or brought back to human settlements, constituted an advantageous asset as a ready supply of milk, butter, meat and clothing.

An early example of a lamb becoming a pet is provided by the parable of the rich man and the poor man told to David by Nathan, reproving him for bringing about Uriah's death in order to enjoy his wife Bathsheba (2 Samuel, chapter 12). The little ewe lamb grew up in the poor man's house with his children, 'it used to eat of his morsel, and drink from his cup and lie in his bosom, and it was like a daughter to him'. So docile and profitable an animal naturally became highly important in the economy of pastoral peoples over much of Asia, Europe and Africa.

At an early period the sheep became associated with religious and magical ideas and customs. Its remains in Neolithic graves indicate that it served as a burial offering. Khnemu, the great god of Elephantine in Egypt, was represented originally as a ram but in historical times as a ram-headed human figure. From the 16th century BC he became combined with the sun god Re and was worshipped throughout southern Egypt as Khnemu-Re, ram-headed and wearing a solar disc, indicating his connection with the sun. The provincial god of Thebes, Amun, became more important with the rise of the Theban power. As Amun-Re, with a ram's head or horns, he became king of the gods of all Egypt.

Thebans treated rams as sacred, but once a year they killed, flayed and cut up one and draped the statue of the god with it. They ran around the temple mourning the animal's death and then buried it in a sacred sarcophagus.

According to the myth of the Golden Fleece, Pelias, king of Iolcus in Thessaly, urged Jason to set forth to Colchis to fetch the Fleece in which, according to one version, Zeus had climbed to the sky. After achieving a number of prodigious feats, he managed to seize it, having lulled to sleep the dragon which was guarding it, by means of a potion provided by Medea.

Other myths, Greek, Etruscan and Italian, connected prosperity with a ram bearing a golden or purple fleece. At the season when the dog star rose and heat was



The concept of the Church as Christ's flock was a powerful influence on Christian thought, and gave rise to the most important symbol of the early Christian era: figure of the Good Shepherd, from Corinth, 4th century AD

As lambs, unblemished and representing innocence, figured in Jewish thought as sacrificial objects it was natural that this imagery should be transferred to Christ. John the Baptist is reported as saying, when Jesus came to him: 'Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world' (John 1.29). When Philip met the Queen of Ethiopia's official on the road to Jerusalem, he read to him a passage from Isaiah identifying Jesus with the sacrificial lamb (Acts 8.32). In Revelation 7.9-17 Christ is again referred to as the 'Lamb of God'. According to a widespread English folk tradition current into the late 19th century, a person mounting a hilltop at dawn on Easter morning would see the symbol of the Lamb of God, bearing a banner marked with a red cross, on the sun's disc.

The concept of the Church as Christ's flock has exercised a powerful influence on Christian thought. During the first centuries of the Christian era the figure of the Good Shepherd was the most important Christian symbol. In biblical times the shepherd did not drive but led his flock; and the crook or crozier carried by a bishop is symbolic of his pastoral office as shepherd of Christ's flock (see GOOD SHEPHERD).

Festivals and Celebrations

Another line of tradition, long established in Europe, has contributed to the folklore and customs connected with sheep. The Roman sheep festival known as the *Parilia* was honoured by shepherds and herdsmen, and considered highly important for the maintenance of the health and increase of their animals. The festival took place on 21 April and was celebrated in both town and country, but obviously its origins were rural. People who went to the temple of Vesta were given ashes, blood and beanstraw to use in a cleansing rite during which they fumigated themselves and also, probably, their beasts. The blood was from the tail of a horse sacrificed in October (see MARS) and the ashes were those of unborn calves taken from the womb on 15 April.

It was believed that the rites quickened the wombs not only of cows and ewes but also of women. The sheepfold was decorated with boughs and a wreath hung on the door. The flocks were purified by being driven through bonfires of pine wood, laurel, branches of the male olive and grass. They were also fumigated with burning sulphur.

The shepherds provided offerings for the deity, including pails of milk and cakes of wheat, praying as they faced towards the east that the sheep might be preserved from witchcraft and wolves, that fodder might be plentiful and the animals prolific. Then the shepherds washed their hands in the morning dew, drank a bowl of milk and wine and jumped over bonfires. Their petitions were not only for the material well-being of their flocks. They sought pardon from the nymphs for the disturbance of the

greatest, youths clad in skins from newly slaughtered rams ascended Mount Pelion in Greece. Thus as a ram god Zeus was a solar deity and connected with the powers of growth and fertility. In Crete Pythagoras submitted to a purificatory ceremony, lying by the sea during the day and by the river at night, with the fleece of a black lamb wrapped around him. Then he descended to the reputed tomb of Zeus clad in black wool. The wearing of a sheep's fleece may have meant that the man so clothed was regarded as a sacrificial substitute for a sheep. Although the records are fragmentary, this view accords with what is known of a ritual observed at Hierapolis in Egypt during which the sacrificer ate some sheep's flesh and laid the skin on the ground, kneeling on it with the feet and head over his own head. Thus, pleading with the god, he made a vicarious sacrifice.

The Lamb of God

The ram was widely regarded as a sacrificial animal. Genesis 22.1-18 relates how Abraham was prevented from sacrificing his son Isaac and how he substituted a ram. This is generally regarded as indicating that, among the Hebrew and other Semitic peoples, animals at some early period were substituted for human sacrifices. After childbirth a Hebrew mother made an offering of a yearling lamb (Leviticus 12.6) and a leper's sacrifice was two yearling rams and one yearling ewe lamb (Leviticus 14.10). The custom of slaying the Passover lamb, traced back to the delivery of the Israelites from bondage in Egypt but apparently an adaptation of an earlier custom, continued as a Jewish observance which influenced Christian doctrine and imagery.

Sheep

pools by their animals and for trespassing unwittingly in sacred groves.

Many festivals exhibiting features similar to those of the *Parilia* were celebrated elsewhere in Europe. Some of these still survive. Usually the procedure is observed on 23 April, St George's Day, when the cattle are driven out to pasture. In the Carpathian mountains the Huzuls kindle a fire of dung on St George's Eve, fumigate the animals and decorate the gate-posts with boughs of the silver poplar, considered effective in repelling evil spirits. Before the cattle are turned out on St George's Day the Ruthenians fumigate them with smoke from a burning snakeskin or rub their horns and udders with serpent's fat. The widespread observance of comparable ceremonies at the same time of year indicates their antiquity.

Later in the year, the sheep-shearing celebrations were the counterpart of the harvest festivities among agriculturalists. Shepherds and their families and friends gathered to the shearing and there was feasting and merriment. Among the Romans it was a very convivial occasion. In southern England the sheep-shearing festivities were more elaborate than in the northern counties. A good dinner was provided for the shearers, their relatives and friends and also for the young people of the village.

Divination by Sheep's Bones

The sheep was regarded as having oracular significance. Virgil (*Aeneid*, book 7) refers to priestesses sleeping on fleeces in order to

hold converse with the gods. In England and Germany it was held to be lucky to meet a flock on setting forth from your house. Good fortune could be expected if, on seeing the first lamb in spring, its head was turned away from you. In Germany if a sheep bore three black lambs it was feared that someone belonging to the household would die.

A girl, anxious about when she would get married, would go to the sheep-stall at night on Christmas Eve and grab an animal. If it turned out to be a ram, this was propitious, but if she found herself holding a ewe she would remain unmarried in that year. In England it was believed that you could forecast the weather by observing the sheep. If they were quiet, fine weather might be expected, but a restless flock betokened wind and rain.

Divination by means of sheep bones, especially the shoulder-blade, was widespread and probably dates from very early times. Such oracular practices have been noted among the Icelanders, Scots, Southern Slavs, Bedouin and Mongolians of inner Asia. English maidens believed that a faithless lover could be recalled by piercing a sheep's shoulder-blade with a knife and repeating this charm:

It's not this bone I wish to stick
But -'s heart I wish to prick.
Whether he be asleep or awake
I'd have him come to me and speak.

For divinatory use in Scotland the shoulder-blade of a black sheep was scraped, avoiding

the use of iron. On Lewis the seer held it lengthwise in the direction of the island's greatest length. In some areas of the Highlands two persons cooperated, one holding the bone over his left shoulder while the other inspected the broad end and interpreted what it revealed, according to the lines and shades.

The ram was involved in magical ceremonies in many parts of the world. The Tibetans, who feared earth demons, regarded the goddess Khon-ma as their leader. Dressed in golden robes and holding a golden noose, she rode on a ram. In order to deter her host of fiends an elaborate structure containing a ram's skull as well as precious objects of turquoise and silver was placed above the door of the house.

In South Africa the Ba-Thonga attribute drought to the concealment of miscarriages by women and perform rain-making ceremonies involving the pouring of water after a completely black ram has been killed.

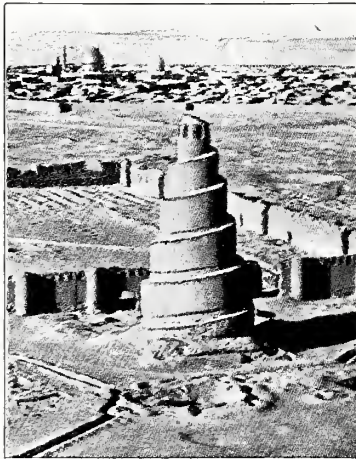
Various members and organs of the sheep were used to cure all sorts of ills in ways which often savoured more of magic than of medicine. The dung was applied to heal wounds and even eaten as a tonic. It was believed that a child suffering from whooping cough could be cured by taking it to the sheepfold at dawn, allowing a sheep to breathe on it and then placing it on the spot which the animal had vacated. The underlying assumption seems to have been that as sheep bleat in a hoarse way the child's cough would transfer itself to the animal.

EDWARD A. ARMSTRONG

Shia

A branch of Islam which is the official religion of Iran and flourishes in important communities in India, Pakistan and Iraq; the movement first developed among supporters of Mohammed's cousin, Ali, and is much concerned with leadership; Shiites look to an imam, or leader, who is sinless and possessed of a divine light, and who will return at the end of the age.

See ISLAM; MOHARRAM.



'If Shinto has been responsible for much that is worst in the history of Japan, it has also been responsible for much that is best'; both arrogance and a high sense of duty arose from the Shinto tradition that the Emperor was a direct descendant of the sun goddess

SHINTO

IT IS IMPOSSIBLE to write of Shinto with the same exactitude as of Christianity, Mohammedanism or even Buddhism, since it is not, in a strict sense, a religion, much less a philosophy. It is almost wholly lacking in any metaphysical doctrines and it imposes no coherent and consistent system of morality

on its followers. A compound of Nature worship and ancestor worship, it is often characterized in its original animistic form as 'primitive'; but on these primitive foundations repeated attempts have been made through the centuries to erect more sophisticated metaphysical and ethical structures. One of its strangest features is that, though it is concerned with the dead as ancestors, it concerns itself so little with death as the ultimate fate of those who believe in it. Essentially it is a religion of the 'middle-now', 'the eternal present'.

Embedded in fossil form in the Christian religion there are, of course, innumerable survivals from our pagan past; but that Shinto and Buddhism should still exist side

by side in Japan and that the Japanese should not consider it strange that, for example, they should be married according to Shinto rites and buried according to Buddhist ones, is rather as if in England each village had not only its vicar but also its Druid priest.

Even the life of a Japanese who has embraced the Christian faith is likely to be subtly permeated by Shinto influences, so that in business, in sport, in politics, in every aspect of private and public life he will, however unconsciously, be affected by them.

The word 'Shinto' itself long postdates the actual emergence of the religion among the people of the Japanese archipelago.



In the Old Testament, God is given the symbolic role of the strict shepherd who cares for his flock; and the lambs, unblemished and representing innocence, are destined to be the sacrificial victims. By extension, In Christian symbolism, Jesus Christ is both the Good Shepherd and the Lamb of God. Above Christ as the Lamb, the blood pouring from his wounded side into the cup of the Eucharist; at the same time he is opening the book with seven seals (Revelation, chapter 5); from a German altarpiece of the early 15th century

Shinto

A Chinese term, consisting of two ideograms, it is usually translated into Japanese as *Kami no Michi* or 'The Way of the Gods'. (Taoism, the religion of 'The Way', may have been responsible for the designation 'Way'; see TAOISM.) When Buddhism first reached Japan in the 6th century, the need to differentiate between the new body of beliefs and the old impelled the Japanese to give a name to a system that until then had been nameless. Some modern Shinto adherents object to the plural form 'The Way of the Gods', on the grounds that this

A Shinto shrine: probably the gods were first worshipped in the open, though tradition has it that the shrines or 'houses' for the gods go back to the earliest times

gives an undue prominence to its polytheistic aspects, and prefer the translation 'The Way of the One and Many Gods'. The translation 'The Divine Way' obviates the difficulty.

The word 'Kami' in *Kami no Michi* in itself presents a problem, since it is a different concept from our 'god'. D. C. Holtom in *The National Faith of Japan* writes: 'No other word in the entire range of the Japanese vocabulary has a richer or more varied content, and no other has presented greater difficulties to the philologist.' Yet to attempt to understand the meaning of this concept is essential if one wishes to reach any understanding of Shinto itself. In many ways the word 'mana' (see MANA) is a near equivalent, as is borne out by this attempt at a definition by the great 18th century

scholar, Moto-ori Norinaga:

I do not yet understand the meaning of the term *kami*. Speaking in general, however, it may be said that *kami* dignifies, in the first place, the deities of heaven and earth that appear in the ancient records and also the spirits of the shrines where they are worshipped. It is hardly necessary to say that it includes human beings. It also includes such objects as birds, beasts, trees, plants, seas, mountains and so forth. In ancient usage, anything whatsoever which was outside the ordinary, which possessed superior power, which was awe-inspiring, was called *kami*. Evil and mysterious things, if they are extraordinary and dreadful, are called *kami*.

Heroes or great rulers are Kami manifest



in corporeal form, so that the demarcation between divine and human, so integral a part of the Christian religion, hardly exists in Shinto.

Missionaries in Japan are often particularly intolerant about this ascription of divinity to dead ancestors or even to living individuals. In *The Religions of Japan from the Dawn of History to the Era of Meiji* (1913), for example, the Rev. William Elliot Griffis writes: 'Keep the boundary clear between God and his world and all is order and discrimination. Obliterate the boundary and all is pathless morass, black chaos and... the phantasms that belong to the victims of delirium tremens.' Yet it can surely be argued that it is precisely because of their willingness to believe that men can also be like gods that the Japanese can find a degree of dignity and self-fulfilment in even the most humdrum and arduous of occupations.

Gods of Sun and Storm

Shinto lacks any definite account of the origins of the gods and its various cosmological myths, like those of the classical world, are often difficult to reconcile with each other. The story begins when the seven generations of celestial deities emerged spontaneously out of the primeval vapour and then vanished without leaving any trace behind them. After them came the two venerable creative deities, Izana-gi (The Male-who-invites) and Izana-mi (The Female-who-invites), who descended from the high plane of heaven to become the begetters of the race.

In the words of the *Kogoshui* (Gleanings from the Ancient Stories), a 9th-century document which is one of the chief literary sources for information about Shinto mythology, 'They begat the Great-Eight-Islands, also mountains, rivers, grasses and trees and they likewise begat the Sun goddess and the Moon god.' Unlike the spontaneous generations that preceded them, these acts of creation were evidently sexual in form.

As well as the sun goddess, Amaterasu-Omikami, who emerged from the left eye of Izana-gi, and the moon god, who emerged from the right, there also came out of his nose the violent god Susa-no-o, often translated 'The Valiant-Swift-Impetuous-Hero'. The moon god never played any prominent part and it was the other two, the sun goddess and the storm god, who divided the rule of the universe between them.

The female was benign and beautiful, representing the forces of procreation, fertility and life. Her brother, like the storm gods of other mythologies, brought with him chaos, destruction and death. He subjected his sister to innumerable insults and indignities, laying waste the rice fields in her cultivation and voiding excrement in the palace in which she was about to celebrate the first fruits.

Eventually the sun goddess retreated in her indignation into a deep cave, thus depriving the world of any light. The 80 myriads of gods then performed a lengthy series of propitiation ceremonies, at the end of which she was at last coaxed and cajoled



Alan Inyine

In the 18th century, the traditions of 'Pure Shinto', the traditional religion cleansed of alien influences from Buddhism and Confucianism, were revived by patriotic literary men. Moto-ori Norinaga maintained that Japan, created by order of the sun goddess, was the greatest of nations, that the Emperor – as a direct descendant of the sun goddess, and one in whom the benevolent divine will had been implanted – was the greatest of rulers, and that the Japanese people would live fruitful and harmonious lives if they obeyed him without question. State Shinto, the form in which these principles found expression, was disestablished in 1945. Below When an offering is made at a Shinto shrine, a card with a picture of the offering is put on a board outside the shrine. Above A symbolic Shinto knot

into opening the Rock Door and peeping forth. Another god, Tajikara-Wo-no-Mikoto, took her by the hand and led her out.

Here, obviously, is a mythological explanation of rituals performed in remote times to intercede for a return of the sun and the fertility that the sun brings with it. Similar myths – those concerning Persephone and Adonis for example – exist in every corner of the globe.

Strong Phallic Elements

Yet though Amaterasu-Omikami and Susa-no-o represent the opposing forces of sun and storm, each can only give birth by exchanging either respiration or jewels with the other. Thus there is little of the expected dualism, such as we find in the ancient religion of Persia (see AHRIMAN). The two powers are often in conflict, but they have reached some kind of accommodation. To the descendants of the sun goddess was entrusted the rule of the actual world; while the hidden, underworld, mysterious forces of existence were in the hands of the children of the storm god.

The phallic elements in Shinto mythology are often strong. Thus, for example, Izana-gi begets various Kami when drops of blood fall off his sword; and when the other gods try to lure Amaterasu-Omikami out of her retreat in the cave, one of them, Ame-no-uzume, performed a dance, at the end of which, as the *Kojiki* recounts it, 'She pulled out the nipples of her breasts and pushed down her skirt-strings to reveal her pudenda. The sun goddess, the bringer of



D. Stevenson

fertility to crops and men, was thus reminded of her obligations.

Significantly, until recent times prostitution had a close connection with some of the most important Shinto shrines. The women attached to the shrines were, in effect, fertility maidens – the Japanese word for temple dancers, *sarume*, even has the same root as that of the name of the chief of the sexual deities, Saru-ta.

It seems unlikely that in early times Shinto ceremonies took place at man-made shrines. A mountain, a stream, or even a tree or a rock, might be the focus for some ceremony of propitiation or thanksgiving. In a rural society, the majority of such ceremonies would be concerned with the crops. Later, one must presume, certain areas – around a clump of trees, for example, by a spring, on top of a peak – would become taboo, because regarded as numinous, imbued with the feeling of divinity, and from this it became a small step to build a house for the deity on the spot.

No date can be given for the first building of such houses or shrines – Shinto tradition has it that they first came into existence in the Age of the Gods – but we do know from written sources that by the 10th century there were already 2861 shrines, according to a census then conducted, which were graded into three categories of importance. Then, as now, at the apex there was the shrine of the sun goddess at Ise, the Mecca of Japan, descending down through shrines to minor gods, to princes and heroes, to local notables, to the spirits of this or that village landmark.

Mirror, Necklace and Sword

With the introduction of Buddhism into Japan by way of Korea in the 6th century, the old animistic cult underwent a metamorphosis. Unlike Christianity, Buddhism has always been tolerant of other creeds, and it was willing to afford hospitality to the Shinto deities in its own pantheon. The theory thus came to be propounded that the Buddhist pantheon represented the eternal and indestructible elements of the gods, while the Shinto deities were their temporary incarnations – the Japanese term *gongen* is usually translated as ‘temporary manifestations’, the equivalent of ‘avatar’. Hence arose Ryobu Shinto or Double Aspect Shinto, as contrasted with Pure Shinto.

For 1000 years Ryobu Shinto maintained its ascendancy. Except at the great shrines at Izumo and Ise, those who conducted Shinto rites were usually also Buddhist priests; and the Buddhist influence on the architecture of Shinto also became strong during this period – even the pagoda, an essentially Buddhist feature, appeared.

In the 15th century Shinto underwent further attempts at systematization. The chief of these was initiated by Ichijo Kanera (1402-81), a noble who served for a time as prime minister and who wrote a number of books. A syncretist, whose philosophy can best be described as idealistic monism, Kanera attempted to fuse together elements of Shinto, Buddhism and Confucianism into a single coherent whole. He contended that though there are myriads of Shinto deities,

all are in fact merely aspects of a single divine entity, which assumes different aspects according to the activity in which it engages itself.

Kanera postulated a triad of divine virtues, symbolized by the imperial regalia: the necklace for charity; the mirror for veracity; and the sword for justice. ‘The man of charity is not anxious; the man of veracity does not err; the man of justice has no fears.’ Thus he summed up the imperial attributes and the virtues by which the state could best survive.

This same triad, in his view, embodied the three aspects of Buddhahood – Wisdom, Emancipation and Truth. But in primitive times the symbolism of the imperial regalia must have been wholly different, with the mirror standing for the sun, giver of fertility and life, the beads of the necklace for the seeds of procreation and the sword for the phallus.

In the 18th century a school of enthusiastically patriotic literary men set about reviving the ancient traditions of what they called Pure Shinto, purged of the alien elements derived from Buddhism and Confucianism. Chief of these was the great scholar Moto-ori Norinaga (1730-1801), who looked nostalgically back to the purity and simplicity of a remote past, as to a Japanese garden of Eden. According to his view, Japan, having been created at the behest of the sun goddess, was therefore the greatest nation in the world. The emperors, by virtue of their direct descent from the sun goddess, enjoyed a divine right to rule.

As Sir Eric Satow puts it in ‘The Revival of Pure Shinto’ (*Transactions of the Asiatic Society of Japan*, volume 2): ‘From the central truth that the Mikado is the direct descendant of the gods, the tenet that Japan ranks far above all other countries is a natural consequence. No other nation is entitled to equality with her, and all are bound to do homage to the Japanese sovereign and pay tribute to him.’

According to Moto-ori Norinaga, the divine will, which is essentially benevolent, has been implanted in each successive emperor; so that if the people give unquestioning obedience to his edicts, then they will live naturally fruitful and harmonious lives. From such doctrines it was only a short step to State Shinto, on which the Japanese nationalism of recent years was arrogantly based.

State Shinto

At one time extremist members of the imperial faction had hoped for a total suppression of Buddhism and the elevation of Shinto to the position of being the sole religion of Japan; but they did not get their way, the first reform being limited to a complete separation of the two religions. After an ambiguous period, during which an unsuccessful attempt was made to harness Buddhism and Shinto together in the service of the new state, Buddhism was allowed to go its own way and Shinto was divided into two classes: Jinsha or State Shinto on the one hand, and Sectarian or Denominated Shinto on the other.

The former represented Shinto as a

national ritual, enabling the subjects of the Emperor to acknowledge his divine origins; the latter represented Shinto as a religious doctrine.

In 1945, after the Second World War, the Supreme Headquarters of the Allied Powers issued a directive to the Japanese government for the disestablishment of State Shinto. This prohibited any manifestations of nationalism based on the three doctrines, implicit in State Shinto, that ancestry and special origin had firstly made the Emperor superior to other heads of other states; secondly made Japan superior to other nations; and thirdly made the Japanese people superior to other peoples. Shinto became just one of a number of religions.

Offerings of Prayer and Food

Shinto has virtually no regular liturgies, as we understand them in the Christian Church, and its priests enjoy great freedom – marrying, and in many cases pursuing other occupations. Worship consists for the most part of obeisance – a bow that lasts for a minute or two – prayers and offerings. At some of the larger shrines young girls, who are likewise under no vows, perform ritual dances and assist in the presentation of offerings. These offerings consist of small trays of rice, fish, fruit, vegetables and sake – symbols of the staple diet of the Japanese through the ages.

In former times pieces of cloth were also offered, but these are now symbolized by strips of white paper tied to twigs of the sakai tree and placed in front of the altar. Purification rites are common to banish defilement caused by disease, death or any other unclean thing, as is exorcism. Abstention, in which the believer avoids any activity that might pollute him, is often practised for a limited period, but it is more common among the priesthood than the laity.

Since 1945 Shinto has lost ground and many people in Japan today have no serious religious affiliation. However, there are still Japanese, many of them people of intellectual distinction, who believe that there is a place for the Shinto faith in the life of their country in the future. Shinto, they point out, has deep roots in the common life of the family, in the community and in the nation at large, and has for generations served to unite and harmonize groups that would otherwise have been at variance and in conflict in the social structure.

Jean Herbert, in *Shinto*, says of it: ‘From it arises respect for all that is, a high sense of duty and a feeling of security and resultant fearlessness.’ If it has been, in part at least, responsible for much that is worst in the history of Japan, it has also been responsible for much that is best.

(See also JAPAN.)

FRANCIS KING

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Osterreichische Galerie, Vienna

SHIP

The black-sailed 'ship of death' travels over the land and sucks into itself the souls of damned seamen; the belief that the dead are transported to their final destination by boat is common to many religions

THE FIRST SUCCESSFUL navigations of wide stretches of water by primitive man must have seemed as much of an achievement as the development of space travel in our own day. Apart from the physical hazards of venturing on the ocean, this unknown element was believed to be ruled by dangerous spirit forces and gods; and as with all other apparently superhuman achievements, navigation has always been closely associated with the supernatural.

The ship, like the sea itself, is rich both

in symbolism and superstition. Because it crosses the unknown ocean where it may encounter unexpected dangers, it is a symbol of confidence, adventure and enterprise. A ship in full sail symbolizes safe conduct, while a similar motif displayed on a coin is a token of joy and happiness. The ship is the Christian symbol for both Church and State; the barque which bears the faithful over the stormy seas of life to the promised land on the distant shore. Medieval Christians wore badges in the form of a ship to show their faith in salvation, and these were also thought to provide protection against the temptations encountered by a traveller on life's voyage. In this sense the ship may be seen as a symbol of transience and spirituality, of faith and hope. The

Ship of Fools by Oscar Laske; engrossed in worldly pursuits, the passengers 'sail' through life, heedless of the need for a spiritual goal and the futility of an existence based on material pleasures

'ship of fools', a constantly recurring theme in Christian imagery, is a symbol of the belief that to 'sail' through this world, treating life merely as an end in itself, is futile; man's spiritual goal must be transition, evolution and finally, salvation.

In some ancient mythologies a ship was said to carry the sun and the moon in their journeys across the heavens. The Egyptian sun god travelled in a ship, and there was much ship symbolism in the worship of Isis (see ISIS). The Babylonian moon god, Sin,



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was also known as the 'ship of life'. The ship with its mast is a fairly obvious fecundity symbol, representing the sexual union of the male with the female, and its motion on the ocean waves represents the action of coition.

As a heraldic symbol a ship represents swiftness and succour in extremity. Its rudder generally symbolizes guidance, truth and wisdom, while the anchor stands for hope, patience and steadfastness.

Superstition surrounds the life of a ship, from the time of its building until it reaches the breaker's yard – and even after its natural lifetime, there are many stories of the ghost ship which continues to haunt the site of its wreck. The landsman's custom of laying a foundation stone is paralleled by the laying of the ship's keel, which may be seen as the foundation of the boat, its backbone. At Boulogne-sur-Mer, no alteration to the design of a fishing boat was ever permitted once the keel had been laid down, as this brought bad luck. In Scotland it was customary to hide a gold coin in some recess in the keel to bring good fortune, the hiding-place being known only to the builder and never to the ship's owner. The first nail knocked into the keel was sometimes tied with red ribbon, to protect the craft against storms and similar misadventures.

It was axiomatic among shipwrights that they were free to curse anything on board ship except the keel, which was sacrosanct. It was forbidden to lay down the keel on a Friday.

In Pomerania, in Germany, it was believed to be lucky to use stolen timbers for

Above The belief that the souls of the dead have to cross a stretch of water in some kind of craft before reaching the otherworld is widespread, and many communities practised ship-burial in ancient times **Left** Ship in a grave in Norway; Vikings were seated in their boats before being buried **Right** Viking grave in Denmark, with stones laid out in the shape of a ship

the construction of a boat. Even today it is customary for shipbuilders to lay a silver coin beneath a ship's mast. An emblem of the moon, this coin, usually a silver sixpence, is supposed to preserve ship and crew from storms. There are also 'topping-out' ceremonies, intended to provide magical protection against storms, during which the ship is decked with laurel leaves and woodland flowers.

The figurehead on sailing ships was often in the form of a naked woman, who was in reality an idol or divine figure to whom propitiation had to be made in the form of a libation. The breaking of a bottle of champagne across the bows of a craft at its launching ceremony is a modern version of the pagan libation. Mediterranean fishermen sometimes pour an offering of wine into the sea to lull a storm, and it is not at all uncommon for European yachtsmen to drop a coin into the water when the weather is threatening. In primitive societies, the libation was often in the form of human blood.

Throughout the recorded history of seaman-ship, ships have been blessed during their launching ceremonies. While the boat

of an Indonesian fisherman is charmed by a sorcerer, that of his European counterpart is blessed by a priest. In both cases a boat is doomed either to disaster or to a run of misfortune if it does not receive benediction.

Whatever the size or importance of a craft, the act of naming it is an event of profound psychic significance; the selection of an unlucky name can have dangerous consequences. Seamen object to any name ending in the letter a, and the sinking of the *Lusitania* in 1915 reinforced this superstition. Once christened, a ship's name must never be changed or disaster will fall upon craft and crew alike. The ill-fated HMS *Victoria*, which in 1893, while on manoeuvres, collided with another battleship in mysterious circumstances, leading to appalling loss of life, is an example of a ship which had been given a new name. The story is told of a skipper who decided to rename his boat after his new wife, with the result that it sank.

Many customs and superstitions that originated far back in the past have survived relatively unchanged, and are still part of shipboard life. When naval officers salute the quarter-deck they are in effect paying their respects to what was the site of the altar, with its image of the Virgin Mary, in pre-Reformation times. Among the Greeks and Romans, every ship had an altar upon which sacrifices were offered to the sea and sky gods as an insurance against storms and wrecks. The albatross, which is a 'soul bird', is sacrosanct today, as a result of the role it plays in Coleridge's

Ancient Mariner; and its arrival is regarded as a sign of coming storms. If it leaves its mark on the deck, this must never be removed but must be left to weather away.

It is said to be unlucky to step forward with the left foot first when boarding a ship and highly ominous to sneeze to the left while doing so. The prejudice against whistling aboard ship, which is still very much alive, is because this was supposed to invoke an adverse wind to the detriment of ship and crew; an example of a superstition which has outlasted the days of sail.

Most seamen, however modern their outlook, believe that it is extremely unlucky to have a dead body aboard ship. A corpse should be buried at sea as soon after death as possible, but, if it is necessary to bring it ashore, it must always be taken off the ship before anyone else disembarks. In the meantime, for the safety of all on board, the corpse should be laid athwart the ship, and never parallel to the line joining bow and stem. This point is specifically discussed in a 17th-century work which inquired 'whether a dead body in a ship causes the ship to sail slower and if it does so, what is the reason thereof.'

Fishermen attempt to preserve the luck of a boat, or attract good fortune to it, in various ways. In Ireland a fisherman may refuse to give a light from his pipe on a Monday, in case he should inadvertently surrender his luck for the whole of the ensuing week; and a fisherman will sometimes try to steal someone else's luck by rubbing the bows of his own boat against those of a more fortunate craft. Irish fishermen object strongly to being in the third boat to leave harbour, as this is said to result in a poor catch.

In past centuries, boatmen attached stones with holes in them to the bows of their boats, to ward off psychic attack. Called 'holy flints', these were made of the same kind of stone as that used to protect houses against witchcraft. Until comparatively recently it was customary in British ports to throw shoes after a departing ship for luck. Wearing a cap made of hazel catkins was said to protect a vessel from shipwreck.

Any ship cursed with a long run of bad luck is said to be 'jinxed'. In some communities in Britain a small craft with an ominous reputation will be set on fire 'to kill the death in her'. The most notorious of all jinx ships was Brunel's *Great Eastern*, launched in 1858. She was so vast that she had to be launched sideways, in itself an ominous portent. She acquired a reputation as an ill-fated ship, not only because of her much publicized misfortunes, but also because the ghosts of a riveter and his assistant, who had been accidentally built into the ship's hull, were said to be on board.

There are distinct traces of pagan sacrifice in the 'crossing the line' ceremony, during which anyone who is crossing the

Equator for the first time is ritually 'shaved' and ducked. In the days of sail, the ceremony was intimidating to say the least. Tar brushes and bilge water were used and the razor was usually a rusty iron hoop.

It was at one time customary in various parts of Europe to throw young boys over the ship's side when passing by important headlands, or within sight of temples on the coast. This was apparently a nautical replica of the 'beating the bounds' ceremony on land.

There is an ancient concept that a ship has a soul. In Japan, ceremonies were held after a shipwreck and the custom of offering up prayers on behalf of ships that had been despatched to the breakers' yard continued into the present century. The custom of pre-

serving the bell of a ship after the vessel itself has been broken up is in effect a gesture of respect towards the ship's soul. Understandably enough, the bells of sunken ships are supposed to ring from beneath the seas, from the places where the craft itself lies wrecked.

Many communities practised ship burial in ancient times. Clay models of barges have been found in Egyptian graves dating back to the Stone Age. Vikings were seated in their boats before burial, and according to Norse mythology the body of the Scandinavian god Balder was laid in a ship on a funeral pyre (see BALDER). In Denmark Viking graves may be seen on which stones have been laid out in the design of ships. (See also SEA.)

ERIC MAPLE



A symbol of confidence and enterprise, the ship is sometimes also a bearer of good fortune, carrying treasures from one part of the world to another; netsuke, by Masshiro, depicts the Japanese gods of luck aboard a treasure-ship



SHIVA

IN MEDIEVAL and modern Hinduism Shiva (or Siva) has come to share with Vishnu the honour of being the supreme deity. 'Share' perhaps, is the wrong word, since for his own devotees Shiva is the Supreme Deity, the Absolute, universal Creator and Destroyer of all things, while for Vishnu's devotees the same holds true.

How Shiva came to achieve this supreme position is not clear since in the oldest Hindu scriptures, the *Vedas*, he is not mentioned at all by name. Later tradition, however, associated him with the Vedic god Rudra who himself plays a very minor part in the earliest texts. Of all the Vedic gods Rudra-Shiva is the most magnificent, and yet ever there he has two sides to his character, a terrible one which is uppermost and a benign (*shiva*) one which is subsidiary.

In the earliest text, the *Rig-Veda*, Rudra-Shiva is rather a lone wolf. He is rarely associated with other gods except the Maruts (also called Rudras), the gods of the storm. As the divine archer he pursues a solitary course, shooting his arrows indiscriminately at whom he will. These arrows bring death and disease, 'fever, cough and poison'. His anger is unpredictable and all his devotees can hope for is to transfer it to their enemies. In the *Vedas* he is 'black, swarthy, murderous and fearful' and, stranger still, 'the lord of thieves and robbers'.

But there is another side to him: for he is not only the great destroyer, but also the divine physician, and his hand is 'soothing, healing and cool'. In him the opposites of unbridled erratic force and an almost maternal gentleness meet.

In the last of the *Vedas*, the *Atharva-Veda*, Rudra is called the 'Lord of Beasts'; and it is in this form that one of the sects devoted to him were to worship him in later times, for they saw themselves as Rudra's flock and Rudra (-Shiva) himself as the divine shepherd. And yet the full status of the later Shiva was only faintly indicated in the earliest Vedic texts. Scholars, therefore, assumed that his origins must have gone back to a more ancient period before the Aryans invaded India. This view has now been vindicated by the discovery of figurines of a deity whose head is adorned by the horns of a bull and who is surrounded by wild beasts. This has very plausibly been identified with the 'Lord of Beasts' of the *Atharva-Veda*. What is more, the god is squatting in a position later characteristic of the contemplative yogi and he has an erect phallus. This surprising bringing together of the posture of contemplation and the symbol of sexual power is in fact characteristic of the later Shiva.

Left Universal Creator and Destroyer of all things, Shiva is often depicted as a slayer of demons; one of his victims was Andhaka who attempted to steal the Parijata tree of Indra which perfumed the whole of paradise; illustration to a 16th century Mogul manuscript *Facing page* The male and female principles are united in Shiva; 18th century miniature showing Shiva as a fair man with five faces

The mythology of Shiva is fully developed in the *Mahabharata*, India's great epic poem, and in the various *Puranas* dedicated to him or to his symbol, the phallus. His original (Vedic) name Rudra gradually gives way to Shiva, the 'auspicious' or 'benign'. And yet the fully-developed figure of Shiva is anything but 'benign'. He is wrathful, incalculable, jealous in the Old Testament sense of that word, devoid of comeliness, wild, sometimes raving mad. He haunts the cremation-ground, clad in elephant hide or tiger skin, his neck encircled with a necklace of skulls, with serpents in his hair. He wears the matted locks of an ascetic and his austerities are prodigious.

But this fierce asceticism is only one side to his character; he is also the 'Lord of the Dance'; and his dance is twofold. Either he dances in the sheer joy of overwhelming power — he dances creation into existence; or else, in the Tandava dance, he careers down the mountainside, like a madman or a drunkard, surrounded by a rout of half-human, half-animal creatures who urge him on in his mad career. This dance represents the destruction of the world. His constant companion is the white bull Nandin and his consort is variously called Parvati, Uma, Kali, and Durga, the last two represented as even more terrible than himself (see KALI).

The significance of Shiva is that he is the reconciliation of all opposites: therefore he is both creator and destroyer, terrible and mild, good and evil, eternal rest and ceaseless activity. His consort is really only a part of himself — his 'power' by which he creates, sustains, and destroys. In the so-called Shakta cults (cults of Shakti or 'power') this 'power' is worshipped to exclusion of Shiva himself as being the active and 'committed' side of his nature.

In the full figure of Shiva, however, the male and female principles are united, and he himself is sometimes represented as half male and half female. The emblem under which he delights to be worshipped is the *lingam*, or phallus, which is always erect. *Lingam* and *yoni* (the female organ) together represent the totality of Nature and of all created existence. Unlike the discus of Vishnu, Shiva's *lingam* is the *natural* symbol of supreme creative power, and even the gods bow down in worship of it.

In the *Shvetashvatara-Upanishad* Shiva is identified with the Absolute but he is also the Supreme Deity who created and sustains all things. The sexual mythology is still there but 'spiritualized': 'With the one unborn Female . . . who produces many creatures like herself lies the one unborn Male, taking his delight: another unborn Male leaves her when she has had her pleasure.' Both the one and the other are Shiva, for he is forever involved in the creative process and forever unaffected by it.

'Who over wisdom and unwisdom rules, he is Another': that 'other' is Shiva, 'the One God hidden in all beings, pervading all, of all beings the Inmost Self, of all works the overseer, . . . witness, observer, absolute, alone, devoid of attributes', the one *personal* God who transcends both time and eternity. (See also HINDUISM; INDIA.)

R. C. ZAEHNER



Sven Gahlin

Blasted to Death

The legend goes that after the tragic death of Sati, Siva returned to Mount Kailasa where he sat wrapt in meditation. In the interval Sati was reborn as Parvati and when she came of age she desired to marry Siva. Accordingly she made her abode not far from the scene of Siva's meditations, and worshipped him.

It was at this time that the demon Taraka began his tyranny over the fourteen worlds, and it became imperative that Siva be the father of a child, since only a son of Siva could be expected to cope with Taraka. The love-god Kama was entrusted with the task of distracting Siva, and he

waited for a suitable opportunity and shot an arrow at the god just as Parvati was walking past. Opening his eyes and beholding the voluptuous form Siva emitted his seed, which fell into a fire and from this was born Karttikeya who eventually killed Taraka.

Another version has it that Siva merely blasted Kama to death with a flash of his third eye, scorned Parvati for her dark complexion, for she was an aboriginal deity, and resumed his meditations. Parvati thereupon took to asceticism to win the god's love.

Benjamin Walker *Hindu World*

The prophecies of the Sibyls were manifestations of a power to which they felt they were enslaved, and usually referred to disasters such as war and famine; wanderers without regular succession in most places, the Sibyls have been described as freelances in prophecy

SIBYLS

THE PROPHETESSES who bore the title of Sibyl in antiquity are celebrated in literature, and many are mentioned in allusions scattered through Greek and Latin texts, but their historical character is not easy to grasp. Some of their personal names are known, but even in ancient tradition these appear unimportant. The classical Sibyls originated in Greek Asia Minor and were probably of oriental origin. They are always connected with Apollo, the god of prophecy (see APOLLO), who also originated in Asia Minor. But they are not his ordinary priestesses, nor even his ordinary prophetesses, for by comparison with the Pythia of Delphi, who was protected and controlled by a skilful priesthood, they appear as freelances in prophecy without regular succession in most places. They would be little more than a minor curiosity of classical lore if Virgil had not assigned a crucial role in the *Aeneid* to the Sibyl of Cumae. Indeed, when the Sibylline books of Rome are added to this account, it is clear that the renown of Sibyls in later literature and art is Roman rather than Greek.

Sibyls do not appear in Homer and are not well established elsewhere in Greek epic. But one character who has the marks of a Sibyl and is occasionally called one, is the Trojan princess Cassandra, whom Apollo loved but could not win, so that he gave her the gift of prophecy, but always as a painful fit of inspiration, in which her utterances were never believed. In Lycophron's iambic poem *Alexandra*, written in the 3rd century BC, Cassandra is made to give a long and exceedingly obscure prophetic monologue on the future fates and wanderings of the Greek chiefs returning from Troy, and of Aeneas, their opponent, who reached Latium in western Italy. This tradition reappears in the *Aeneid*, where the Sibyl leads Aeneas eventually into the presence of the dead Anchises to hear him foretell the future greatness of Rome.

In Greece the best-known Sibyl, typical of all of them, belonged to Erythrae on the coast of Asia Minor facing Chios. She is probably the one mentioned by Heraclitus

'The Sibyl with raving mouth, uttering things without smiles, without graces and without myrrh, reaches over a thousand years because of the god'; Heraclitus was probably referring to the Sibyl of Erythrae, on the coast of Asia Minor, but in fact these prophetesses of antiquity were commonly thought to live for as long as 1000 years. It was sometimes said that, even after death, they were able to make their voices heard in the air: Michelangelo's studies for a Sibyl, one of the hundreds of figures in his series of paintings in the Sistine Chapel, Rome

as quoted by Plutarch, who says of her, 'The Sibyl with raving mouth, uttering things without smiles, without graces and without myrrh, reaches over a thousand years because of the god.' Sibyls were in fact believed to live for 900 or 1000 years, and it was thought that sometimes even after death they could make their voices heard in the air. Other Sibyls, of whom little is known, were those of Marpeesus of Alexandria in the Troad, of Phrygia, of Sardis, of Delphi, of Thessaly, of Egypt, and, in the west, of Cumae in Campania. Very little remains of their actual prophecies except for inscriptions such as one at Erythrae in the Sibyl's dwelling, and such late compilations as the book *On Long Lived Persons* by Phlegon of Tralles, who lived in the 2nd

century AD. In one utterance there a Sibyl claims a status between the human and the divine, and in another expresses jealousy or dislike of Apollo's priests or even of Apollo himself. The prophecies generally refer, like many others in history, to expected disasters such as war, plague and famine. The Sibyls were very loosely attached to the pan-Hellenic Olympian religion and even to local cults, and are often said to have been wanderers. Their prophecies were compulsive manifestations of a power to which they felt enslaved.

In the *Aeneid* Virgil makes the Sibyl a figure already established at Cumae at a time corresponding to the Greek heroic age. Such traditions at least suggest the antiquity of the influence of Greek religion in



Italy, even if it is here exaggerated. The Sibyl, in frenzied inspiration, prophesies the terrible wars which will follow Aeneas's landing in Italy. She then conducts him through the entire extent of the infernal regions before leading him to meet his father Anchises among the blessed, and from there into the upper world again, through the ivory gate of dreams. No Sibyl of old Greece had a role of such grandeur.

The Sibylline Books

The celebrated legend of the Sibylline books, recorded by Varro and Dionysius, is among the more historical of Roman traditions of Sibyls. These were offered for sale to King Tarquin of Rome (reports vary between Tarquinius Priscus and his

son Tarquinius Superbus) by a mysterious woman who was perhaps the Sibyl of Cumae. Nine books were offered but rejected because the price was too high; then, when she had destroyed three, six were offered at the same price as the nine but were again refused. Finally on the insistent advice of the augurs, the last three were bought at the price of the original nine. They were kept by the Roman state for centuries under the special care of a board of magistrates, were concealed from public view, and were consulted, with the help of Greek slaves, at moments of crisis or when alarming prodigies such as monstrous births occurred. They were used during the Latin wars and much later when Rome was threatened by the Gauls and Hannibal. Exceptional

sacrifices were ordered for the infernal powers after consultations and once in 226 BC the burial alive of a Gaulish and a Greek couple. Sibylline oracles had much earlier been mocked by the Greek Aristophanes as texts of nonsense, but the Romans, perhaps following Etruscan tradition in such matters, regarded them as sacred texts giving practical rules for dealing with abnormal, uncanny and perilous situations.

Apart from the classical Greek and Roman framework, a large collection of Jewish, Chaldean and Christian prophetic poetry, in Greek hexameters, was formed in the eastern Mediterranean region in Hellenistic and Roman times. This collection is now known as the *Oracula Sibyllina*.

E. D. PHILLIPS

Based on the teachings of Guru Nanak, Sikhism requires its followers to 'avoid all conduct that does not conform to the truth that is God'

SIKHS

THE ROOTS of the Sikh tradition lie in the Punjab, a region in north-western India where Hinduism and Islam have confronted one another ever since the 10th century AD. At various times religious movements arose which combined features of Hindu and Islamic thinking, and the 11th and 12th centuries saw the development of a mysticism based on the ecstatic experience of saintly men, the Sufis (see SUFIS). Though they were adherents of Islam, the Sufis accepted certain Hindu ideas and practices, and converted many Hindus to their own faith. The interaction of the two religions did not lead to a true synthesis, however, and repeated attacks by fanatical Moslem invaders destroyed such mutual tolerance as the Sufi movement had created.

In the 15th century there was another upsurge of syncretistic ideas, and it was in this atmosphere that Sikhism arose as a new and distinct religious movement. The Sikh community gradually assumed the character of an ethnic group of distinct cultural heritage and national sentiment. Today there are about eight million Sikhs in India, and expatriate Sikh communities which retain their sense of identity exist in Britain, Canada, the United States, Afghanistan, Iran, Thailand, Malaya, Indonesia and East Africa.

The undisputed founder of Sikhism was Nanak, believed to have been born in 1469 in a village not far from Lahore. The story of his life is embedded in a welter of legends, but there is no doubt that his family background was that of a high Hindu caste, and that he became familiar with Moslem concepts and practices at an early age. His father was a village accountant, but Nanak showed little interest in the family profession, although he entered the service of a Moslem prince and held this position for 13 years in order to support his wife and children. Though he was deeply religious, and often consorted with both Hindu and Moslem ascetics, Nanak did not envisage complete



renunciation of secular life. He was middle-aged when he had a mystic experience while taking a ritual bath in a river. It is believed that in this vision he received the divine command to go into the world and teach mankind to pray to one supreme Creator god. Nanak then disappeared for three days, and was believed to have been drowned; but he returned to announce his newly-found faith which was epitomized in the declaration: 'There is no Hindu, there is no Moslem.'

This incident marked the end of the first phase in Nanak's life. The search for truth was over, and he was intent on proclaiming his faith to the people of the world. He left his wife and home, and travelled widely, visiting many places sacred to Hindus and Buddhists as well as to Moslems. He saw how religion was practised by the adherents of various faiths and he determined to do away with superficial ritual, and concentrate in his teaching on the essence and purity of faith in a supreme deity.

From then on he became known as *Guru* (teacher) Nanak, and it is believed that his mission took him to Baghdad, Mecca and Medina. He certainly mixed with both Hindus and Moslems, and dressed in a manner combining the styles of the ascetics of both faiths. Many incidents of his life as

Religious power is vested in the entire Sikh community, and their actions are guided by the scriptures set out in their holy book, a focal point of their ritual: gold tablet inscribed with the sacred tenets of the Sikh religion, in the 'golden temple' at Amritsar

a wandering ascetic are reported in the biographies compiled by his disciples, and though historical facts are interspersed with legendary elements, the picture that emerges is of a preacher of great independence of mind, who discounted the value of many traditional ritual practices, and advocated a religion focused on the love of God and the love of man.

On his travels Nanak gathered as his disciples many men and women who dissented from both Hinduism and Islam. The earlier Sufis had prepared the ground for a religion which dispensed with elaborate ritual and sought mystical union with God. Nanak's teaching appealed especially to the underprivileged Hindus of the lower castes, and to the poorer Moslems.

In later life Nanak returned to his family and settled down at Kartapur, where he combined work on his farm with teaching the disciples who flocked to him from many parts of the Punjab. He made them observe



a strict routine of prayers and work, and set up a communal kitchen where people of all castes and social status ate together, a practice diametrically opposed to the traditional segregation of the various Hindu castes. Nanak is believed to have died in 1539 and, according to legend, his body disappeared from among the flowers which surrounded it, thus obviating the problem of whether it should be cremated in Hindu style or buried according to Moslem custom.

During his wanderings as a preacher Nanak had set up centres of worship in widely separated areas, but those in distant places did not last very long. He had spoken and written in the language of the Punjab and it was in the Punjab that his message took root. His concept of God was derived more from Islam than from Hinduism. He was a strict monotheist and his disapproval of the worship of images placed him in conscious opposition to Hindu ritual. He believed that God was truth as opposed to falsehood and illusion; to tell a lie is to be ungodly, and untruthful conduct not only hurts one's neighbour, but is also irreligious. A good Sikh therefore must believe that God is the one omnipotent reality, and he must avoid all conduct that does not conform to the truth that is God. Nanak believed that the power that was God could not be defined because God was formless.

This abstract definition of God did not prevent Nanak from referring to him by a variety of names, such as 'Father of all mankind', 'Lover and Master of the devotee', and 'Great Giver'. He insisted that in order



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Top The 'golden temple' at Amritsar, the central sanctuary of Sikhism; built by Ram Das, the fourth Sikh guru, it contains the *Granth Sahib* or 'master book' of sacred scriptures **Above** Pilgrim outside the 'golden temple'; because they are forbidden to shave or cut their hair, orthodox Sikhs have beards, and long hair which they tie up under turbans

to understand the nature of God, man needed a guru, a religious guide inspired by God. Hinduism was the source of Nanak's belief in rebirth and his doctrine that man's fortunes are shaped by his deeds in a previous existence. Fortune and misfortune and all social inequality are said to be the natural products of individual conduct. Linked with this idea is the belief in retribution and

rewards after death. A bridge as narrow as a knife's edge leads to the world beyond, and sinners, unable to cross this bridge, fall into an abyss filled with blood, while the pure walk safely across. Redemption is achieved neither by rigid asceticism nor by pilgrimages and the endless repetition of prayers, but by faith in the truth of God, and by integrity of conduct.

As well as being a preacher of a new doctrine, Nanak also organized and advocated social and religious reforms. His message has been preserved in a book of hymns which he recited so frequently that they became firmly lodged in the minds of his followers. Today they are a central part of Sikh sacred scriptures. They were composed in metric form and in a peculiar language, known as Gurmukhi, the 'tongue of the Guru'. In the same way that Nanak's teaching embraced Hindu and Moslem ideas, so the literary Gurmukhi language was a conglomerate of Hindi, Arabic and Persian elements. His successors developed a special alphabet for the Sikh scriptures.

Although Nanak did not formulate a rigidly defined doctrine to be adhered to by all Sikhs, he made arrangements for his succession and by doing so laid the foundations for what became in practice a Sikh 'Church'. In preference to his own sons Nanak chose Guru Angad (1539-1552) to be his successor. Angad was a former devotee of the fierce Hindu goddess Durga. Like his master, he tried to avoid the formation of a separate sect, and sought to preserve Sikhism as a movement of reform and a

medium of reconciliation. But he was conscious of the twin dangers of absorption in Hinduism and eradication by militant Moslems.

Angad's successor was Amar Das and under him Sikhism assumed an attitude of conscious opposition to Hinduism. He rebelled against the practice of burning widows, a Hindu custom that had continued among Sikhs, he castigated the avarice of many Brahmin priests in his poems, and he argued against the evils of worshipping images and a multitude of gods. He emphasized the sad state of the world and the virtue of humility and penitence, and spoke of a God dwelling in men's hearts. He made the communal kitchen an integral institution of the Sikh Church by insisting that anyone who wanted to see him had first to accept his hospitality by eating with his disciples. In the case of high-caste Hindus, doing so showed willingness to abandon narrow caste-prejudices. Among Amar Das's innumerable visitors was the Mogul Emperor Akbar, who was so impressed by the lofty ideals of the community that he assured the Guru of his patronage.

Amar Das was succeeded by his son-in-law Ram Das, who founded the town which later became known as Amritsar, 'pool of nectar'. When Ram Das died, his own son Arjun (1581-1606) became the fifth Guru and during his term of office the Sikhs turned more and more into a distinct religious and political community. By compiling the writings of his predecessors and adding hymns and poems of his own, he created a large body of sacred scriptures which subsequently came to be regarded as the religious heritage of Sikhism. Arjun also built the 'golden temple' at Amritsar, which became the central sanctuary of Sikhism.

Martial Tradition

After the death of the Emperor Akbar, the Sikhs suffered from the oppressive policies of less tolerant Moslem rulers. This forced them into a defensive position and accelerated the growth of a political organization. Under Arjun's successors, and particularly the tenth Guru, Gobind Singh (1675-1708), the Sikhs created a theocratic state, of which the Khalsa, an elite group, became the military arm. Gobind Singh did not appoint a successor but decreed that after him the power of the Guru should be vested in the

entire Sikh community, whose actions should be guided by the sacred scriptures, to be referred to as Guru Granth Sahib, 'Master Book'. This book has been venerated ever since, and has been treated as if it were the Guru himself.

In the 17th and 18th centuries the Sikhs became involved in armed conflicts with the imperial Moslem power, as well as with the Hindu states that surrounded the Sikh region. Gradually they carved out several principalities which were integrated into a sovereign state by Ranjit Singh, the most prominent military Sikh leader of his time. In 1809 he concluded a treaty with the British, which defined the southern limit of his kingdom. Subsequently the Sikhs fought successfully against invading Afghans, but a clash with the British in 1849 ended with the subjugation of the Sikh state and the annexation of the Punjab by the British rulers of India. By that time, however, the Sikhs had developed as a separate ethnic and cultural group, distinct from all other communities of India.

After the establishment of the Khalsa as a military elite, the Sikhs developed a strong martial tradition. They entered the British Indian Army in great numbers and distinguished themselves in many wars as tough and dependable soldiers.

A tragic situation arose when, in 1947, the division of the Indian sub-continent into India and Pakistan resulted in the partition of the Punjab, the Sikh's traditional homeland. While the majority lived in the regions allotted to India, substantial minorities remained on the Pakistan side of the newly-drawn boundary. Though the founder of Sikhism had envisaged his doctrine as a means of reconciling Hindus and Moslems, it now appeared that in the Islamic state of Pakistan there was no place for Sikhs, and in bloody clashes between Moslems and Hindus, the Sikhs found themselves on the side of the Hindus.

In a mass emigration triggered off by persecution and massacres, the Sikhs of West Punjab flooded into India, leaving their ancestral homes and many of their temples. Their cohesion as a community with a fanatical faith in its identity enabled them to establish themselves among their co-religionists in East Punjab. In the course of a long political struggle they finally obtained their own state, carved out of East

Punjab, while the districts where Hindus are in a majority were established as the new state of Haryana. The fulfilment of the Sikhs' agitation was reached in 1970 when Chandigarh, the town designed by Le Corbusier as the capital of the undivided East Punjab and till then shared with Haryana, was allotted to the Sikh state.

Wherever their communities dwell, both in India and in Western countries, Sikhs follow the same practices in worship and the same pattern of living. The focal point of their ritual is the holy book. It occupies a central position in all temples and is solemnly displayed at every service. One room in the home should be set aside for this holy book, and part of it read every day. Most Sikh services include the distribution of communion food, and new members are initiated in a rite during which they must vow to adhere to the Sikh faith and to observe certain rules of behaviour. Among these is a ban on shaving or cutting any part of the body hair; it is for this reason that orthodox Sikhs have beards, and long hair which they tie up under their turbans. Any mutilation of the body, such as circumcision or piercing the nose or ears is also forbidden.

Sikhs in foreign lands consider the observance of these rules to be an essential part of their religion and tend to resist adaptation to local customs of hair style. Nevertheless, there is a class of young men among the educated and wealthy Sikhs in India who have begun to give up the practice of wearing their hair and beards unshorn. Although they may retain other symbols of Sikhism, they are regarded as renegades by the orthodox, who maintain that there is no such thing as a clean-shaven Sikh; at best such a person is a Hindu believing in Sikhism. Today there is a tendency where Sikhs are dispersed among Hindus to adapt to the Hindu pattern, and to dilute Sikh ritual and tradition. However, with the creation of the Sikh-dominated state of East Punjab, where nationalistic sentiment underpins religious practice, the Sikhs have acquired a national home and with it a new lease of life for their religion and their traditions.

C. VON FURER-HAIMENDORF

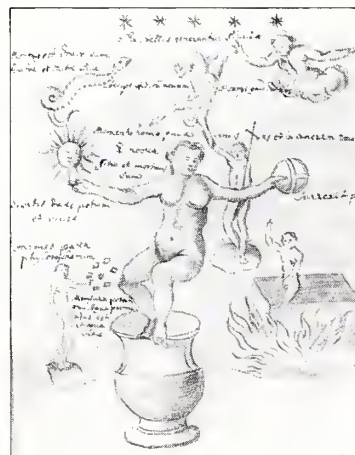
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Mansell Collection

Silenus

In classical mythology, one of the Sileni, woodland spirits who became associated with Dionysus and the satyrs (see DIONYSUS; SATYRS); represented as an elderly, fat, hairy but bald-headed man with the ears of a horse, riding an ass or a wineskin; he is profoundly wise and constantly drunk; sometimes said to have been the teacher of the young Dionysus or the father of the satyrs; Socrates was compared with him for wisdom and ugliness.



British Museum

Silver

Metal of the moon, because of its colour; according to some alchemists a stage in their work was the making of the White Stone, which turned all things to silver and which they connected with the white stone mentioned in Revelation 2.17: there is a widespread tradition that a silver bullet is needed to kill a sorcerer, a witch or an evil ghost. See ALCHEMY; CORRESPONDENCES.

SIMEON STYLITES



Sonia Haliday

Renowned for the fanatical austerity of his life, Simeon has nevertheless been described as modest, humble and sweet-tempered: wall painting from Asinou Church, Cyprus

A CHRISTIAN SAINT of the 5th century, Simeon passed 42 of his 70 years in the Syrian desert, perched on top of a pillar which he eventually built up to a height of 50 or 60 feet. Here he endured not only the scorching summer days and bitterly cold winter nights, clad only in a simple leather tunic, but also the rigours of frequent fasting, and the hideous discomfort of a platform too small to lie down on.

Simeon was born to Christian parents in 389 at Sisan, a village on the borders of Syria and Cilicia in Asia Minor. He never attended school, but from an early age helped

to look after his father's sheep. When he was 13, he entered a local monastery as a servant, after hearing the Sermon on the Mount read in church. He had been deeply moved by the Beatitudes, and had a vision in which he was digging the foundations of a building, and heard a voice bidding him four times to dig deeper in order to build higher.

After two years as a novice, Simeon went to another monastery at Teleda, where he led a life of such fanatical austerity that he was finally ordered to leave, in case he exerted an undue influence on his brother monks. A typical incident was his attempt to mortify the flesh by tying a rope of twisted palm leaves round his waist so tightly that he caused ulcers, the stench of which, after a number of days, drew the attention of his superiors. Simeon fainted with the agony when the rope had to be cut out of his flesh with a knife, and lay on the floor for some time as if dead.

Leaving Teleda, Simeon went to Tell-neshin, near Antioch, where he persuaded a local abbot to wall him up in a cell during Lent, with ten loaves and a jug of water. At the end of Lent, Simeon was found stretched almost lifeless on the floor of his cell, with the bread and water untouched. He was revived with a moist sponge, and given a few lettuce leaves to eat. For the rest of his life Simeon fasted completely throughout Lent, standing and praising God to begin with, and gradually sinking to the ground as the strength ebbed from him. Later in life, on his pillar, he managed to remain standing throughout the fast, tied to a pole in the early years; gradually he was able to dispense with this aid.

When Simeon eventually took up the life of a solitary in the rolling stony hills to the west of Aleppo, he at first chained himself to a rock. But Bishop Meletios of Antioch advised him to scorn such a material bond, and to trust in his own will, sustained by divine grace, to keep him to his ascetic life. Simeon's first biographer, who knew him personally, reported that when the iron chain was removed from Simeon's leg, 40 large bugs were discovered on his skin underneath the shackle.

Simeon acquired a reputation as a healer of all sorts of sickness, and was an especial favourite of women who believed themselves to be barren. It was to get away from

mobs of admirers and miracle-seekers that Simeon first resorted to the idea of building a column. He first built an enclosure, and then a column inside it. Accounts vary as to the exact size of this column, which he raised higher and higher as the years passed, but according to a Syriac biography written not long after his death, it rose finally to a height of 40 cubits (roughly 67 feet) and consisted of three huge drums, in honour of the Holy Trinity.

Simeon spent most of the time standing upright on a small platform at the top of the column, which could be reached by means of a rope ladder, though he varied his posture by leaning against a post, and inclining his head in prayer. An observer once counted 1244 obeisances during a day's prayer before coming to the end of his own, but not the saint's, powers of endurance. The constant standing gave Simeon an ulcer on his foot from which pus ran constantly. He is reported to have had spells of blindness, during which his eyes were open.

He regularly preached two sermons a day, and prayed all night with his hands raised. His sermons were greatly admired, and he is also described as a pleasing and ready conversationalist. He was at the disposal of the crowd who flocked to stare at him every afternoon, and to the end of his life listened to requests, healed the sick, and reconciled disputants. He was available to labourers, peasants and beggars, and also to the high and mighty of his time. He was in correspondence with potentates and Church dignitaries in many parts of Christendom, but also preached to pagans and prayed and spoke on their behalf. His extraordinary way of life had its detractors, but those who knew him well insist that he was humble, modest, easy and sweet-tempered. In spite of his solitary existence, he took part in many of the controversies of the day.

When he died thousands attended his funeral, which was celebrated with a torchlight procession through Antioch. A great church was built at Qalaat Semaan, which was unique in Christendom in being centred on the saint's pillar, instead of an altar. Simeon set an example for dozens of stylite (pillar) saints in the centuries that followed his death, and isolated examples have been reported down to modern times. The base of the original column is still standing at Qalaat Semaan to this day.

SIMON MAGUS

THIS SAMARITAN magician and, perhaps, Gnostic teacher of the first Christian century, is known from the New Testament book of Acts and from later Christian writers. According to Acts (chapter 8), Simon was a magician (hence called 'Magus'), baptized as a Christian after seeing miracles performed by Christian evangelists in Samaria. Two apostles, Peter and John, came from Jerusalem and laid hands on other converts, who then received the Holy Spirit. Simon offered money (hence the later term simony) for the power of transmission; Peter harshly rebuked him and

predicted his doom. Conceivably, the author of Acts knew that Simon was also a Gnostic revealer and redeemer, for he is described as 'saying that he himself was somebody great' and as known in Samaria as 'that power of God which is called Great'. It may be that the author intentionally refrained from mentioning his dangerous Gnostic teaching, although it is possible that Simon had not yet developed it.

In any event, by the time of the theologian Justin Martyr (c 150) Simon was regarded as the founder of Christian heresy. Justin himself came from Samaria and knew that Simon was a native of the village of Gitthae. It was said that he claimed to be 'the first God' and that a prostitute named Helen

embodied 'the first conception' of his mind. He was worshipped by 'practically all the Samaritans'. Justin had also been told that during the reign of Claudius (41-54) Simon had practised the art of magic at Rome; the Senate and the Roman People had erected a statue in his honour, with the inscription SIMONI DEO SANCTO ('to Simon, the holy God'). Unfortunately, in the 16th century this inscription, or one like it, was discovered. It read SEMONI SANCO DEO FIDIO, a dedication to the old Sabine deity Semo Sancus. Presumably the error was due not simply to Justin's poor eyesight but to the power of suggestion exercised over him by Simonians. It reflects Simonian propaganda of the mid-2nd century.

Other Church writers, perhaps relying on a lost work by Justin, tell more about Simon's system. He was the 'Father above all' and in the beginning emitted from himself the 'Mother of all', his first Thought. She descended from the height and generated angels and powers who, in turn, made the world. Because of their desire to be regarded as supreme creators, they imprisoned their Mother and made her pass from one female body into another – for example, into Helen of Troy, whose fatal beauty was the cause of the Trojan War. Finally she was a captive in the body of a prostitute from Tyre. Simon, who viewed her as his 'lost sheep' (compare Luke 15. 4–7), came down through the planetary spheres to look for her and save her. He appeared among the Jews as Son

(that is, as Jesus), among the Samaritans as Father, and elsewhere as Holy Spirit; his followers also identified him with Zeus and Helen with Athene. His rescue of Helen was a model for his rescue of 'those who are his' everywhere. He freed her and them from the authority of the hostile angels, who not only had created the world but also had

Regarded as the 'Father above all' by his followers, Simon Magus was credited with numerous magical feats; according to one legend he attempted to fly over Rome, but the evil spirits who had raised him were forced to cast him down to earth again by the prayers of Peter and Paul: Simon Magus with the Roman emperor and the apostles, from a 14th century Italian manuscript

produced the Old Testament law and prophecies in order to enslave mankind under conventional morality. Simon's followers, saved by his 'grace' or favour, were free to do whatever they wished. What they wished, according to Christian critics, was to make use of incantations and magic.

With the passage of time, further details about Simon's life came into existence. Christians at Rome told of his flight over the city, terminated after prayer by the apostle Peter. Others claimed that he tried to emulate the burial and resurrection of Jesus but did not survive the experience. In the Jewish-Christian Clementine romances he was described as a follower of the Jewish or Samaritan heretic Dositheus, who recognized him as 'the Standing One', as God.



Simon's magic was said to produce everything one could desire: invisibility, invulnerability, the animation of statues, tunnelling under mountains, transformation into a sheep or goat. Like Jesus, he was said to have been born of a virgin mother.

Since the 16th century the figure of Simon Magus has been merged, in Western culture, with that of the magician Faust, whose memory was combined with medieval tales about Simon and with the idea of a pact with the Devil (see FAUST). The first book about this Faust, by an anonymous author, was published at Frankfurt in 1587. In an English translation it inspired Christopher Marlowe's *Tragical History of Doctor Faustus*, published in 1604. Extremely popular during the 17th and 18th centuries,

the story of Faust was given its greatest expression in the work of Goethe, who recast it and deepened its philosophical interpretation (see GOETHE). Composers were attracted by the story — for example, Berlioz, Liszt and Gounod in the Romantic era. The most successful treatment is to be found in the eighth (choral) symphony of Gustav Mahler (1907).

The modern Faust is not, of course, identical with the Simon Magus of the early Christian period, who was not described as making a pact with the Devil; and Faust's Helen is not Simon's. Goethe's emphasis on the goodness of human freedom and striving, however, is not unlike the Simonian stress on emancipation and magic.

Certain questions raised by the Simonians

were faced more radically than was the case among their Christian opponents. Was man simply to accept (or, among ascetic groups, to reject) the world of Nature or was he to control it? To what extent were traditional and biblical ethical systems simply the products of convention? What was the place of woman or 'the female principle' in the created order and in the process of salvation? These questions were to be elaborated in the modern treatment of Faust, but in principle, at least, they were already raised among the followers of Simon Magus.

R. M. GRANT

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The experience of sin is not the same as that of the difference between right and wrong, or good and bad; it is an essentially religious concept based on man's relationship with a transcendent reality or order

SIN

FEW CONCEPTS have been as significant and influential in the history of religions, and few have been so denigrated in modern times, as the concept of sin. Most religions have a variety of terms to render the idea of sin, and there is a wide range of nuances and emphases in the various religious cultures, and even within a single religion. One way of studying the concept of 'sin' would therefore be to analyse the meanings of the different terms used in the various religions, cultures and languages. For example, there is the Old Testament (*het, awon, pasha*, and so on), the New Testament (which mostly uses the Greek word *hamartia*). Hindu tradition (*papa*, which includes both ritual and moral sin), China (*tsui, o, kuo*), or Japanese Shinto (*tsumi, aku*). Practically all religions and cultures, even the most primitive ones, have terms more or less equivalent to 'sin', and very often the variety of terms in even a single culture reflects differentiations of various types of categories of sin (for example, *ama-tsumi* and *kuni-tsu-tsumi*, 'sins relating to heaven' and 'sins relating to earth' in Japanese Shinto).

Offending the Gods

Sin is an essentially religious concept since it implies an offence with regard to a religiously or supernaturally conceived reality: a personal god or gods, a divine order of things, or a set of taboos possessing supernatural sanctions. It is this added quality which distinguishes 'sinning' from 'wrongdoing', and renders the experience of sin different from the experience of the difference between right and wrong, or good and bad.

Sin is based on man's experience of, and his relation with, a transcendent reality or order. In the perspective of this relationship, all evil, wrong or unjust acts, and even the awareness of inescapable human

inadequacy, acquire the additional quality and depth-dimension of 'sin'.

The elaboration of this concept, the interpretation and the consequences of the sense of sin, vary in different cultures, at different periods in the history of the same culture, and in the lives of individuals, even in any one period. So do the means devised for escaping the consequences of sin — rites of purification, atonement, remission of sins, penitential exercises and mortifications. Or means may be devised to escape the sense of sin itself, for instance by mobilizing psychological theories in defence of the assertion that there is no such thing as sin or sinfulness.

Rejection of God's Will

Because sin, as distinct from mere wrongdoing, is connected with man's relationship with the transcendent sphere, it is closely bound up with the ways in which the various religions represent this sphere and man's relation to it. There is a tendency in most religions to consider misfortunes of all kinds (sickness, famine, drought, defeat in war) as the result of sin (the anger of irate gods or spirits, punishment meted out by a just godhead, the automatic irruption of destructive forces resulting from a disturbance of the right order). Methods and rituals are therefore evolved for detecting sin, punishing the culprits or finding a scapegoat, or obliterating the sin by appropriate ritual acts or by obtaining forgiveness from the offended deity. By and large, most ancient religions do not distinguish between ritual and moral offences, and very often the former, the breaking of ritual taboos, for instance, appear to have been regarded as more serious.

The ancient Mesopotamian texts suggest a preoccupation with ritual offences. The ancient Egyptian texts (in which innocence from all sins is mentioned as a prerequisite for life after death) catalogue both ritual and moral transgressions, blasphemy and murder for instance, without distinction, whereas in ancient Greece and Rome the social character of religion also led to a greater emphasis on 'sins' relevant to the social order. The Hebrew prophets, who never tired of speaking of the sinfulness of the people and of God's wrath and imminent punishment, nevertheless shifted the

emphasis from ritual to moral values as in the book of Micah (chapter 6).

"With what shall I come before the Lord,
and bow myself before God on high?
Shall I come before him with burnt offerings,
with calves a year old?
Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of
rams, with ten thousands of rivers of oil?
Shall I give my first-born for my transgression,
the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?"
He has showed you, O man, what is good;
and what does the Lord require of you
but to do justice, and to love kindness,
and to walk humbly with your God?

A deepening of experience and of reflection on the character of human nature and its inherent failings and inadequacies led to a more systematic and fundamental consideration of sin and sinfulness. Whereas Islam takes it for granted that man is weak and always liable to sin, it holds Allah to be not only a stern judge but also compassionate and forgiving. Sins are essentially the result of human weakness which fails to obey the commands of Allah.

In Christianity, too, sin is conceived essentially as disobedience to, or a conscious rejection of, God's will; but the experience of sinfulness and the elaboration of the doctrine of sin have been carried further than in any other religion. In fact, sin can be regarded as one of the pivotal concepts of Christianity. Though essentially a religion of salvation, the salvation which it brings is primarily from sin. Christ on the cross took upon himself the sins of mankind, and by his suffering and death procured atonement and expiation. He was the 'Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world', and in the account of the Last Supper, on which the rite of the Eucharist is based, Jesus says to his disciples as he gives them the cup of wine 'Drink of it, all of you; for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins' (Matthew 26.27-8).

Whilst bringing the good news of liberation from the power of sin, Christianity also did much to foster awareness of this power, sometimes to a pathological degree. Man is a poor and miserable sinner, and only contrition, continuous penance and resort to the sacramental means of grace provided by the Church will save him from

the dire consequences of both his essential sinfulness and his specific sins. The source of sin and the nature of sinfulness were described in various idioms, ranging from mythology to a theological psychology. In mythological symbolism the Devil played a major role: it is he who tempts man away from God, hence the tendency to associate everything 'tempting', including the pleasures of this world and especially sex, with the Devil and lord of demons. Hence also the tendency of medieval Christianity to associate sin, heresy and magic.

The analysis of sinfulness as an inherent human trait and as a basic feature of the human mode of being in its actual ('fallen') state was first made by St Paul and subsequently developed by the Church Fathers, especially St Augustine, and by later theologians. Man's nature is so corrupted and vitiated that he cannot turn towards the better out of his own resources. Even his repentance, faith and conversion are the result of a divine grace moving him. In Christian doctrine this inherently sinful state of human nature was connected with the biblical account of Adam's Fall in Paradise (Genesis, chapter 3), giving this story of 'original sin' an importance it never had in biblical and rabbinic Judaism (see EVIL; FIRST MAN).

Whilst medieval Catholic belief held that it was possible for individuals to overcome sin and to rise to the level of sainthood, Martin Luther and the reformers reaffirmed the sinfulness of even the good Christian. To be saved is not to be free from sin but to acquire, through faith, the grace and pardon given in Christ. The role of sin in the experience and consciousness of Christianity in all its major historic forms is attested by its liturgy, traditional beliefs and practices, and literature.

The prevalence and omnipresence of a sense of sin were intensified by the teaching that sin was a matter of intention and desire no less than of overt action. 'You have heard that it was said, "You shall not commit adultery." But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart' (Matthew 5.27-8). 'For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, fornication, theft, false witness, slander' (Matthew, 15.19).

In due course Christianity developed very elaborate doctrines and catalogues of sins, as well as practices for dealing with them. There was original sin to which every human being is heir (according to St Augustine it was transmitted through the act of procreation), and the individual sins man committed during his life. There are the sins committed after baptism (which posed a serious problem to the early Church since it was believed that baptism had washed away not only all past sins but also the inclination to sin). These were divided into 'mortal' sins, which entail everlasting punishment, and venial or pardonable sins. The 'Seven Deadly Sins' became a favourite theme of medieval art. Around the basic idea of sin were built many other doctrines and practices: the sacrament of penance, confession and absolution, hell and purgatory,

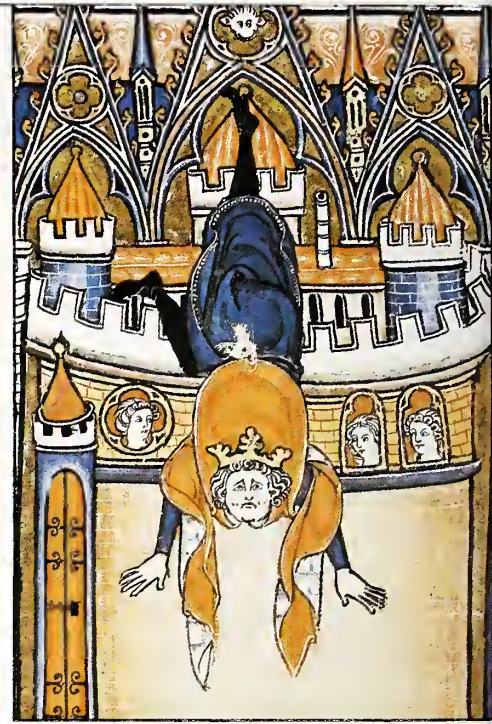


The Christian concept of original sin, the belief that sinfulness is an inherent human trait, was introduced by St Paul and developed by the Church Fathers and later theologians; it is traditionally said to stem from Adam's disobedience in the garden of Eden: Adam and Eve by Cranach the Elder

and the belief in the possibility of escaping the sufferings of purgatory. The abuses, such as the sale of indulgences, to which the latter belief led were important factors in precipitating the Reformation in the 16th century. But whilst the reformers did away with many Roman Catholic beliefs and practices, the doctrine of sin and sinfulness still remained central in their theology.

The significance attributed to the notion

of sin can be gauged by, among other things, the practice of confession of sins. This flourishes wherever the reality of sin is taken so much for granted that the attempt to deny it would merely be compounding it, and wherever remission, expiation and atonement are considered to be real possibilities. Where these pre-conditions are lacking, 'declarations of innocence' may take the place of confession, as in the ancient mortuary ritual of Egypt, where the tomb inscriptions contain such declarations, evidently for the purpose of enabling the person buried to pass the Judgement of the Dead (see BOOK OF THE DEAD; JUDGEMENT OF THE DEAD). Confessions of sin are essential parts of the Jewish and Christian liturgies, and quite naturally precede every



prayer for forgiveness. In Psalms (51.1-4) the psalmist prays:

Have mercy on me, O God, according to thy steadfast love;
according to thy abundant mercy blot out my transgressions.
Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin!
For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me.
Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done that which is evil in thy sight . . .

The General Confession in the Anglican Book of Common Prayer reads:

Almighty and most merciful Father: We have erred and strayed from thy ways like lost sheep. We have followed too much the devices and desires of our own hearts. We have offended against thy holy laws. We have left undone those things which we ought to have done; and we have done those things which we ought not to have done; and there is no health in us. But thou, O Lord, have mercy upon us, miserable offenders. Spare thou them, O God, which confess their faults. Restore thou them that are penitent: According to thy promises declared unto mankind in Christ Jesus our Lord.

This type of confession, as well as the underlying doctrine of sin, presupposes a personal god who is a law-giver, judge and forgiving father. But the notion of sin is also found in religious cultures that do not recognize a personal godhead and where the problem of expiation is not conceived in terms of humble prayer and personal forgiveness. The Indian notion of sin is related to the general theory of karma (see KARMA); liberation from evil karma leads to the great and ultimate liberation. To assist man on his way to liberation, Hinduism has an elaborate system of penances to counterbalance and efface the effects of sin with corresponding merits.

In Buddhism, too, sin is essentially an

act that produces evil karma. But although the commission of such acts is itself the outcome of earlier bad karma, man is thought to be sufficiently the master of his fate to break through the chain of karma and to advance on the path of right knowledge, insight and conduct to the great liberation.

Wrong acts have to be neutralized or balanced, and much Buddhist ritual is concerned with accumulating merit and applying it for the benefit of the departed. Rites of confession of sin were practised in early Buddhism, but these were chiefly the Buddhist monk's confession and enumeration of breaches of the rules of the order. In fact, early Theravada Buddhism thought of sin mainly in terms of individual offences against the rule. Mahayana Buddhism, on the other hand, developed a concept of man's fate and karma-bound existence which put the emphasis on his sinfulness in its totality, rather than on specific offences. This is clearly brought out by the form of confession of sins which is still in use in many Mahayanist circles. The text originally occurs in the *Avatamsaka Sutra*; it is still used among Zen Buddhists:

All the evil karma ever committed by me since of old
On account of my beginningless greed, anger and folly
Born of my body, mouth and thought (that is, committed in action, speech and thought)
I now make full open confession of it.

The notions of both 'original' and 'karmic' sinfulness go beyond the purely moralizing, and give to sin an almost ontological status. Modern psychology and existential philosophy, whilst doing away with many primitive, perverted and obsessive ideas of sin, illuminate the nature and character of human existence so as to place the problem and reality of sin in a new light.

R. J. ZWIWERBLOWSKY

The Christian Church taught that sin was a matter of intention and desire as well as of overt action. Elaborate doctrines were developed and sins were divided into various categories; as well as original sin there were individual sins committed during a man's life. Mortal sins entail everlasting punishment, and there are also venial or pardonable sins. The Seven Deadly Sins are those which are held to endanger the life of the soul if they are committed with full consent; a variety of sins were in fact depicted under this heading in art before the list was finally formulated. *Above, left to right* Hypocrisy; pride; wrath; sloth. *Below, left to right* Hatred; avarice; gluttony. All these illustrations are taken from a 13th century French manuscript which is now in the British Museum





Sinai, Mt

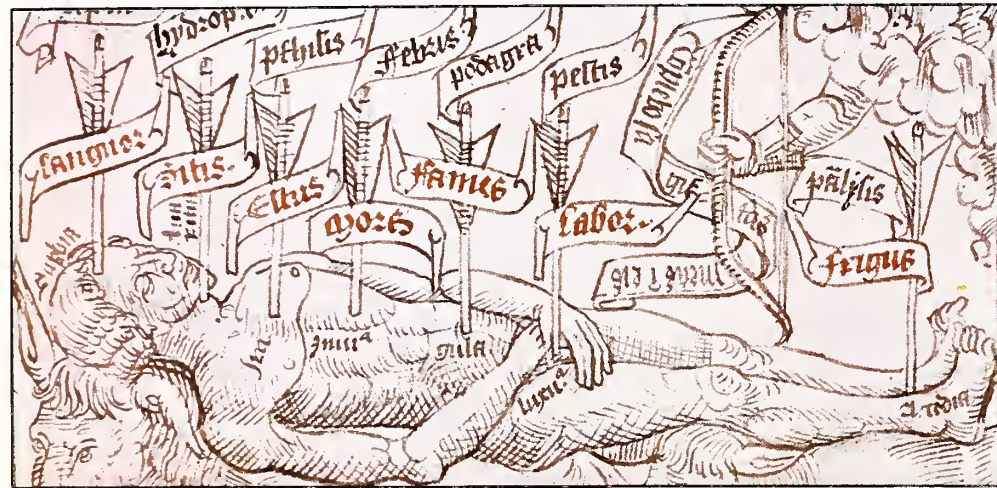
Holy mountain where God delivered the law and commandments to Moses (Exodus, chapter 19); which mountain it was is uncertain, but it was first identified as Gebel Serbal and later as Gebel Musa, in the Sinai peninsula; the episode of the burning bush (Exodus, chapter 3) was also placed there; the monastery of St Catherine on Gebel Musa became a centre of pilgrimage.



Mansell Collection

Sinbad

Or Sindbad, legendary Arab traveller who sailed on seven voyages in the Indian Ocean and the seas further east; he encountered all sorts of wonders and marvels, including a roc (see ROC) and the Old Man of the Sea, a monster which climbed on his back and would not leave him, until he killed it.



As long as the doctrine of hellfire was preached the sin eater, who took upon himself the sins of someone who had just died, could always find work; the unsaved dead were said to be doomed to the everlasting torments of hell: illustration from a 16th century Flemish manuscript showing the sinfulness of man

SIN EATER

THE FUNCTION of the person known as a 'sin eater' was to act as a human scapegoat for the sins of someone who had just died. By eating bread and drinking either milk, beer or wine that had been placed on the body of the corpse, the sin eater took upon himself the sins of the departed, absorbing them into his own body. He was paid a small amount of money for saving a soul from hell in this way.

Sin eaters were first recorded by the antiquary John Aubrey in the 17th century, in his book *Remaines of Gentilisme and Judaisme*: 'In the County of Hereford was an old custome at funeralls to hire poor people who have to take upon them all the sinnes of the parting deceased . . . The manner was that when the corpse was brought out of the house and layd in the bier, a loaf of bread was brought out and delivered to the sinne-eater over the corpse as also a mazar bowl of maple full of beer (which he was to drinke up) and sixpence in money in consideration whereof he took upon him (*ipso facto*) all the sinnes of the defunct and freed him or her from walking after they were dead.' In North Wales, according to Aubrey, milk was used instead of beer.

A later writer, Bagford, referring to information obtained from Aubrey, described the sin eaters of Shropshire: 'Within the memory of our fathers . . . when a person dyed there was a notice given to an old

sire (for so they called him) who presently repaired to the place where the deceased lay and stood before the door of the house when some of the family came out and furnished him with a cricket (stool) . . . Then they gave him a groat which he put in his pocket; a crust of bread which he ate, and a full bowl of ale which he drank off at a draught . . . (after which) he pronounced the ease and rest of the soul departed for which he would pawn his own soul.'

In the late 17th century sixpence or a groat (fourpence) were worth very much more than they are today but even allowing for this, it seems a ridiculously small fee for the redemption of a human soul.

The concept of a scapegoat, who takes upon himself other peoples' sins, is based upon the primitive idea that the qualities of a human being or animal, whether good or evil, can be transmitted to another by some supernatural agency (see SCAPEGOAT). Some primitive peoples ate the flesh of the newly-dead in order to acquire their strength. In ancient Europe human blood (which was identified with the soul) was frequently drunk in order that the living might share in the strength or valour of the dead. The Greek geographer Strabo writes that in the British Isles it was the custom for sons to eat the flesh of their dead parents in order to prevent their ghosts from returning to haunt them. It is probable that the bread consumed by the sin eater represented the body of the deceased and that the wine, beer or milk symbolized the blood.

Rites developed by human beings for the

purpose of keeping the soul at rest seem to have been based originally on the principle that unless obligations to the dead were fulfilled, the soul was bound to suffer. For this reason it was imperative to remove the burden of sin from the person who had died.

As long as the doctrine of hellfire was preached, the sin eater could always find work. In *Sighs From Hell, or the Groans of a Damned Soul*, published in 1658, John Bunyan compared the agonies of the dying with those of the unsaved dead who were transferred from the discomforts of 'a long sickness to a longer hell - from the gripings of death to the everlasting torments of hell'.

Although later references to sin eaters are scarce, they probably survived in remote places in the British Isles until well into the 18th century. They were occasionally seen in the Lowlands of Scotland at this time; in this area it was essential that the sin eater was a stranger to the dead person, and that he did not consume the food and drink 'with a grudge in his heart'. There is reason to believe that vestiges of the custom continued to influence funeral rites in Welsh border districts for a considerable period; for instance, a poor man might be given a present of money at the graveside. In Derbyshire in the 19th century a glass of wine from a box resting at the foot of the coffin would be offered to mourners, the intention behind the ceremony being the sacramental 'killing' of the sins of the deceased.

It seems that in East Anglia an unsuspecting tramp or beggar who happened to apply for charity at the door of a household where an unburied body awaited interment, would sometimes be tricked into taking the sins of the dead person upon himself. A piece of bread which had previously been passed over the corpse would be given to the vagrant who would eat it in good faith, unaware of the meaning of this innocent act. The last relic of this ancient superstition is possibly the reluctance of tramps to beg where there is a dead body in the house.

In the Theravada school of Buddhism the highest ranking layman has always been considered of lower status than the youngest religious novice; the scriptures on which Ceylon's predominant religion is based were brought to the island in the 3rd century BC

SINHALESE BUDDHISM

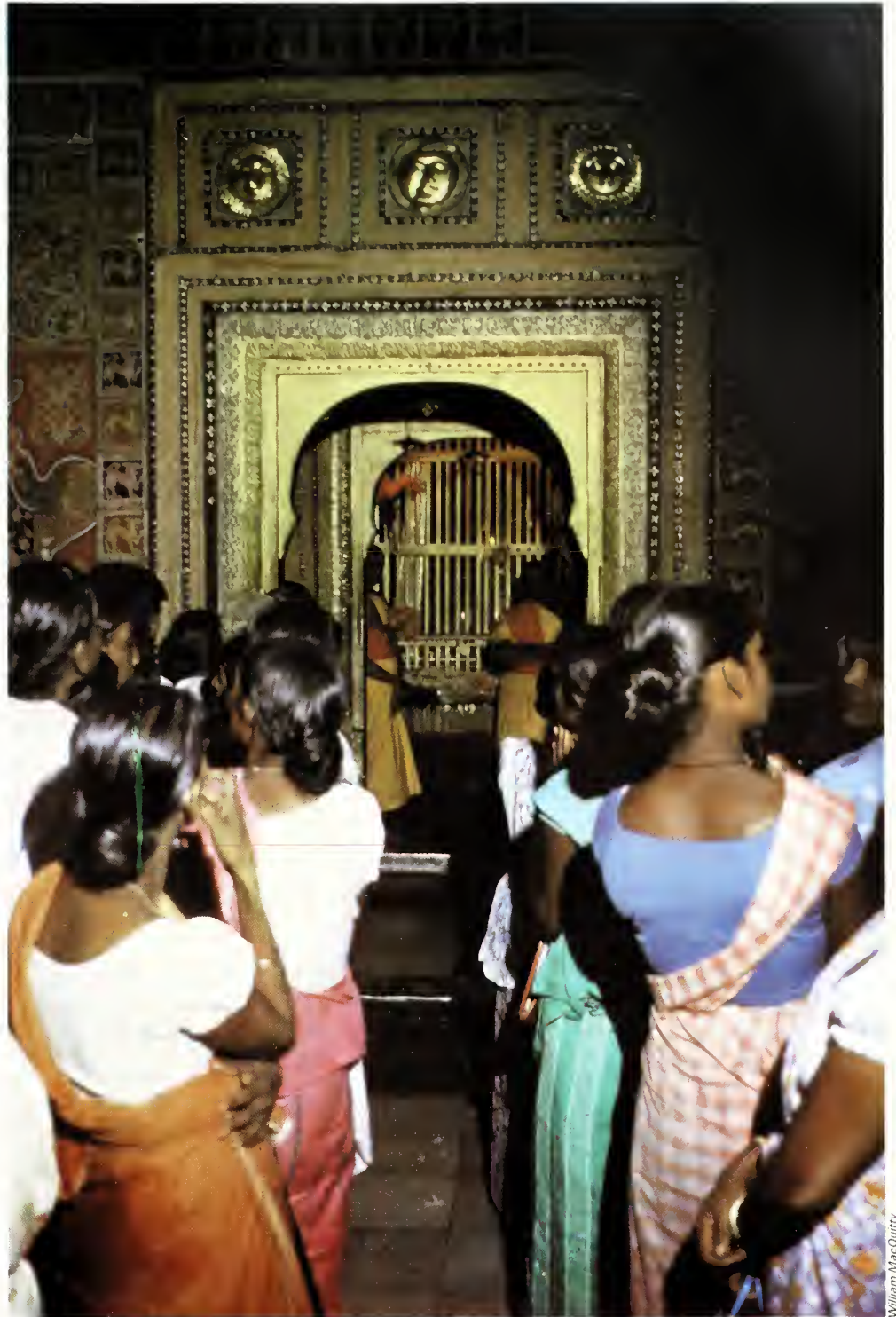
THE MAIN INTEREST which Buddhism in Ceylon holds for the outsider is its long and continuous tradition. Introduced into Ceylon from India soon after 250 BC, less than 250 years after the Buddha's death, Buddhism has been the religion of most Sinhalese, who are the principal inhabitants of Ceylon.

The school of Buddhism preserved in Ceylon is the Theravada, which has since become dominant in Burma, Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, and the southern part of South Vietnam. The scriptures of Theravada Buddhism, the *Tipitaka*, are preserved in an ancient language called Pali, a word which originally means 'text'. The Pali language and the Pali Canon (see GAUTAMA BUDDHA) were first introduced to Europeans in the middle and late 19th century from Ceylon; and the size and importance of these scriptures persuaded many scholars that Theravada represented the 'original' form of Buddhism.

This is now considered to be an exaggeration. When Buddhism was brought to Ceylon, traditionally by Mahinda, a son of the Indian Emperor Asoka, Theravada was but one of many schools with equal claims to authenticity. That it has so well preserved its scriptures, and the doctrines and practices which they embody, is mainly due to the historical accident that Mahinda converted the King of Ceylon, Devanampiya Tissa, who established Buddhism as the official religion of the Sinhalese.

Since then the fortunes of Buddhism have usually been identified with the fortunes of the Sinhalese nation; and Sinhalese literature, art and education have predominantly used Buddhist materials. The Sinhalese view of themselves as a kind of Buddhist 'chosen people' is exemplified in the *Mahavamsa*, a chronicle written in Pali by Buddhist monks through the centuries. The first part, written in the 5th century, is especially interesting. In the first chapter are alleged accounts of three visits to Ceylon made by the Buddha in his lifetime. Vijaya, the reputed founder of the Sinhalese nation, is said to have landed in Ceylon on the day of the Buddha's death, while the Buddha was prophesying to the king of the gods that his doctrine would be established in Ceylon.

After describing Mahinda's mission the chronicle is devoted mainly to the exploits of King Dutugamunu (101-77 BC), the greatest Sinhalese folk hero. When Dutugamunu ascended the throne, the Sinhalese capital, Anuradhapura, was held by Tamil invaders. In his successful campaign against them he fought with a relic of the Buddha in his spear and monks (who left their order for the purpose) in his army.



One of the best-known Buddhist celebrations is the annual festival in Kandy, during which the Buddha's tooth, which is said to have reached Ceylon in the 4th century, is paraded through the streets of the town every night for a week; at one time possession of the tooth was thought to confer the right to rule; worshippers outside the Temple of the Tooth, a celebrated Buddhist shrine

Mahinda is traditionally held to have brought the complete Pali Canon to Ceylon. This is substantially correct in spirit, as most of the texts must antedate his arrival. However, all teachings at the time were preserved orally, and it is very doubtful whether one man could memorize the whole Canon. The Pali Canon was written down in

Ceylon in the 1st century BC, probably the first time that the Buddhist scriptures had been committed to writing. Again, although it cannot be literally true that Mahinda brought with him the commentaries on the whole Canon, those composed in Ceylon certainly preserve Indian traditions. They were in Sinhalese, and were probably all completed by about 100 AD. These old commentaries have been lost.

In the early 5th century Buddhaghosa came to Anuradhapura from northern India, and wrote commentaries in Pali on most of the canonical texts, basing his work on the Sinhalese commentaries. His edition was regarded as definitive, and the Sinhalese originals were superseded. Buddhaghosa also composed a summary of Buddhist



The doctrine that an individual is responsible for his own salvation is explicit in Theravadin Buddhism; there are no millenarian movements, and the coming of Maitri, the only figure who could be regarded as a future Messiah, is thought to be immensely distant. Although Sinhalese Buddhists accept the concept of a Bodhisattva, one who is on his way to becoming a Buddha, this belief is not based on fact or demonstration: wall painting of a Bodhisattva in the Temple of the Tooth

doctrine, the *Visuddhi-magga*, 'the Path to Purity', which is still considered authoritative. His interpretation of the Canon is unquestioned in Ceylon and constitutes the touchstone of orthodoxy.

Buddhists traditionally believe that their religion is embodied in the *Sangha*, the community of monks and nuns, and for them their religious history is properly the history of the community, which depends for its continuation on the preservation of a valid ordination tradition: a monk must receive the full ordination, *upasampada*, from no fewer than five fully-ordained monks, and nuns must similarly be ordained by nuns. The community of nuns *bhikkhuni sangha*, died out in Ceylon in the 11th century, while the order of monks also died out during several periods of political turmoil, and was then re-established by contact with monks from abroad. However the discontinuity is of little importance, because succession has always been renewed by monks from Burma or Thailand, countries which themselves originally received their succession from Ceylon. The largest body of monks in Ceylon today, the Siam Nikaya, traces its ordination line back to the last such renewal, when monks came from Thailand to hold an ordination ceremony in 1753. It therefore has a strong claim to stand in the direct tradition of the *Mahavihara*, 'Great Monastery', of Anuradhapura, which was founded by Mahinda.

The Mahavihara was always the bastion of Theravadin orthodoxy in Anuradhapura, but the main currents of Mahayana thought seem to have reached Ceylon from India. The first Ceylonese schism occurred shortly before the beginning of the Christian era and throughout the first millennium AD, until Anuradhapura finally fell to the Tamils, the monks were split into three *nikayas*, or fraternities. For more than a hundred years there have again been three *nikayas* in Ceylon. Monks from different *nikayas* will not co-operate in religious acts, generally live apart, and do not recognize each other's ecclesiastical seniority or authority. In ancient times the lines of division, whatever their origin, were generally given a doctrinal basis; but in modern times this is not so, and Sinhalese Buddhists stress that they all follow Theravadin orthodoxy.

The reason for the modern split is caste. The Siam Nikaya in the late 18th century would ordain only members of the *goyigama*, (farmer) caste, the top caste and by far the largest. Early in the 19th century members of other castes went to Burma for ordination and started independent lines, which are known jointly as the Amarapura Nikaya. A similar

Buddha's Footprint

Fa-hsien, a Chinese traveller, visits Ceylon in the 5th century AD

After fourteen days and nights he reached the Land of the Lion (Ceylon), said by the inhabitants to lie at a distance of seven yōjanas from India . . . This country was not originally inhabited by human beings, but only by devils and dragons, with whom the merchants of the neighbouring countries traded by barter . . .

When Buddha came to this country, he wished to convert the wicked dragons; and by his divine power he placed one foot to the north of the royal city and the other on top of Adam's Peak, the two

points being fifteen yōjanas apart. Over the footprint to the north of the city a great pagoda has been built, four hundred feet in height and decorated with gold and silver and with all kinds of precious substances combined. By the side of the pagoda a monastery has also been built, called No-Fear Mountain, where there are now five thousand priests. There is a Hall of Buddha of gold and silver carved work with all kinds of precious substances, in which stands his image in green jade, over twenty feet in height . . .

The Travels of Fa-hsien (399-414 AD)
trans by H. A. Giles

renewal from Burma in the mid-19th century is the Ramanna Nikaya; it has a fundamentalist tendency, mainly in its monastic regulations, which insist, for instance, that monks handle no money. There are in fact many different nikayas, and the fact that they are usually grouped together and spoken of as three must be mainly due to the ancient model.

The appearance of caste criteria in the Sangha is only one aspect of the intrusion of secular institutions into the Sinhalese monastery. Though monasteries in ancient Ceylon, as elsewhere, continually received valuable gifts, and even held slaves, monastic landlordism in its present form is probably only about 700 years old. Individual monasteries own land, which the incumbent has the right to use, and some own the estates of entire villages and command the services of the cultivators, as did the kings of Kandy and members of the lay nobility. These service tenures are now diminishing greatly.

In other respects, however, monastic organization in Ceylon is still archaic. Nikayas are autonomous, and though each has an acknowledged head, who is usually elected by a small council of elders, there is little centralization, even within the nikaya, except in holding ordination ceremonies. For most purposes the unit that counts is still the individual monastery. Though king and government have at times had, and even exercised, the power to intervene in monastic affairs, this has never been formally acknowledged; the highest layman has always been considered of lower status than the youngest novice, and until recently lay participation in controlling monks has been unthinkable.

In Ceylon alone among the Theravadin countries has been preserved the ancient custom by which it is normally assumed that someone entering the Sangha does so for life. It is always possible to leave without formal stigma, although there may be social disapproval. Novices usually enter young, at any age from seven onwards, and receive the higher ordination at the minimum age of 20, or soon after.

There are now about 7½ million Sinhalese Buddhists, about 17,000 monks and about 5500 monasteries. About two thirds of the monks and over half the monasteries belong to the Siam Nikaya.

Beliefs and Rituals

Buddhists have always believed in gods and lesser spirits, all of whom they regard as subject to the law of karma (see KARMA) and therefore to finite knowledge, power and longevity. Gods and demons exist for the vast majority of Buddhists just as other humans do; they accept their existence much as we accept that of nuclear particles, and consider them equally irrelevant to genuinely religious concerns, by which they mean the Buddha's *Dharma*, 'doctrine'. The Sinhalese believe that when the Buddha on his deathbed prophesied that Ceylon would be a stronghold of his religion, the king of the gods put the country under the particular protection of the god Vishnu. Gods and other spirits all hold authority

under *varam*, 'warrants', which go back to this and similar events, so that ultimately they derive legitimacy from the Buddha. In granting material rewards and sending diseases and misfortunes, the gods and demons can only realize a man's karma: if by this moral law he is due for some good fortune, it may come to him from a god, but the god is only acting as a powerful man might act, and is likewise morally responsible in his turn. A demon who hurts a man will not go further than the man's bad karma will justify, for he is liable to have his warrant withdrawn by a higher, and therefore more just and more powerful spirit. Moreover, his malevolence creates more bad karma for himself. Relations with gods and demons are not considered religious matters.

Religion and mundane affairs do, however, meet occasionally. A ritual of very varied function and extent consists of monks chanting a collection of Pali texts called *pirit*, 'protection'. This occurs especially at set intervals after a death, when monks are also fed. Monks also officiate at funerals, but have nothing to do with any other life crises; birth and marriage are purely secular events. Monks serve the laity principally by enabling them to earn merit by listening to sermons and by giving food; the alms round is exceptional in Ceylon, as laymen usually take food to a temple.

Laymen also earn merit by observing the precepts. The Five Precepts (*pan sil*) must always be observed; the Eight Precepts (*ata sil*), which involve some abstention from normal indulgence, are taken on quarter days of the lunar calendar, especially full moon days, but traditionally only by elderly people. Those taking the Eight Precepts spend all, or most, of the day at the temple and wear white. More positive ways of earning merit include going on pilgrimages, especially to one of the 16 spots in Ceylon that were supposedly visited by the Buddha. However, the religious festival that is most widely known abroad concerns none of these. Once a year the Buddha's tooth, which reached Ceylon in the 4th century, is paraded through the streets of Kandy on the back of an elephant with huge tusks, preceded by dancers, drummers and many other elephants. This is repeated every night for a week.

Even a summary of ways of earning merit would be incomplete without mention of meditation, which is necessary to attain Nirvana, or even the highest (formless) heavens. It is conceived to be the supreme purpose of monasticism, but in neither theory nor practice is it confined to monks. However it seems likely that meditation has never been practised by more than a small minority of people. The recent propaganda for meditation, and its increased practice, is a result of modern developments, including rivalry with Christianity and lay Buddhist control over the state school system. This contrasts with the traditional belief that the last person to attain Nirvana in Ceylon lived 2000 years ago, and that no one on earth will do so again until the coming, aeons hence, of the next Buddha, Maitri. Most Buddhists are willing, even

content, to postpone the attainment of Nirvana to a future life, and make rebirth in one of the lower heavens, or even in a good station on earth, their immediate goal.

In theory Theravada Buddhism has no place for devotional religion; in practice this rigour is mitigated. The doctrine that each individual is wholly responsible for his own salvation is universally explicit. Sinhalese Buddhism completely lacks millenarian movements, and the coming of Maitri, the only figure who might be considered a future Messiah, is conceived of as being immensely distant. Bodhisattvas play a purely notional part in the religion. On the other hand Gautama, the historical Buddha, is venerated as supreme. Whether one can describe him as deified depends on the level of analysis. No Sinhalese Buddhist would accept the term, for they say that the Buddha was human, and is dead and gone, but they certainly derive emotional satisfaction from his veneration. Every house has an image of the Buddha, even if only a picture, and the image house, the most essential feature of a temple after the residence of a monk or monks, contains at least one Buddha statue. Images are venerated as 'reminders' of him.

The other main features of a temple, the bo-tree and the stupa, are also venerated for their association with him: the one because under such a tree did he attain enlightenment, the other because it contains relics. Offerings (*puya*), most commonly of flowers, incense sticks or lights, are made before images, bo-trees and stupas, and people often recite Pali verses, some of them definitely devotional in tone, before representations of the Buddha.

(See also BUDDHISM.)

RICHARD GOMBRICH

FURTHER READING: Nanamoli Evans, *The Path of Purification (Visuddhi-magga)* distributed by Luzac, London; W. Rahula, *History of Buddhism in Ceylon: the Anuradhapura Period* (Intl. Pubns. Serv., 1966).

Gautama, the historical Buddha, is venerated as supreme by Sinhalese Buddhists; every house has an image of him, even if it is only a picture, and the image house of every temple contains at least one Buddha statue: feet of the giant reclining Buddha at the site of the ruined city of Polonnaruwa



Picturepoint London



Left The Sirens appear in the *Odyssey* as beautiful maidens who enchant passing sailors with their song so that they swim ashore and perish; Odysseus escaped this fate by commanding his men to bind him to the mast: *Odysseus and the Sirens*, 3rd century mosaic from Dougga **Below left** Formed partly like birds and partly like women, the Sirens are said to have attended Persephone before she was carried off to Hades: tripod, c 600–570 BC

Linear B from Mycenaean Pylos seem to refer to decorations on furniture as *seremokaraoi* and *seremokaraapi* which has been interpreted as 'siren-headed'. If this is so, the word *serem*, in that form with M not yet changed to N, already existed in Mycenaean Greek, and the Sirens were known in myth in some form. What form the Mycenaean 'siren-headed' decorations had is not known.

In later periods poets and mythographers continued to write of Sirens, revealing more of their nature. Hesiod in a fragment of his *Eoiai* called their island Anthemoessa and named them Thelxiope, Molpe and Aglaophonus, daughters of Phorcys the sea god, saying also that they calmed the winds. In the 7th century BC the lyric poet Aleman spoke of the Muse 'the clear-voiced Siren' as if Siren and Muse were the same, and elsewhere mentions the Sirenides, but only for their music. A fragment of Sophocles makes them daughters of Phorcys and 'singers of songs of Hades'. The comic poet Epicharmus makes the Sirens try to attract Odysseus by descriptions of the food and drink that they enjoyed and which he might share; plump anchovies, sucking pigs, cuttlefish and sweet wine. When they begin to speak of their evening meal Odysseus cries 'Alas for my miseries'. Other comic poets, Theopompus and Nicophon, mention the abundant feasting of the Sirens and their taunting of the hungry wanderer Odysseus. This association with fabulous plenty is difficult to explain, even given the food-loving conventions of comedy.

'Barren Nightingales'

In Apollonius the island of the Sirens is Anthemoessa and they are the daughters of the river Achelous and Terpsichore, the Muse of choral dance and song. They once attended Persephone before she was carried off to Hades and they were then formed partly like birds and partly like maidens. The Argonauts would have been drawn into their power as they passed, but Orpheus with his lyre drowned the sound of their voices. Only Butes swam toward the shore, but Aphrodite snatched him up and set him on the height of Lilybaeum. In Apollonius the Sirens are placed on the coast of the Tyrrhenian Sea, as is usual in post-Homeric poetry. But the river Achelous belongs in Aetolia in north-west Greece, which may have been their original home in Greek legend. The tradition of this location is preserved later by Lucian and others, particularly by another Alexandrian poet, Lycophron, author of the poem *Alexandra*, in which Cassandra prophesies the future wanderings of the Greek chiefs, including Odysseus, on their return from Troy.



SIRENS

FEMALE BEINGS connected with the underworld, the Sirens were particularly dangerous to men; it is hard to find any story in which women suffered at their hands. They first appear in the *Odyssey* (book 12) as beautiful females who sit in a meadow by the sea, enchanting passing sailors with their song so that they swim ashore, or land, and perish miserably. Round them is a great heap of bones which come from the rotting corpses of men.

Odysseus was advised by the enchantress (Circe (see CIRCE)), when she warned him of the Sirens, to stop the ears of his rowers with wax as the ship passed them;

and she told him that, if he wished to hear their song himself, he should make his men bind him to the mast and not release him however much he might implore them. A mysterious calm fell as the ship passed their island, so that it depended entirely on rowing to make headway. The Sirens sang to Odysseus that they knew of all his deeds and sufferings at Troy. In Homer they are mentioned in the dual number, so that he recognized no more than two. Their names are not given, and their physical form is not described. Like other such beings in the *Odyssey* they are not located in known or normal geography.

For the historical period corresponding to the heroic age, it is of some interest that tablets inscribed in the script known as

Lycophron calls the Sirens 'barren night-ingles and slayers of the centaurs', because the centaurs were so charmed with their song that they forgot to eat. Later he says that Odysseus will be the death of the Sirens, who will hurl themselves from the cliff-top into the Tyrrhenian Sea. One will be washed ashore by the towering Phalerus (Naples) and the river Glanis (Clanuis) where the inhabitants will build a tomb for her as the bird goddess Parthenope, and honour her with yearly sacrifices. Leucosia will be cast ashore by the strand of Enipeus (Posidon), that is, at Posidonia or Paestum. Ligeia will come ashore at Tereina and will be buried with honour in the stony beach. The tone of this passage shows that in Italianate Greek

belief, on the coast of Campania and further south, the Sirens were regarded as beneficent beings, at least after their death. Their cult here and its centres, particularly on the Sorrentine peninsula south of Naples and its neighbouring islands, are also described by Strabo. This region became their regular location in myth, and this is where they had a temple. This lore, like most of the legends about Odysseus in Italy, was spread by the Greek colonists from Euboea who reached Italy by passing north-west Greece.

In later tradition Parthenope is presented by the medieval *Cronaca di Partenope* as a princess of Sicily who sailed into Naples Bay and died of the plague. She was buried there and became a sort of local saint who was consulted as an oracle. At some time in the

Middle Ages the Sirens lost their bird form and acquired fishes' tails so that they became a form of mermaid. Earlier Greek art shows them always in the form of birds or birdlike women. One reason for locating the Sirens on or near the Sorrentine peninsula, while their character was still conceived as in the *Odyssey*, is the appearance of a cave on the coast. In this is a great mass of prehistoric bones preserved under transparent breccia (composite rock consisting of fragments of stone cemented together). The bones are in fact the remains of game that was killed and eaten by Paleolithic hunters. They must have been seen by generations of Mycenaean and later Greek voyagers who thought they were human bones.

E. D. PHILLIPS

SIVANANDA



Kenneth Grant

three years, until he experienced, in 1923, what Western mystics have referred to as the 'dark night of the soul'. He suddenly realized that however many people he might help by remaining a doctor, he could alleviate only the sufferings of a few.

Kuppuswamy withdrew from medical practice and sunk himself in deep meditation, striving to solve the problem of how he might bring relief, not to the few, but to all: not temporary bodily relief, but permanent spiritual peace. The solution came as a revelation which fully enlightened him; he would become a doctor of the Spirit. He would heal the entire universe of its worries and woes or, failing this, he would give people the means of healing themselves. Kuppuswamy had become Sivananda, the name by which he was soon to be known. He renounced the world and became a mendicant; he visited many sacred places in south India and stayed at the *ashram* (spiritual colony) of the celebrated sage Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi (see RAMANA MAHARSHI). Shortly afterwards, Sivananda met his own personal *guru*.

He travelled to north India and came to Rishikesh on the banks of the Ganges, in the Himalayas, where, on 1 June 1924, he was initiated into the Order of *Sannyasis* (celibate monks) by Paramahansa Visvananda Saraswati. Finding Rishikesh alive with spiritual power, Sivananda engaged in intensive *sadhana* (spiritual culture). He made his home at various places in the region for the next 35 years.

He settled at Swargashram and lived in a small hut where he meditated deeply, gradually piercing the layers of illusion until he realized the *Atman*, or impersonal Self of the universe (see BRAHMAN). It was here that people first flocked to him.

On 12 June 1931 he began an arduous pilgrimage to Mount Kailasa in western Tibet, considered by millions to be the physical form of the god Shiva himself. He was accompanied by several saintly men and walked barefoot every inch of the 475-mile journey, despite chronic lumbago.

Swargashram swarmed with devotees and the regional authorities were soon unable to cope with them. Sivananda therefore decided to leave. He moved to a small and dilapidated hut nearby, where he stayed for eight years. It was here that he

founded the Divine Life Society in 1936. Subsequently 300 branches were established in large cities, and by 1960, shortly before his death, the Society was in a position to maintain about 400 persons.

One of Sivananda's most important contributions to the science of the Spirit was *Namapathy*, healing by name; that is, by any name of God, or by a *mantra* (see MANTRA), a form of words or sounds which are believed to have a magical effect when uttered with intent. To perform *Namapathy* he composed a special ritual so that new life could pour into sick persons all over the world. Several Western centres of spiritual healing were modelled on the ashram in Rishikesh.

Sivananda's personal experience of all forms of yoga and religions enabled him to combine them for the rapid development of widely differing types of students. He reduced to their essentials all systems of spiritual attainment and called the result 'Synthetic Sadhana'.

The Divine Life Society, the Yoga-Vedanta Forest Academy and the Sivananda Ashram, all of which he founded and imbued with powerful spiritual impetus, attracted aspirants from all parts of the world. He stressed that work without thought of personal gain, and selfless service, were vital factors in development; and maintained that even a single sincere student could move the world by the power of his devotion.

He advised his helpers against refusing money from sympathizers on the grounds of non-attachment to worldly things. Money was needed for the work of printing and publishing great spiritual truths; for buying medicines for the sick; for clothing the poor and housing the homeless.

He treated women with the same courtesy, affection and generosity that he extended to men. Although he warned his male disciples against the wiles of women, and described them in some of his books as epitomizing uncleanness, he did so to obviate disaster to immature aspirants. He knew that it was not easy to acquire the perfect *samadrishti*, equal vision with regard to all, that enabled him and those of his stature to neutralize the glamour of women or, alternatively, to recognize them as channels of spiritual power. His own attitude was

Founder of the Divine Life Society, Sivananda believed that selfless service, and work without thought of personal gain, were vital factors in development; he maintained that just one sincere student could move the world by the power of his devotion

BORN ON 8 September 1887, in the small village of Pattamadai in south India, Sri Swami Sivananda was a descendant of the 16th century holy man Appaya Dikshitar, who wrote 104 works on *Vedanta* and the Sanskrit language. Named Kuppuswamy by his parents, he matriculated from the Rajah's High School at Etiapuram in 1903, and shortly afterwards took a course in medicine at the Tanjore Medical Institute.

In 1913 he was appointed doctor-in-charge of a hospital on a rubber estate near Seremban in Malaya, where he worked for nearly seven years. He then joined the Johore Medical Office, where he served for

characterized by that supreme reverence to the feminine aspect of divinity that is one of the redeeming features of Hinduism.

Sivananda converted the villainous, lazy, and ill-tempered into ardent and cheerful workers who performed useful work in the ashram. Other, possibly less successful, gurus, those who claimed astonishing occult powers for themselves, referred to him as 'a guru for thieves and rogues'. In fact he welcomed thieves and rogues as cheerfully as anyone else, knowing that they would eventually become dynamic yogis, after being transformed in a place charged with spiritual vibrations, and regarded the quip as a sublime compliment. However, he deprecated the use of the term guru in connection with himself, and asked his devotees never

to describe him as a master or world teacher, but always as an ordinary *sadhu* (seeker). He never attempted to monopolize anyone who sought his help; on the contrary, he would even recommend their visiting other ashrams and other gurus, if he thought it was necessary.

Intoxicating Music

He laboured to imbue the mass of people with the spirit of devotion. He advocated the practice of *kirtan* (devotional singing and dancing), and compared its spiritual effects to the intoxication produced by drugs: 'Just as the intoxication from hashish, opium, or alcohol, lasts for some hours, so also this Divine intoxication that you get from *kirtan* will last for many hours during the fol-

lowing day, and at night also during dream.'

By this analogy he implied that there is a path, the effects of which are everlasting. This is the *Jnana Marga*, or path of Pure Wisdom, which he embodied and exemplified. But, although he had realized the Ultimate Truth of One-Self-in-All, he taught this interior science only to those who had pierced the last veils of illusion.

KENNETH GRANT

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SKOPTSY

THE LAST SURVIVING POCKET of Skoptsy, a sect which originated in Russia in the 18th century, was still in existence after the Second World War, outside the Soviet Union, in Romania. They were the descendants of people who had fled to the islands of the Danube delta, on the Black Sea coast, one of the remotest and least-known areas of Europe. This wilderness of reeds long harboured one of the strangest assortments of human flotsam in the world: Ottoman Turks, Nogai Tartars (relics of the Golden Horde) and members of the Lippovan heretical Christian sect, which settled in and around Unirea late in the 18th century. The Skoptsy populated several villages, consisting of houses built on stilts above the waters, and made themselves economically self-supporting. They no longer survive, apparently, though the Lippovan churches, which are famed for their chanting, managed to outlast the Ceausescu regime.

The Skoptsy are one of the more curious aberrations in the history of religion. The name means 'eunuchs' and Skoptsy men carried their disapproval of sex to the point of having themselves castrated. Castration as an adjunct of religious zeal is a very old phenomenon indeed, dating back to the cult of Cybele (see CYBELE; MUTILATION). In the 3rd century, the Christian Origen castrated himself, on a literal interpretation of Matthew 19.12: 'And there are eunuchs, who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of Heaven.'

The immediate ancestors of the Skoptsy were the Khlysty ('Flagellants'), themselves one of the dozens of offshoots from the Old Believers at the end of the 17th century. Danila Filippov, the peasant founder of the Khlysty, was himself an ascetic, whom his followers considered to be of equal status with Christ. He sought the 'gifts of the Spirit' for his followers by denying them the right to have sexual relations with their wives, to drink alcohol or to eat meat. All sought the charisma or grace of the Spirit, but those who believed they had attained it considered themselves above human laws. Denied the right to cohabit with their wives, they considered extra-marital relations to be especially sacred. Filippov, however good

his original intentions may have been, found himself quite incapable of controlling the excesses of his followers, or of preventing other would-be charismatic leaders from pressing their own claims to participation in the divine revelation.

So it was that the Skoptsy arose as a reaction against the Khlysty. The man who founded the new sect, Kondrati Selivanov, was himself a Khlyst. He, too, gave it out that sexual union was the fount of all sin; the only possibility of salvation for mankind, he said, was to renounce sex totally.

It was in 1757 that Selivanov, then in his 26th year, first attracted a following. He said that to attain total purity and finally remove any possibility of sin, he must make

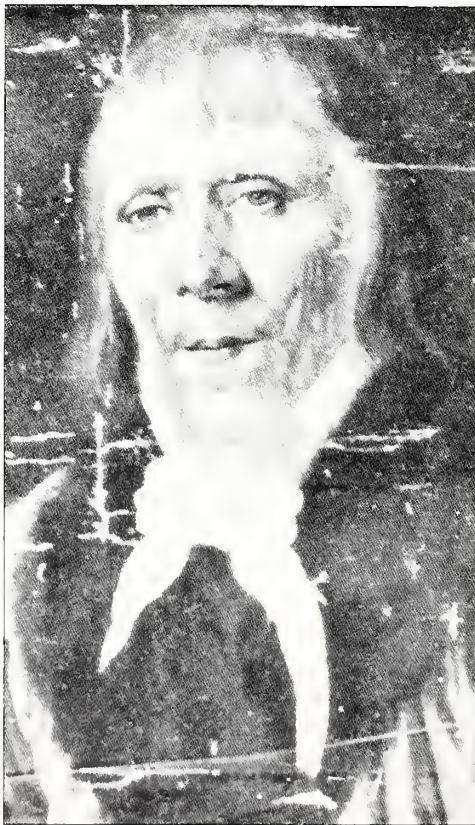
himself a perfect example to his followers. He would undergo a second baptism 'by fire' – and shed his own blood for Christ. As a public proof that he meant what he said, he had himself castrated.

The Skoptsy came to believe that as soon as 144,000 converts had been found to follow this path, the Last Judgement would descend upon all mankind. Selivanov himself was apparently in no hurry to meet his maker, for he lived to be 100 years old. As time went on, his followers imbued him with more and more attributes of the godhead, although he slightly confused the issue by making himself out to be the Tsar Peter III, who was murdered in 1762.

The Skoptsy never became numerous enough to be as important as many other religious sects in Russia, but for years they remained the most notorious. Groups sprang up in many areas of central Russia. Surprisingly, in view of the usual hostility of the authorities to any kind of sectarian deviation, they seem to have been treated with some awe by both the Tsarist regime and by the Russian Orthodox Church.

Some groups, however, were forced to flee, and they established communes in remote areas of Siberia. Some also fled southwest to the Danube delta. In the main, however, they flocked in comparative safety to the towns, where they established themselves as quasi-monastic communities, living in dormitories, but going out daily to work.

It became the practice for a male follower to father a small family before becoming a 'full member' of the sect. Before long, too, the Skoptsy doctrine became modified, so that some leaders preached 'spiritual castration' as the ideal. Physical mutilations had already become far less frequent by the time of the Revolution, but there was a tendency for them to increase in number as an act of violent protest when conditions became exceedingly hard. Soviet sources have admitted that in 1929 there were as many as 2000 adherents of the sect, that their number was increasing during collectivization and the mutilations becoming more prevalent. The last recorded instance of a castration in the Soviet Union was in 1951, by a certain Lomonosov, who was then the leader of the sect near Rostov-on-Don. He persuaded his brother to undergo this after the latter's demobilization.



Portrait of Kondrati Selivanov, founder of the Skoptsy, who claimed that the only possibility of salvation for mankind was to renounce sex totally. As an example to his followers he had himself castrated

'The eyeless sockets peer back sightlessly into our own', a reminder that in the midst of life we are in death; the psychic qualities attributed to the skull, both human and animal, led to its use in religious practices, magical ritual and medicine

SKULL

THE HUMAN SKULL is a pre-eminent symbol of mortality and the vanity of this earthly life, representing at the same time a warning sign and a threat. Two beliefs which are found the world over, and which are shared by humanity past and present, are that all bones are centres of psychic energy, and that the head is the dwelling place of the soul; until well into the 17th century it seems to have been generally accepted as a scientific fact that the soul flowed in the fluids of the ventricles of the brain, while even in our own times there exists a strong tendency to regard mind as an aspect of spirit. These basic themes have had a profound influence upon social and religious attitudes down the ages.

Surviving Beliefs

A number of significant ideas emanating from the prehistoric cult of the dead continue even now to affect religious thought. At the cave of Ofnet, between Augsburg and Nuremberg, nests of skulls were discovered in post-Magdalenian deposits, relics of a primitive European culture; each of the skulls was turned in a westerly direction, no doubt towards some mythical land of the dead. (See also CULT OF THE DEAD.)

From the discovery of large numbers of skulls buried separately from the other parts of the skeletons it is evident that some form of second burial must have taken place in former times. It is widely held by historians and archeologists that from the beginning of the Pleistocene period such burials took place following the extraction of the brains, perhaps for use as food. Rare artistry was often displayed in the decoration of human skulls, many being painted red, or decorated with sea-shells.

The skull motif dominated the ideology of northern Europe, and we find, for example, that the ancient Norse imagined the heavens to be constructed from the sky dome or skull of the giant Ymir. In the Swedish text of an old ballad – 'The Twa Sisters' – the frame of a fiddle is said to have been created out of a magic skull.

Skulls were frequently used to decorate the facades of buildings, only later being superseded by stone balls. They also had a vital, if gruesome, function in builders' rites, sometimes being embedded into the foundations of buildings (see BUILDERS' RITES).

That there was supposed to exist some supernatural quality in the human skull is evident from the custom in Easter Island, where sacred caverns were placed under the protection of skull guardians. In some places the heads of warriors have been found buried, apparently facing in the direction from which danger of invasion has been anticipated.

The skulls of enemies were at one time extremely popular as drinking cups. The

17th-century writer Sir Thomas Browne refers to this practice in *Urn Burial*: 'To be gnawed out of our graves, for our skulls to be made into drinking bowls and our bones turned into pipes to delight and sport our enemies are tragical abominations'. Among certain peoples of the Far East, however, only a skull that had been picked clean by vultures made an acceptable libation bowl.

As late as the last century, pious pilgrims would travel to the holy well at Llandeilo, in southern Wales, where they drank water from the brain pan of the pre-Reformation St Teilo. Saintry skulls were once a common sight in churches all over Europe; in Protestant countries few seem to have survived the Reformation of the 16th century, but in Catholic areas thousands of skulls of martyrs and saints are still displayed in the churches. The skulls of the 11,000 holy virgins of Cologne must have presented a truly imposing sight to the credulous.

Regarded as the seat of soul power, the skull has played an important part in primitive ritual. In New Caledonia pilgrimages were made by the natives to pay homage to the skulls of chieftains and others considered worthy of high honour. Skulls were also offered as gifts to the primal ancestors by the Wa people of Indo-China.

To the headhunter, the skull of a slain enemy could represent not only considerable prowess in the field but a decided advantage over the victim. In the long-houses of New Guinea enemy skulls were displayed on racks, before each of which stood a shield representing the spirit of the warrior responsible for the deaths. It was taken for granted that the ghost of the conqueror was in a position to command the services of the ghosts of those he had killed. The headhunters of Borneo used the skulls of enemies as pillows. Trobriand Island widows converted the skulls of their late husbands into lime pots. Indians of the Amazon frequently adorned the ancestral skulls with feather head-dresses.

As a symbol, the skull appears often in art. A grinning skull is frequently depicted in representations of the medieval Dance of Death and also of Ankou, the skeletal death-summoner of Brittany (see BRITTANY; DANCE OF DEATH).

In Mexico the skull may be said to dominate certain forms of artistic expression. This can be seen, for instance, in the stone skulls carved on the temple of Tepoztlan, and in Aztec models constructed out of wood, obsidian or rock crystal. The Mexican death god Mictlantecuhtli, the skeleton with the conical hat, is probably responsible for the shapes of the toys and sweets of modern Mexican children, which often take the form of skulls.

The ancient Etruscans are said to have employed a skull impaled on a pole as a device 'to scare away death by his own likeness'. In New Guinea the same device is employed somewhat pointedly as a 'Keep out' sign.

The skull and crossbones symbol is not only the hallmark of the pirate. This device has been carved on gravestones for many centuries, as a reminder of mortality. A British regiment, the 17th-21st Lancers,



Homiman Museum



Axel Poignant

Below Nazi Death's Head badge in the shape of a skull and crossbones. Besides its associations with death, the skull is valued in many societies as the seat of a person's soul
Top Skull from New Guinea, very probably a headhunter's trophy
Above Maori tiki amulet made from a human skull and thought to bring the owner good luck



Andrew Mollo



As the framework of the body and the part which lasts longest, bones and skulls are often regarded as the basis or root of life. Left: Skulls of former abbots are carefully preserved and named at Stavrouni monastery in Cyprus. Right: Detail from Signorelli's *Resurrection of the Body*, in Orvieto Cathedral, showing skeletons being clothed with flesh.

from the unburied skull of a criminal. Self-medication was readily available to those prepared to drink water from the skull of a suicide. Death by violence was an essential requirement when selecting a skull for medicinal purposes, and a flourishing trade in skulls developed between English apothecaries and Irish executioners. A distillation particularly favoured by King Charles II consisted mainly of filings of skull bone, spirits of wine and sage. A draught was administered to Charles on his deathbed with apparently little effect upon the outcome.

Irish skulls were particularly valuable by virtue of the greenish lichen which grew on them, known as usnea; they could realize as much as ten shillings each on the open market, a considerably larger sum in the 17th century than today. Severe headaches were said to be cured by an inhalation of snuff made from skull-scrapings, and in order to relieve toothache the sufferer had only to bite a molar out of a freshly disinterred churchyard skull.

Most medieval magicians, following the ancient theory that the skull was a centre of psychic power, included it in their ceremonies. At her trial in 1324, the notorious witch Dame Alice Kyteler (see KYTELER), was said to have brewed a potion consisting of the brains of an unbaptized child, scorpions, chickens' entrails and other horrors, using the skull of an executed thief as a cauldron. Some 50 years or so later, when a Surrey wizard was arrested he was discovered to have in his possession what was described in the indictment as the 'head and face of a dead man'. Both the skull and the wizard's book of spells were afterwards consigned to the flames. Skulls play an important part in the rites of modern black magicians; a skull impaled on a post was a prominent feature of the rituals carried out in Clophill churchyard, Bedfordshire, in 1963 (see CLOPHILL).

At about the time when magic was at long last giving way to scientific knowledge and most of the older medical superstitions were disappearing from the scene, skull mysticism reappeared in the form of the 'science' of phrenology. Dr Franz Joseph Gall, an 18th century Viennese physician, put forward the intriguing theory that a man's physical constitution determined his character and that the faculties of the brain could be assessed from the shape of the cranium. In the 19th century phrenology gained widespread popularity, both in Europe and in America. Although this latter-day cult of the skull has now been relegated to the fairground quack and the seaside pier entertainer, in the present century there has nevertheless been a revival of scientific interest in the possible effects of physique on character (see PHRENOLOGY).

known as the 'Death or Glory Boys', used the skull and crossbones as a regimental badge, and the helmet of the German Death's Head Dragoons bore this emblem as their insignia. In modern times it has become an international warning sign which is used, for example, on the labels of poison bottles in some countries and on Spanish electricity sub-stations.

Medicine and Magic

One curious feature of skull lore which has attracted the attention of archeologists and anthropologists is artificial cranial deformation as practised by the ancient Egyptians, among others; this was achieved by bandaging tightly the soft and malleable skulls of young children. Yet another type of

deformation was trepanning, a surgical operation carried out by Stone Age savages apparently to relieve pressures on the brain caused by skull injuries. It was supposed that this operation permitted the evil spirit responsible for the headache or similar pains to make its escape, thereby freeing the sick person from discomfort. This primitive surgery must have been highly skilled in view of the fact that some of those operated upon are known to have lived for years afterwards.

The skull played a considerable part in medicine and magic. Epilepsy, a disease regarded with supernatural awe in the Middle Ages and later, was sometimes treated with a special elixir known as Spirit of Human Skull, which was prepared

Animal Skulls

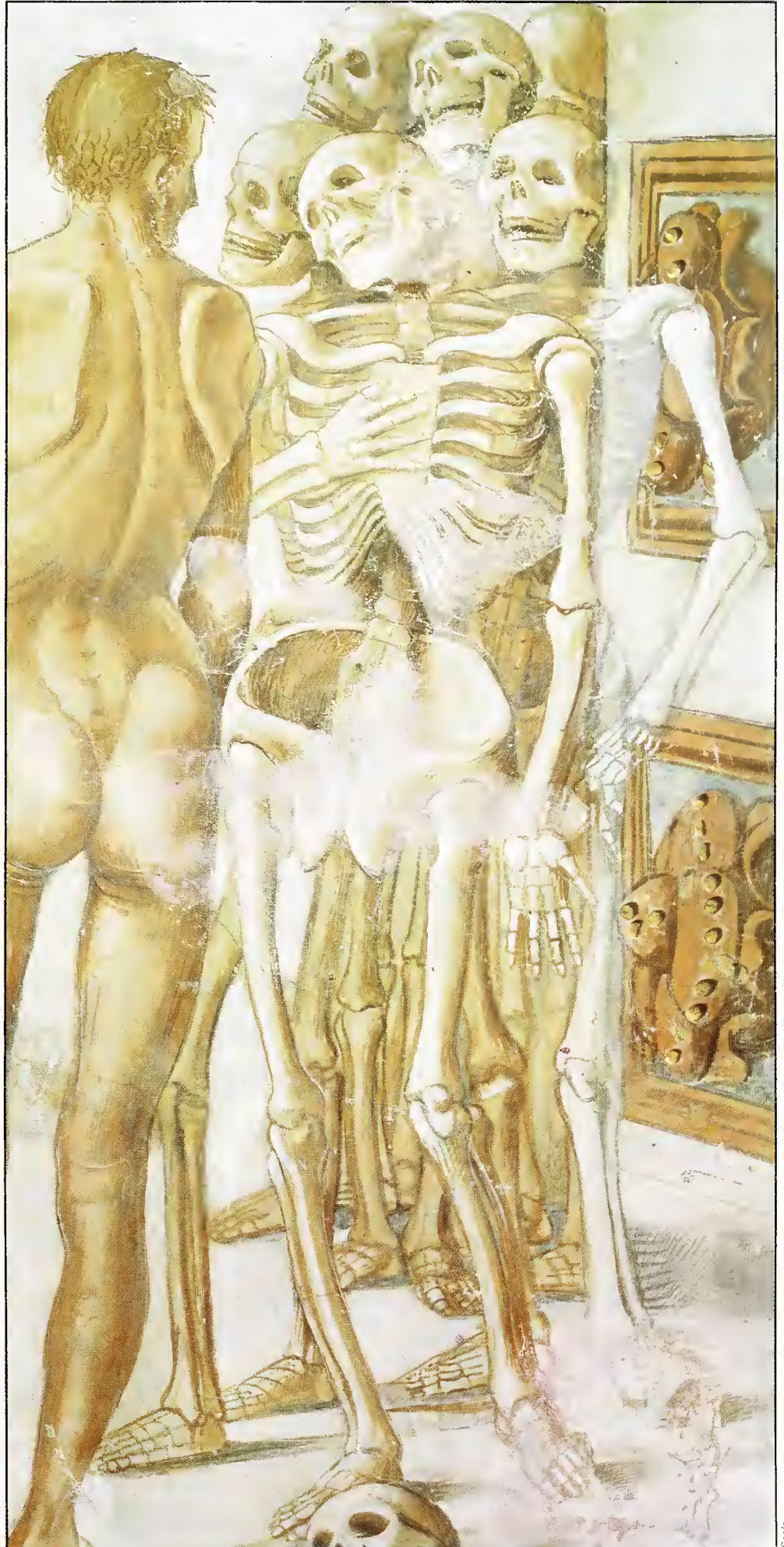
In the 1st century AD the Roman writer Tacitus noted the curious custom of the ancient Germanic tribes of suspending the heads of animals from trees in sacred groves as offerings to the god Odin (see ODIN), while other early peoples offered the skulls of animals to their gods in return for success in battle. This idea is far from extinct, for modern huntsmen continue to exhibit the skulls of slain animals as trophies. It would appear that among some peoples the skulls of animals may have had a totemic significance similar to that of human skulls. In the Indian Archipelago turtle skulls were hung up to receive the prayers of turtle fishermen, and the Ainu of Japan offered libations of millet beer to the skulls of bears impaled on sacred posts (see BEAR). Nearer home, the 16th century historian John Stow in *A Survey of London*, recorded the discovery in 1316 of a huge cache of animal skulls, 'more than a hundred scalps of oxen and kine', in the vicinity of St Paul's Cathedral; this seems to indicate the existence of some kind of animal cult in England in prehistoric times. A further discovery of 1000 ox skulls buried on Harrow Hill, a pagan site at Angmering, Sussex, supports this theory. In 1895 a number of bullock and horse skulls were found under a building in south Devon.

Similar discoveries of horses' skulls buried beneath barn floors or concealed in church buildings remain as yet something of a mystery. In Ireland horse skulls were often deposited under the corners of threshing floors, so as to make the sound of the threshing reverberate and echo; this not only announced to passers-by that threshing was in progress, but was thought to be lucky. The skulls also magnified the music which accompanied dancing at the conclusion of threshing time. Towards the close of the last century, when the Presbyterian meeting house in Bristol Street, Edinburgh, was being demolished, the skulls of eight horses were found concealed behind a sounding-board. In some churches sounding-jars, usually of earthenware, were used to produce sonorous echoes; a number of these jars were discovered at Leeds Church, near Maidstone, in 1878. The practice of using jars for this purpose seems to have displaced the earlier use of horses' skulls. The horse skull motif also occurred in a number of folk ceremonies, well-known examples being the Welsh Mari Lwyd in which the skull was carried on a pole by a cloaked performer, and the related Hodening ceremony of Kent in which a skull which had been 'long buried in the soil' was occasionally used (see HOBBY-HORSE).

The skull is the emblem of finality, the perpetual reminder of death and the transitory nature of human existence. In the form of the libation cup, it is a hint to all to drink deeply of life while we yet have it. Its eyeless sockets peer back sightlessly into our own, and within them we may read Fate's immutable decree.

ERIC MAPLE

FURTHER READING: Barbara Jones, *Design for Death* (Andre Deutsch, 1967).





SKY

The Home of the Highest

'If many of us, still, are afraid of thunderstorms but welcome the rain falling on our gardens in due season, without associating meteorological phenomena with the divine, we can perhaps understand something of the emotions of people who did'

'OUR FATHER who art in heaven' is a familiar prayer to a Supreme Being in the sky, and the Old Testament is full of passages which associate God with phenomena of the sky, with light and darkness, clouds and winds, thunder, lightning and rain. When God was angry with the world he sent a deluge of rain which lasted for 40 days, and when he made an agreement with the survivors he set the rainbow in the sky as a sign (see FLOOD; RAINBOW). When he descended

on Mount Sinai in the sight of all the people, 'there were thunders and lightnings, and a thick cloud upon the mountain', and when Moses spoke, 'God answered him in thunder' (Exodus, chapter 19). Psalm 18 describes the Lord coming down from the heavens in wrath, flying swiftly on the wings of the wind, with thick darkness under his feet and rainclouds as his canopy, thundering and flashing forth his arrows of lightning.

These passages are expressions of God's raging and overwhelming power. Elsewhere, he is not himself the tempest and the thunder, for when Elijah experienced his presence on Mount Horeb, the Lord was not in the wind which tore the mountain or in the earthquake that followed the wind or in the fire that followed the earthquake, but in

Height is associated with power and moral superiority, and so the great gods often live in the sky *Above* Psyche is received by the Greek gods on Olympus, set among the clouds: painting by Caldara da Caravaggio *Right* Lucifer and his fellows are cast down from the heights of heaven into the pit, to the accompaniment of lightning and whirlwinds: *The Fall of the Rebel Angels* by Charles le Brun

the 'still small voice' which came after the fire (1 Kings, chapter 19). God wields the weapons of the sky because the sky is his eternal home, the place from which he watches and dominates the earth. It was there that Ezekiel and the author of Revelation saw visions of God, and still today, if you asked a broad sample of people what





area of the universe they particularly associated with the Almighty, the majority would probably point to the sky.

The sky is naturally the home of the Supreme Being, or may actually be the Supreme Being, because it is above the earth. We constantly associate height with power and often with moral superiority as well. The connotations of the words lofty, exalted, uplift and sublime (from Latin *sublimis*, 'high') indicate this double significance of height. High aims are ambitious or noble or both, to rise in life is to better your status, and Highness is a title of kings.

Access to the Divine

God is the highest of all things, the Most High, and in many traditions the righteous go after death to join him in a paradise high in the sky (see PARADISE). The pharaohs of Egypt were buried with rites to enable them to join the sun god in the heavens. Romulus, the founder of Rome, was taken up into the sky by Jupiter. After Jesus had 'risen' from the tomb, he ascended into the sky: 'he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight' (Acts 1.9).

The sky god might control the weather himself or he might delegate these various functions to other deities: a lecturer in a 14th century manuscript expounds on the winds that blow from each quarter of the compass

In Christian art, saints, kings and heroes are shown being carried up into heaven. The rebel Lucifer, on the other hand, was expelled from the sky and hurled down to the earth.

Because they can fly, birds were long believed to have access to the gods in the sky and to be in touch with power and knowledge denied to earthbound creatures (see BIRDS). Mountains are linked with the divine because they reach up to the sky (see LANDSCAPE; MOUNTAIN). Superhuman beings of all sorts have been observed careering through the sky, including phantom armies, dragons, visitors from distant planets, and the Wild Hunt (see ARMIES; DRAGON; FLYING SAUCERS; WILD HUNT). The astral body in which, according to occult lore, a man can rise into a higher plane has its origin in speculation about the souls of stars (see ASTRALBODY).

There is no evidence of sky worship among the earliest of prehistoric men, but as supreme sky gods are known from most societies and as they are often more important in myth than in cult, it may be that one of the oldest and deepest of religious emotions is the sense of the immensity of the sky dominating and dwarfing the little figure of man walking on the earth. The sky contains the sun and moon, which provide heat and light, the rain which fertilizes the earth falls from the sky, the storm in which all the violence of Nature terrifyingly explodes brings the life-giving rain, and all this has affected the human view of the heavens. If many of us, still, are afraid of thunderstorms but welcome the rain falling on our gardens in due season, without associating meteorological phenomena with the divine, we can perhaps understand something of the emotions of people who did. And the fact that in changeable climates the appearance of the sky tends to affect people's feelings – bright and cheerful on a sunny day under blue skies, depressed on cloudy, overcast days – has probably contributed to the belief in dominant sky deities, as well as

The supreme sky god is the master and sovereign of all things... he is all-seeing and all-knowing, because the sky looks down upon every part of the earth

accounting for the passionate addiction to talking about the weather.

There are different sorts of sky deities and the god of storm is not always the same as the supreme power of the sky itself. The supreme sky god is the master and sovereign of all things, which he himself generally created. Usually, he is all-seeing and all-knowing, because the sky looks down upon every part of the earth, and even at night in the darkness he sees everything through his myriads of eyes, the stars. Though he lives in, or actually is, the sky, he may also be everywhere because the air is everywhere, and the air or the wind is his breath, which is also life (see BREATH).

The Father in Heaven

Because he is the supreme ruler and made everything and knows everything, the sky god is likely to be supremely responsible for law and order, both on a cosmic scale and in human terms, and he may be thought of as the Father, the heavenly parallel to the patriarchal father on earth, the author of life, the originator and upholder of rules and standards, the benevolent tyrant who loves and punishes and inspires and provides for his children. The sky's connection with law and order is strengthened when an orderly calendar is worked out by reference to events in the sky, when the stars are used as aids to navigation on sea or land, when the regular and predictable motions of the planets suggest that here in the heavens is the principle of order in an apparently chaotic universe, so much so that their movements can be used to calculate the future course of events on earth (see ASTROLOGY).

And yet the supreme sky being himself is frequently (though not always) unimportant in day to day matters. He made the world and man, he put the wheel of the seasons in motion and set the stars in their courses, but he is distant from the everyday world of humanity and does not much concern himself with it. Presumably this is a consequence of the fact that the sky really is far away and unreachable (at least until recently) and so the sky god is too.

The Andaman Islanders in the Indian Ocean, for instance, have a Supreme Being called Puluga, who lives in the sky. The wind is his breath, the thunder his voice and hurricanes his rages. He made the world

and the first man, sent a flood to drown most of humanity when they disobeyed the laws he had made for them, and when later generations were still disobedient he went away and has never been seen since. People are frightened of him and respect his laws but they do not worship him or offer him sacrifices.

Similarly, in Africa there are traces of a great sky god who has practically no cult. The Ashanti people in Ghana, for example, say that he used to live close to the earth but moved far away into the heavens. He is everywhere and sees everything, you can speak to him by talking to the wind and place offerings to him in a pot which contains his thunder axe, but he has no organized cult, no set rituals or occasions for his worship, and rituals are mainly concerned with lesser and closer gods (see ASHANTI).

In many parts of the world Sky Father appears in myths as the great male principle who fertilizes Earth Mother with his rain (see EARTH), but little attention may be paid to him in cult and ritual. The gods who are more actively worshipped may be gods of the sun or the moon, or gods who have little to do with the sky at all. The general prevalence of Supreme Beings in the sky suggested the theory that the earliest religion was monotheism, which degenerated into polytheism, but this theory has not found general acceptance. Where a High God in the sky is believed in, there are also lesser gods who rank below him but may be regarded as more accessible to men. Sun, moon, storm, weather, may be the preserve of separate deities who are the High God's children, or they may be fully the preserve of the High God himself (see HIGH GODS; RELIGION).

Lord of Lightning

One High God who thundered for himself was Zeus. He is related to Dyaus, meaning basically 'bright, shining', the name of an early Aryan sky god, which lies behind Latin *deus*, 'god' and *dies*, 'day', French *dieu* and our 'divine'. The titles of Zeus demonstrate his connection with the sky and the weather — 'cloud gatherer', 'lord of lightning', 'rainy', 'thunderer', 'he who sends favourable winds'. Altars were sometimes dedicated to him in Greek houses as Zeus Kataibates, 'who descends', a reference to lightning, and sacrifices would be offered

on the altar to prevent the house being struck by lightning. But he was, of course, much more than a weather god. He was supreme ruler, the father of gods and men, the giver of fertility and master of fate. He could be spoken of as being the sky itself: sometimes he shines brightly and sometimes he rains, and this is probably a statement of his oldest role, as the living sky whose overwhelming power dominates all things (see ZEUS).

One common function of a High God Zeus did not perform, according to Greek mythology. He was not the Creator. He wrested supreme power from his father Cronus, who had himself castrated his father, Uranus, in a myth based on the widespread idea that the sky and the earth were originally joined together and had to be separated (see CRONUS). Uranus was the Greek word for 'sky' and rain was sometimes represented as his seed, which fertilized the earth. But according to Hesiod's *Theogony* there was a sinister aspect to his virility, for the children he begot on the Earth included dangerous monsters, and Uranus hated his children and imprisoned them in the earth. He had no place in Greek worship: 'Zeus was the original Father Sky and consort of Mother Earth, and he remained the real Greek sky god' (see URANUS).

Bull of the World

Zeus's Roman equivalent, Jupiter (see JUPITER), was again a personification of the sky, father of gods and men, inspirer of Rome's greatness and guardian of law, armed with thunder and lightning, and sender of rain. 'Lo, through the clouds the father of the gods scatters red lightnings,' says Ovid's *Fasti*, 'then clears the sky after the torrent rain.' His temple on the Capitoline Hill in Rome was open to the sky, and thunder, lightning and the flight of birds could be interpreted as signs of his will (see AUGURY).

Dyaus Pitar, Zeus Pater, Jupiter, all mean Sky Father. Dyaus was a remote sky god by the time the Aryans reached India and was the father of nearer and more active deities, several of whom were connected with the sky (see INDIA). Indra was lord of the atmosphere between the earth and the far heavens, of weather and war. In early myths he wages successful campaigns against demons, who presumably represent the



Left Roman statuette of the 2nd to 4th century AD, showing the god Zeus or Jupiter holding a thunderbolt: the supreme god of Greek and Roman religion was the power of the living sky **Above** In Canaan the most active deity was Baal, 'the cloud-mounter, god of storm and rain': stele from Ras Shamra dated 1900-1750 BC **Right** In this beautifully colourful Persian illustration, the sky is depicted thronged with angels

native inhabitants who were defeated by the Aryan invaders. He was golden or red in colour and rode in a golden chariot drawn by tawny horses. The thunderbolt was his weapon, the rainbow his bow, and he wielded a great hook to trip and slaughter his enemies and a net of illusions to snare them in.

The heroic god of warrior chieftains (the poetic analogy between war and storm is obvious), Indra had superb and terrifying vitality. He lashed the world with tempests, he burst the clouds open to pour down the rain, he made the blood circulate and the sap. He had a thousand testicles, he was 'master of the fields', 'master of the plough', 'bull of the world', the god who made land and beasts and women fruitful, not

himself the Creator but the virile promoter of life.

Another Aryan god, Varuna (the name means 'sky' and seems to be basically the same as Uranus), also had storm and weather attributes. The wind was his breath, he growled in the thunder, darkened the clouds and made the sky rain. But he was more important as the all-seeing, all-knowing sky. He had a thousand eyes, which were the stars, and he knew all acts and motives and secrets. He was responsible for the law and order of the universe, for the passage of the seasons and the moral code of men. Mircea Eliade comments that Varuna 'does not take to himself any rights, conquers nothing, does not struggle to win anything (as does Indra for instance); he *is* powerful,

he *is* sovereign, while remaining a contemplative . . . power is his by right because of his very nature . . . the tendency to passivity is shown by all the supreme sky gods who live in the higher spheres, far from man and more or less indifferent to his daily needs.'

The Storming of Ur

In Egypt the sky itself was female, an exception to the general rule, but the principal sky deity was Horus, 'he who is on high' or 'the distant one', who was a falcon, 'the most fierce and terrifying of all the birds of prey which scoured the Egyptian sky'. Each of the pharaohs was identified with him as supreme ruler, and he was assimilated to another dominating power in the



William MacGurty



sky, the god of the sun (see CREATION MYTHS; EGYPT; HORUS).

In Mesopotamia the god An or Anum ('sky') was the oldest of gods, the supreme father and king, the ultimate source of all existence, but in practice the divine power of the sky was more often exercised by the god of the atmosphere, Enlil, 'Lord Wind'. When the city of Ur was taken and sacked by invaders from Elam, to the east, the attack was described as an appalling storm, mounted by Enlil. The god summoned evil winds, he called the hurricane of heaven howling across the skies, the shattering storm, the relentless tempest which covered Ur like a cloth and wrecked the city. The attackers 'stormed' the walls, as we would say, but here not just as a vivid metaphor but in the sense that they embodied the terrible violence of the god.

There were also other powerful gods of the sky – the sun god, the moon god, the lady of heaven (Ishtar), and the weather god, Adad. Several of these deities were connected with the bull, an animal frequently linked with gods of sky and storm because of its dominance, its virility and fierceness, and its bellowing voice, like the thunder or the roaring of the wind (see ANIMALS; BULL; MESOPOTAMIA).

Powerful sky gods are also found among many other ancient peoples, including the Germans and Scandinavians, and the Hittites (see GERMANIC MYTHOLOGY; HITTITES). In Canaan the supreme god El remained in the background and the most active deity was Baal, the cloud-mounter,

god of storm and rain. The bull was his cult animal and he wore the horns of a bull on his helmet. His weapons were thunder and lightning. Unlike most gods of sky and storm, he died and rose again, being both the fall of rain and the growth of vegetation (see BAAL).

St Swithin and Umbrellas

In religion the sky gods range from supreme but passive deities through supreme and highly active ones to gods with more specialized sky functions. In folklore and superstition it is naturally not so much the all-powerful and all-knowing sky that occupies attention as the more immediate phenomena of thunder, lightning and rain.

Church bells are still sometimes rung in parts of Europe during thunderstorms and hailstorms to shield crops from damage (see BELLS). Red coral, houseleek, St John's wort, hawthorn, mistletoe, sprigs of holly, and small branches of hazel gathered on Palm Sunday are all supposed to protect houses against lightning. When out of doors, you can protect yourself by wearing rosemary or mugwort (which will also ward off sunstroke and the malevolence of witches), or by carrying a nettle. Some people still cover mirrors and hide away all metal objects during a thunderstorm, and some say that the doors and windows should all be opened, so that if the thunder does get into the house, it can swiftly get out again.

The oak is generally considered the most protective tree against lightning (see OAK), which is probably a paradoxical result of

Above Zeus, Sky Father and supreme god, was the lover of many mortal women; to approach Danae, who had been imprisoned by her father, he took the form of a shower of gold – a possible reference to the sky as the source of fertilizing rain: *Danae and the Shower of Gold* by Titian *Below right* A cartoon by George Cruikshank, 'St Swithin's Chapel', pokes fun at the fashion for carrying umbrellas: this modern defence against the rain soon attracted a variety of superstitions

the fact that oaks are peculiarly prone to being struck and so became sacred to Zeus, Jupiter and other gods of thunder and lightning, since anything struck by a bolt of lightning becomes a container of something of the god's force. All ferns are associated with thunderstorms and bracken is sometimes called Oak-fern. The marks on a stem of bracken that is cut across close to its root were thought to represent an oak tree, or alternatively an eagle, which is also sacred to sky gods (see EAGLE). There is an old belief that cutting or burning ferns will bring rain, and in 1636 when Charles I was going on a visit to Staffordshire, a letter was sent ahead of him asking the High Sheriff of the county to see that no fern was burnt during the royal visit, to make sure of fine weather.

If it rains during a funeral, this is a good omen for the dead person's soul. 'Happy is the bride that the sun shines on, happy is the corpse that the rain rains on', presumably because the sky is in harmony with the spirit of the proceedings.

'Happy is the bride that the sun shines on, happy is the corpse that the rain rains on', presumably because the sky is in harmony with the spirit of the proceedings

On the other hand, if a ray of sunshine lights up the face of somebody attending a funeral, he will be the next to die.

There is an old tradition that if it rains on St Swithin's day, 15 July, it will go on raining for 40 days afterwards, but if the weather is fine that day, there will be no rain for 40 days. St Swithin (or Swithun) was Bishop of Winchester in the 9th century and according to legend humbly asked to be buried in some vile and unworthy place. Years afterwards the monks of Winchester decided to dig him up and give him a more honourable resting place but they were prevented from beginning work, on 15 July, by torrential rain which fell for 40 days and 40 nights (as in the Flood story in the Bible).

'Rain, rain, go away, come again another

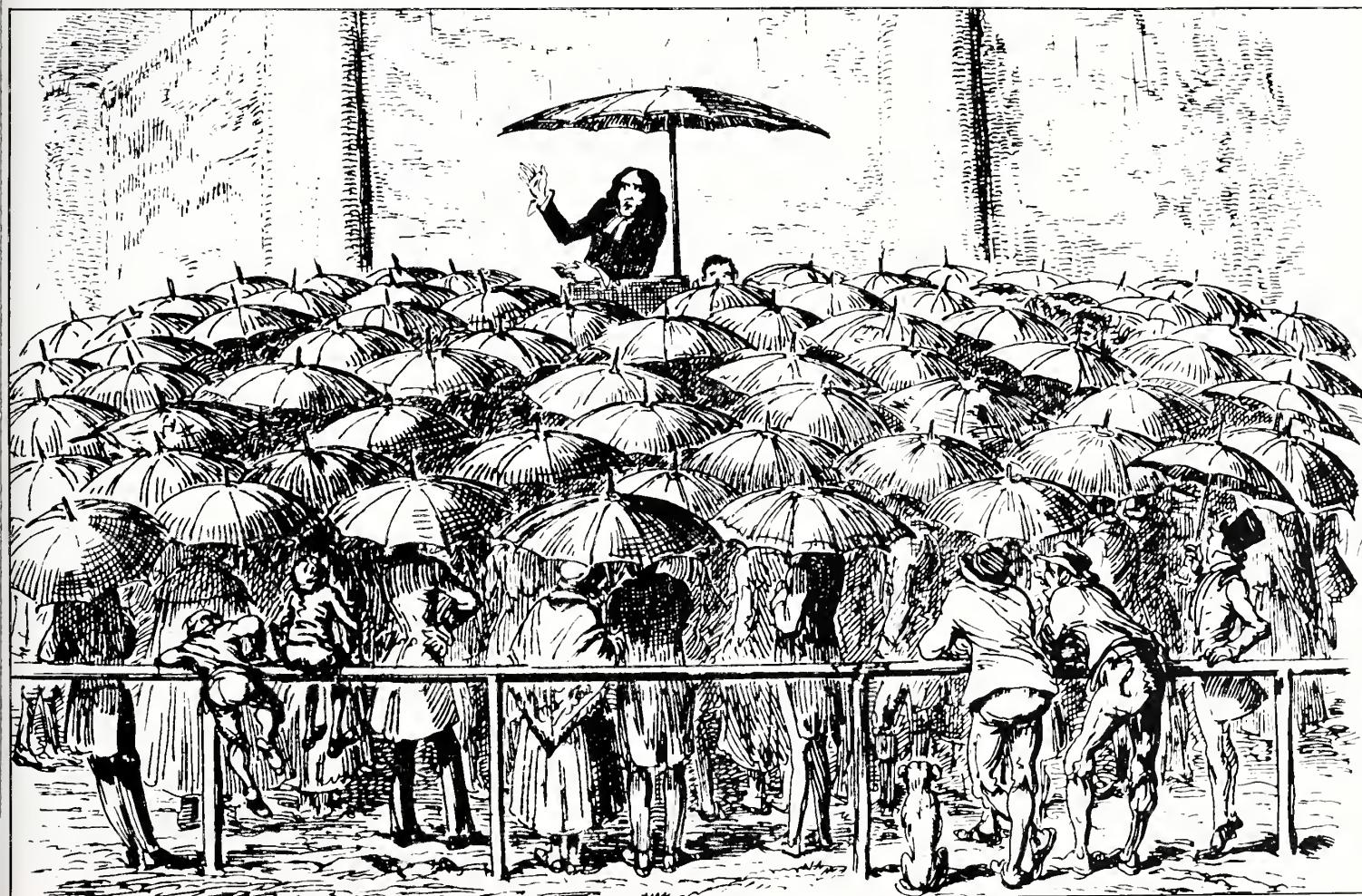
day' and 'Rain, rain, go to Spain' are rain-repellent charms, still chanted by children. Even the modern adult's practical defence against rain, the umbrella, has attracted superstitions to itself. Through an obvious association of ideas, to open an umbrella in fine weather will cause rain, and to open one indoors at any time will bring bad luck. It is also unlucky to give anyone an umbrella, and if you drop one, you should never pick it up yourself but let somebody else pick it up for you. In the *Encyclopaedia of Superstitions* Christina Hole remarks that 'although these beliefs are themselves trifling, it is interesting that they should exist at all in Britain, in view of the late appearance of the umbrella there.' Long known in the East as an emblem of

majesty held over the heads of kings on ceremonial occasions, presumably as a symbol of the sky, the umbrella was apparently used by a few women in England in the 17th century but was not adopted by men till the late 18th. A man named James Hanway appeared with one in London in 1778 and was jeered and hooted at in the streets.

(See also AURORA; AUSTRALIA; HAMMER; LIGHT; METEORS; MOON; STARS; STEPS AND LADDERS; SUN; WEATHER MAGIC.)

RICHARD CAVENDISH

FURTHER READING: G. Wainwright, *Sky-Religion in Egypt* (Greenwood, 1971, c1938); R. Williamson, *Living the Sky; The Cosmos of the American Indian* (Houghton Mifflin, 1984).



Long after conversion to Christianity, the Slavs continued to worship the old gods of sun, fire, water, woods and fields

SLAVS

THE EVIDENCE relating to the existence of Slavonic tribes does not go much beyond the 1st and 2nd centuries AD, though there is a tendency among the Russian chroniclers of later centuries to push their ancestry back as far as possible. References to the Slavs in the 6th and 7th centuries speak of them mainly as living near the estuary and central part of the River Danube. The period of their expansion covers the time of the decline of the Byzantine Empire between the advance of Attila in the 5th century and that of Genghiz Khan in the 13th century.

Geographically, the Slavonic tribes came to be divided into southern, eastern and western Slavs. All three groups are now distinguished by different dialects and their own folklore but, as far as is known, the mythology was similar among all Slavs. Documentary information about the customs, religion and myths of the ancient Slavs has come down to us almost exclusively through their neighbours.

More valuable is the archeological evidence and that of the existing folklore, such as the customs connected with the seasons, as well as Church records that deal with those pagan practices that have passed into Christian ritual. Folklore, songs, sayings, epics, sculpture, dances and games provide material that yields much reliable information. Slavonic folklore is abundantly rich and survived well into the 20th century: in Russia major changes in the way of life occurred only with the Revolution.

All-Pervading Life Force

The pagan Slav felt himself to be part of Nature and his feelings for it were of a religious kind – he worshipped all its manifestations. From these very close ties his gods were created and can be seen to be personifications of the life he experienced around him. He worshipped individual aspects of Nature, from an oak tree to a large stone, a swamp or a ravine. And everything was endowed in equal measure with an all-pervading life force with which he felt affinity.

From this intimate connection with Nature arose the knowledge of how to make use of its gifts and powers, such as were latent in springs and herbs, for example. The pagan Slav personified those powerful manifestations of Nature on which he felt most dependent and these personifications entered the upper ranks of his mythology as gods. He also believed that each domain of Nature was inhabited by all kinds of spirits and demons. Whereas the ancient gods came to be forgotten soon after Russia became converted to Christianity, this lower order of beings survived in popular belief, magical practices and folk customs, many of which merged with Christian folk tradition.

Although many names of Slavonic gods and spirits have come down to us, in many cases their individual functions are not clear. Often it is not even known whether,

perhaps, they originated in another people's mythology, or where exactly they were worshipped. The attempt has been made to establish their geographical distribution through an etymological analysis of place-names. As there is no written evidence of the gods of the Poles, Czechs, Serbians or Bulgarians, the information available covers mainly the areas of the eastern Slavs and the Baltic or western Slavs.

Opinions are divided as to whether a basic dualism underlies the Slavs' mythological concepts. According to the 12th-century chronicler Helmold, whose evidence is confirmed by recent Russian research, the Elbe Slavs used to offer prayers to the divinity of good and evil; these were personified in Chernobog and Byelbog, gods of darkness and light.

Chernobog was regarded as very powerful, being the cause of all calamities, and prayers were offered to him at banquets to avert misfortune. 'The Slavs have a remarkable superstition, for on the occasion of banquets and festivities they carry about a round vessel over which they speak words which are not a blessing but rather a curse, which they utter in the name of the gods of good and evil, for from the good god they expect good fortune, but from the evil god misfortune.' No other specific evidence concerning these two divinities has been preserved.

Helmold testifies further that in spite of a fundamental dualism, the Slavs worshipped one god, ruler of all the other divine powers to whom they used to attribute parts of Nature, as fields or forests, as well as the human emotions of sorrow and joy. This god, he says, cared only for things celestial, whereas the rest, who sprang from his blood, obeyed the duties assigned to them, enjoying distinction in proportion to their nearness to the chief god. The name of this Supreme Being is not known.

The names of a number of gods and spirits that were worshipped at one time have been established with some degree of certainty. The sites of some of the statues of the principal east Slavonic gods were the hill before the palace in Kiev and by the River Volkhov in Novgorod. According to manuscripts dating from the 12th to the 16th century, these statues represented the gods Perun, Khors, Volos and Dazhbog.

Perun's statue was erected by Vladimir, who later became the first Russian prince to accept Christianity. The idol is described as having been made of wood, with a silver head and a golden beard. Vladimir's uncle Dobrynya, a celebrated semi-legendary hero of many historical songs, was responsible for setting up a similar image of Perun in Novgorod.

As no remains of temples dedicated to their gods have been found among the eastern Slavs, it is assumed that they used to erect their statues in the open. We are told that they were commonly placed on hills, facing east and the direction of water, a nearby river or lake.

When Prince Vladimir received baptism in 988 AD, he ordered all idols in Kiev to be destroyed. The statues of Perun in Kiev and Novgorod were dragged down to the river.

The Novgorod idol was tied with ropes, pulled through the mire down to the river, where it was beaten with rods so as to cast out the demons that were thought to inhabit it. Perun appears to have been perhaps the most important east Slavonic god, being a solar deity, a god of lightning and of fire. His worship was widespread among the Slavs, judging by the many place-names in Slovenia, Bohemia, Bulgaria and Poland which are connected with his name. Worship of this god disappeared in about the 11th century. In the Christian era his worship was transferred to St Ilya. Nestor, the medieval Russian chronicler, tells that when Prince Igor was about to conclude a treaty with the Byzantines, the Christian Russians took oath in the church of St Ilya, while the pagans swore to Perun.

Gods of Sun and Fire

Dazhbog's statue also stood on the hill in the courtyard of the castle at Kiev. In old manuscripts this god is referred to as 'Tsar Sun'. According to the 12th-century Russian prose epic *Slovo o polku Igoreve*, Vladimir and the Russians call themselves the grandchildren of Dazhbog; however, it is a common tendency of all people to explain their origins as having links with divine beings. Dazhbog also seems to have been known among the southern Slavs. A Serbian fairy tale relates that 'Dabog, the Tsar, was on earth and the Lord God was in heaven.' Dazhbog is here contrasted with God and is regarded as an evil being, for in early Christian times the memory of the previous pagan gods was linked with the Christian concept of evil and its personification, the Devil or Satanael. Dazhbog, who probably took over the role of sun god from Perun, played a significant part until long after Christianization because of his connection with fire and the Slavs' worship of the hearth as a sacred place in the house.

The Christian clergy fought a long and difficult battle against this worship of fire. In a sermon we read: even 'priests do not scorn the company of the idol-worshippers, they eat and drink with them... they pray to the fire which they call Svarozhich' (another name of Dazhbog). As Christianity was introduced to the Slavs by their rulers, the common folk clung to their pagan beliefs for a long time, but gradually the old gods of the sun and the fire were replaced by Christian angels and saints.

The worship of fire and the hearth dates back to the days of nomads and hunters of Paleolithic times, to whom the fireplace and the spirit of the ancestors which lived in it was the central point of their religious worship (see FIRE; HEARTH). The names Ovinnik, Yarilo and Kupala, which were later used in folk ritual in connection with the worship of fire, stand for basically the same idea, since all are part of the customs of the sacred fire and its purifying power. Fire worship was often condemned by the Church, as in a 12th-century sermon by the Bishop of Turov,

Slav mythology abounds with stories of heroes and their legendary feats; Ilya-Muromyets tries to release Svyatogor from the coffin in which he has shut himself. Drawing by I. Bilbina



A. G.
1928



Left Volkh, a mythical being of Slav mythology, depicted as a hawk. He had the ability to assume a number of forms, such as a grey wolf or a tiny ant, and was renowned for his sorcery. **Below right** Baltic Slavs pay homage to an image of the god Svetovit; he was famous for his prophecies, especially those to do with the success or failure of the harvest. Drawings by I. Bilibine

would tie the last handful of ears into a knot, which used to be called 'plaiting the beard of Veles'; in some districts a piece of bread was put among the ears. Veles was also known among the ancient Bohemians. Later his worship came to be transferred to St Blaise, a shepherd and martyr of Caesarea in Cappadocia whom the Byzantines called the guardian of flocks.

The Human Sun

Some Church records give an interesting indication of the Slavs' worship of the heavenly bodies. A sermon of John Chrysostom admonishes those who worship the sun, the moon and the stars to repent of their sins. Similarly, in a sermon, Cyril of Turov regrets that even now, in the 12th century, the Devil tempts people to believe in God's creatures, in the sun, the moon and the stars. In his 'Hymn of the Mother of God' he says: 'They have forgotten God and believe in the creatures that God has given us for work, and so they have called everything gods.' The questions asked by the priest during confession are also revealing: 'Have you perhaps worshipped animals, the sun, the stars, the moon, dawn and dusk? Or have you worshipped God's creatures . . . the sun, moon and stars, giving them the name of God, and the sun, the moon and the stars and the planets of the zodiac, looking at them, did you believe in them?'

In proverbs, songs and legends the sun has a human body, rises like a human in the morning and shows human emotions like happiness and sorrow. The setting sun is visualized as an old man with a golden head and a silver beard. The sun's sister is the *deva-zorya* or *solntseva sestritsa* which is dawn and dusk. The conviction was widespread that stars and humans are closely related, that there are as many stars as there are people, and that the luminaries of the night are the abode of the souls of the departed.

Various chroniclers give colourful accounts of the temples and idols of the western Slavs, who appear to have reached a considerably high cultural level, with a well-organized priestly caste and a definite ritual. The best known centre of worship was Arkona, on the island of Rügen in the Baltic Sea. The 12th century Danish historian Saxo Grammaticus reports of the image of the god Svantovit (or Svetovit) that it had four heads and necks, two facing the front and two behind. The faces of this image were clean-shaven and the hair cut short, as was the custom of the people of Rügen. In his right hand the idol held a horn, made of various metals and in his left he had a bow. He wore a tunic of wood reaching to the knees.

Svetovit was famous for his victories and

Cyril, who wrote: 'We do not worship fire. Now neither the forces of Nature, nor the sun, nor the fire . . . are called by the name of God . . . for idol-worship has come to an end and the devilish violence has been overcome by the sacrament of the cross.'

Many magical rites stemmed from belief in the capacity of fire to cleanse and heal. Until the 20th century, for example, Russian peasants believed that the most effective means of healing and protecting was the so-called 'new fire', which was obtained by rubbing together two pieces of dry wood. In the event of an epidemic, frightened superstitious villagers would put out all fires in their houses and then, after having said special prayers, would go out together to fetch this 'new fire'

for their homes. The holy fire became part of Christian belief. It would be brought home from church on particular feast days, especially at Easter, and was regarded as a protection against unclean powers. On the whole, Christianity succeeded in banishing the old gods from the consciousness of the Slavonic tribes, but it did not succeed in suppressing the religious customs connected with them; these customs remained closely connected with Nature and the seasons.

Another major Slavonic deity was Volos or Veles, the god who protected cattle. What appear to be remnants of the worship of this god were still to be found until recently as part of the harvest festival customs in southern Russia. The peasants

prophecies. Divining the success or failure of the crop of the following year was also connected with this god. After each harvest a great festival was held in his honour and people assembled from all parts of the island to sacrifice cattle and join in the rites. The king was held in very moderate esteem compared with Svetovit's priest. His temple was of wood and extravagantly adorned, for neighbouring tribes and nations sent abundant tribute to his sanctuary. The god had a magnificent sword and horse which were sacred to him; this horse could be ridden and tended only by the priest. Svetovit had 300 men-at-arms and horses attached to him and always received one third of their spoil. The priest of the image, so we are told, on the day before the celebration of the god's power, carefully cleaned out the sanctuary with a broom; this sanctuary no one was allowed to enter. He was careful not to breathe in the building and, as often as he was forced to inhale or exhale, he would run to the door, lest he should contaminate the presence of the god with the pollution of his mortal breath. In 1169 the Danish king Valdemar seized the treasures of the temple in Arkona, ordered the destruction of the sanctuary and then had the idol smashed to pieces and burnt. The name of this god suggests that he was probably a personification of the power of light.

Among the Elbe or western Slavs Svarozhich is said to have been a war god. His temple stood in Radegast, near Leipzig. The idol wore a helmet resembling a bird with

outstretched wings and on its breast was the head of a black bison. The idol's right hand rested on this symbol, while the left grasped a double-edged axe. The temple was much visited by all Slavonic tribes to make use of the prophetic powers of this god, to whom human sacrifice was made. According to the records, in honour of a victory won in 1066, the head of John, Bishop of Mecklenburg, who had been captured in battle was offered to this divinity.

Tribute of a Bishop's Head

Apart from the sanctuary of Svarozhich there were other places of worship both in Radegast and in Stettin, near the mouth of the River Oder. Thietmar, Bishop of Merseburg, describes the town of Radegast with its three gates as being surrounded on all sides by sacred woods. The temple of Svarozhich, however, also contained the images of other gods and goddesses in armour. In time of war incantations and spells were used to induce a propitious sign from the gods. A sacred horse was used for divination, as in the ritual connected with Svetovit. Thietmar speaks of many temples and single images in these parts. Apparently, human sacrifice was common to appease the wrath of the gods.

Helmold mentions four temples in Stettin, all of which were devoted to the god Triglav. His three heads denote the three kingdoms: the heavens, the earth and the underworld. The image was made of gold and his eyes and lips were covered with a veil, that he might not see the sins of

men. A black horse, used for divination, was sacred to him. The god's statue stood in a temple whose outer and inner walls are described as having such beautifully embossed figures of men, animals and birds that they seemed to live and breathe. All the temples in Stettin were full of valuables. Triglav's statue was broken by Otto, Bishop of Bamberg, and its head was sent to the pope. All pagan temples in the town were burnt to the ground, and churches in honour of St Peter and St Ethelbert were built on the hill that once had been sacred to Triglav.

Worship was also given by the Pomeranians of northern Poland to Gerovit (Herovit), another war god, in whose sanctuary hung an enormous shield, skilfully wrought and adorned with gold. It was carried before the army and was believed to ensure victory. Other colossal many-headed idols were those of Rugievit, with seven faces and seven swords hanging from his belt, and of Porevit and Porenutius, whose idol had four faces and a fifth one in his breast. It is assumed that all these gods were different versions of Svetovit.

The Pregnant Earth

The southern Slavs or Bulgarians accepted Christianity in the middle of the 9th century from Byzantium. About a hundred years later began the conversion of the eastern Slavs, followed by that of the Czechs. Other west Slavonic tribes became Christian much later; the Elbe Slavs, who today are extinct except for the Upper and Lower Lusatians, who occupy an area in East Germany



between Dresden and the Polish and Czech frontiers, were converted in the 12th century. For some time the old and the new faiths existed side by side, as is evident from references in many sermons and chronicles. In a 12th century work, *Slovo o khristolubtsa*, the author complains that there are many Christians who still believe in the old gods, making sacrifices to them and practising the old rites. Yet the early Slavonic chroniclers seemed to know very little of the old gods, and often remembered even their names wrongly. This ignorance is also reflected in the sermons of many of those preachers of the Christian faith who were concerned with propagating the new religion, and from the 16th century onwards the pagan Slavonic gods are only very occasionally referred to in the chronicles.

Finnish tribes who used to inhabit the region which is eastern Russia today influenced the beliefs of the Slavs to a great extent. The Finns worshipped the forces and manifestations of Nature (see FINLAND) and it appears that until about the 13th century the folk beliefs of the eastern and southern Slavs were largely identical, and pagan customs were retained for a considerable time. Such survivals are particularly to be found in north Russia which was far less accessible to Christianity, partly for geographical and climatic reasons.

The Slavs worshipped the earth, calling it 'Holy Mother Earth'. This reverence for the earth is also apparent in many agricultural customs and popular beliefs. In Russian villages, if the children were seen to strike the ground with a stick in the course of a game, older people would often stop and tell them, 'It is a sin to beat the earth, for she is our mother.' In White Russia (Byelorussia) the peasants believed that to injure the earth in any way in spring until about 25 March was a sin, as she was considered pregnant at this time. Since the earth was thought to be a pure element, the belief arose that she would not receive back into her womb the bodies of sinners, black magicians or suicides.

Water was an element in whose cleansing powers the Slavs believed deeply. It was thought to be neutral and could therefore carry positive and negative qualities. Because of its capacity to reflect, to mirror, water was used for divination and for healing magic generally. A custom which survived until the turn of the 19th century was to wash one's face three times in the first spring rain for beauty and good fortune, and to preserve this water for the whole of the year. The Slavs had holy springs and sacred lakes. This ancient cult of water is also linked with the belief in water spirits such as the Vodyanoy and Rusalki among various others.

Cult of the Dead

The Slav felt himself to be surrounded by spirits and demons who were mainly ancestral spirits, either helping or harming their descendants. Often they had no distinct features but might be recognized by general characteristics, such as a particular type of behaviour, a certain smell, or

by leaving traces of their appearance. The memory of the ancestral spirit was honoured in a cult which was widespread among all Slavs, and which was linked with that of the domestic spirits and with animal worship. Ideas that are linked to ancestor worship have been handed down in proverbs and funeral laments, and in many folktales. Archeological material suggests that the Slavs believed that the soul had the same needs in the otherworld as on earth. The dead were therefore buried with food, clothes and household utensils. When they felt death approaching, old men used to go out in the fields and take leave of the earth and the light. A coffin would be made from a single tree trunk, with a little window cut into it; this was known as *domovina* (house, or boat). The funeral meal with the various offerings and the laments formed a substantial and obligatory part of the cult of the dead. The soul was believed to enter other people, birds or other winged creatures, or to become a spirit whose presence would be experienced by his next of kin; in this way the domestic spirits were the ancestral spirits who protected the family and their home and property; they were called Ovinnik or Domovoy.

The animal cult, such as the worship of the bear and deer, for instance, was closely linked with ancestor worship. In folktales the bear often figures as the protector and guide of man in the form of *Tsar-medved* (Tsar bear). The cock, as a bird that was at one time sacred to the sun and to fire, enjoyed particular respect among the Slavs. It was thought to banish evil spirits; it indicated the time of day by crowing, and predicted the weather. In an anonymous episcopal sermon for clergy and laymen alike, Christians are threatened with excommunication for several years who believe in 'bird song and who predict the future with bird omens'. A 16th century Russian book of rules and admonitions for the successful regulation of a household prohibits the belief in *rodoslovie* (genealogy) and in the forces of destiny, the *rozhanitsy*, that were believed to protect their descendants. Genii of fate would appear, according to a popular belief, at various crucial periods in life; at birth, for instance, three female spirits were thought to appear. Each of them would speak in turn of the fate of the newborn child. Bread, salt and wine were put next to the mother-to-be as a welcome for the *rozhanitsy*. Annual festivals, commemorating the dead, took the form of solemn banquets in which the ancestors were invited to take part. These old sacrificial customs were maintained long after the coming of Christianity.

The woods, waters and fields were the domains of Nature which belonged to various different spirits. The waters were the realm of the Vodyanoy, who was thought to live in deep rivers, lakes and brooks. He could transform himself in many ways and had nymphs as his wives and daughters. At night he would come to the surface of the water; when he appeared he could often be troublesome, but could be appeased by offerings. The Rusalki were water creatures who were believed to be women who had died

a violent death; the Slavs visualized them as beautiful girls with long hair. At night, during the new moon, they would dance in forest clearings, luring the lonely wanderer. He who came into their power was doomed unless he could solve the riddle which they put to him. The Navy, also spirits like the Rusalki, were thought to be the souls of children who were killed or who had died in infancy. Sometimes at night they would appear in the shape of birds and give a shrill cry. The Serbians and Croats thought of them as big birds with the heads of children.

Dwarfs and Vampires

It was the task of the Leshy to guard the woods and to take care of all the animals and birds in them. He was thought to have green eyes that burnt like coals, his hair and beard were white and long; he was portrayed as an old man in white robes and a greenish-white hat; sometimes he would wear a crown. There were also a great variety and number of dwarfs, wild women, field spirits, 'mid-day women', and nightmares and vampires, all of which had a particular time when they appeared, often harming those who met them, playing tricks on people working in the fields, luring away little children or giving people hallucinations. These spirits had to be rendered harmless; countless magical practices existed for controlling their influence.

The belief in the supernatural and its manifestations in good and evil spirits was closely linked with the multiform magical practices and their exponents the Kolduny, Znakhary and Ved'my. The Christian clergy preached incessantly against the old gods and spirits and made the magical rites out to be 'devilish games'. But the belief of the Slavs in their traditional rites and customs was not to be uprooted easily. Instead of seeking advice from their local priest, the common folk turned to their wise men, their magicians and witches, who all had a well-tryed remedy for anything from nightmares to toothache. They specialized in predictions, and would cast spells and cure with herbs and potions which only they knew how to apply. These exponents of traditional wisdom were both feared and hated as well as deeply trusted and revered. Almost every village had its own wise man and black magician who had often more power over the lives of the people, largely based on fear and superstition, than the Church ever succeeded in obtaining. But in due course the Church too produced its holy men, the 'Men of God', 'Elders' and 'Fools in Christ' who were believed to be endowed with supernatural powers. In the course of time, what was left of the former pagan beliefs and customs become emptied of their original religious content and survived as traditional customs that often merged with the Christian ones; they became incorporated into folk beliefs, children's games and legends.

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Many Evans Picture Library

The connection between 'Death, and his brother, Sleep', occurs both in magical practice and also in legends of bygone heroes, who are not truly dead but lying in a death-like trance, ready to rise up in time of national danger

SLEEPERS

A CURIOUS ACCOUNT of an attempted robbery in County Meath appeared in the *Observer* of 16 January 1831. A group of thieves, who had entered a house without any attempt at concealing themselves, were discovered by the household and fled. The men supposed, wrongly, that a magic charm they had brought with them would act as a

protection by casting a spell over the occupants. The charm, well known in Europe centuries ago, was called the Hand of Glory: that is, a hand cut from the body of a man who had been hanged. Dried and pickled, it was used as a holder for a candle made from the fat of a hanged man, or sometimes the fingers themselves were set on fire. When this charm was carried into a house and set alight, everyone inside would fall into deep sleep from which they would only wake if milk was used to extinguish it (see HAND OF GLORY).

Sleep and death are obviously closely linked here and the logic behind the charm may have been that, just as the dead sleep in their graves, so portions of a dead body may be used to induce a similar

condition. The Hand of Glory was specifically a European charm but related objects have been used both in Europe and in other parts of the world, again chiefly by burglars, to induce a similar condition. Among the southern Slavs the thief threw a human bone over the roof, saying: 'As this bone will be waken, so may these people waken', the significance of the spell lying of course in the fact that a bone remains as it is, an immutable object. In Java the thief strewed earth from a grave right round the house. Hindus

Rip van Winkle, a Dutch colonist, meets a strange band in the Catskill Mountains, tastes their liquor and falls asleep for 20 years, in an American version of a widespread folktale: illustration by Arthur Rackham

Sleepers

placed ashes from a funeral pyre in front of the door, and Peruvian Indians also used charred human remains. The left arm stolen from the corpse of a woman who had died in her first childbirth was used by Mexican Indians. With this they struck the ground in front of the house to be burgled. In Indonesia, when a young man wanted to visit his girl friend at night, he threw soil taken from a grave over her parents' room. This was to prevent them from waking and disturbing the young couple. All these charms served the same purpose: to throw the householder and his family into a trance.

Methods for inducing magic sleep make an interesting comparison, and in some cases they are perhaps suggestive of a rudimentary knowledge of hypnosis. Combing the hair is one method occurring in certain fairy tales. Another is the sung or chanted verse, sometimes so reminiscent of a lullaby or sleep charm that one might assume this to be its origin.

A tale from Bengal, 'The Story of the Rakshasas', describes how a beautiful girl is placed in a death-like trance by means of a silver stick, and revived with a gold one. Slumber is produced by a spindle in the well-known story of 'The Sleeping Beauty', the princess who lies in enchanted sleep for 100 years until a prince arrives and revives her with a kiss. Opera-goers are familiar with Richard Wagner's treatment of Germanic legend in *The Ring of the Nibelungs*: Wotan lays Brunhild down on the mountain and causes a magic fire to blaze around her. Only a hero brave enough to

pass through the flames can rouse her from this charmed slumber. Eventually it is Siegfried who awakens her with a kiss.

The converse of this idea occurs in the widespread legend of sleeping heroes, such as Sir Francis Drake in Henry Newbolt's poem *Drake's Drum*:

Drake he's in his hammock till the great
Armadas come
(Capten, art tha sleepin' there below?),
Slung atween the round shot, listenin'
for the drum,
An' dreamin' arl the time o' Plymouth Hoe.
Call him on the deep sea, call him up the
sound,
Call him when ye sail to meet the foe.
Where the old trades plyin' an' the old flag
flyin'
They shall find him ware an' wakin', as they
found him long ago!

Inevitably human psychology plays its part. Popular leaders are not readily forgotten by the people from whom they sprang. They live on in the memory of the folk; and in times of peril and national emergency it is good to feel that they are there, waiting to be called upon. This expresses partly that basic human unwillingness to face up to unpleasant facts, and partly that dependency upon another greater than oneself, represented in its simplest form by the child who wants his parents to live for ever, and never die. The hero fulfils such a need. Bridging the gap between deity and man, he represents an image of transition, the pre-Christian version of a saint.

According to many accounts, King Arthur (see ARTHUR) is not dead but living, sunk in magic sleep and waiting to be roused. One of the best known is from Yorkshire, where Arthur and his host are believed to sleep beneath the ruins of Richmond Castle. Once, so it is said, a man called Potter Thompson was taken to an underground vault where they all slumbered. He was told to unsheath a sword and blow a horn, but though he tried to do so, he grew tired before the task was completed; the sleeping figures had begun to stir. As he left, a voice cried:

Potter Thompson, Potter Thompson,
If thou hadst either drawn
The sword or wound the horn
Thou hadst been the luckiest man
That ever yet was born.

Parallel stories of slumbering heroes appear all over Europe: King Wenzel and his knights below Blanik mountain in Bohemia; Frederick Barbarossa with his men beneath the Kyffhäuserberg, a peak in Thuringia; King Marko sleeping in the mountain Urvina with his horse Sharatz, according to Serbian legend; Dobocz, the Carpathian robber chief; the founders of the Swiss Federation; Olaf Tryggvason; Ogier the Dane, one of Charlemagne's paladins; Charlemagne himself, and Don Sebastian of Portugal (see CONSELHEIRO). There are many others.

Sometimes there are references to treasure: King Arthur dreams in the Vale of Neath beneath the Craig-y-Ddinas



(Castle Rock) with his warriors and a quantity of gold. Of course, important leaders often possessed great riches during their lives, so the idea of the hero and his treasure is easily understandable. But it has also been suggested that such wealth was originally linked to the Nature spirit of the site, an idea perhaps associated with the ancient custom of killing a man so that his shade could guard buried treasure.

Slumbering Heroes

Certainly in many of these legends the hero sleeps, not in a distant land of the imagination, but literally underneath the ground, which could represent some earlier stage of folk belief and an identification with local earth deities. Legendary heroes exhibit a tendency to sink into the fortresses in which they lived to the clefts and caverns below. Norse tradition holds that aged heroes, dissatisfied with the world, shut themselves up in a hill. The subterranean location of the sites is of interest since a characteristic theme in mythology is removal: disappearance or translation to another sphere. A usual method is enclosure within the earth, which opens for the purpose.

Popular belief sometimes places the world of souls underground, and there the hero is secluded with his company. This suggests a possible association of ideas between the sleeping army and the host of the dead. Or there may be a memory here of the custom of slaughtering a man's retinue to keep him company and maintain him in his customary state in the afterlife. Such sleeping warriors occur in two examples from the Isle of Man and Rathlin Island, County Antrim. The first describes a hole called Devil's Den at the base of a mountain: one man brave enough to go in found a group of sleeping giants and, on a stone table in the midst, a bugle. He blew a blast, which woke the giants, and he fled in terror. On Rathlin Island, one of the traditional sites of Robert the Bruce's escape in a cave, where he was inspired by the spider and its web, there is a ruin called Bruce's Castle. Below it, in a grotto, the Bruce and his men lie in enchanted sleep. A man who ventured in found a group of slumbering men dressed in armour, and a sabre, partially sheathed, in the ground. When he tried to draw the sabre, the warriors woke and he ran away.

A Christianized sleepers myth, well known in the early centuries of this era, is the story of the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus. It appears in many versions and Mohammed used it in the Koran. According to *The Golden Legend*, a medieval collection of lives of the saints, seven Christians – Maximian, Malchus, Marcian, Dionysus, John, Serapion and Constantine – were living in Ephesus during the persecution by Emperor Decius in 250 AD. This group of Christian heroes, refusing to abandon their faith, hid in a cave on Mount Celion and fell asleep. Hearing a rumour to this effect, Decius caused the entrance to be blocked with stones. Several centuries later during the reign of Theodosius II, a workman chanced to remove the obstruction and the sleepers awoke. They were hungry so



Left Vishnu asleep upon the coils of the serpent Ananta: the god was said to sleep for the four months of the rainy season **Above** The disciples beg Christ, asleep during a storm on Lake Galilee, to awaken and save them from sinking: from a 15th century French psalter. Many stories tell of sleeping heroes who wake in time of trouble to save their people

Malchus was sent to buy bread. Shopkeepers in the city, amazed at the ancient money with which he tried to pay, took him before the authorities and accused him of stealing treasure. The bishop agreed to go to Mount Celion and see the cave where the others were waiting. At that time there was a heresy in Ephesus denying the resurrection of the dead. The seven martyrs who were shown to Emperor Theodosius declared: 'God has resuscitated us before the great resurrection day, in order that you may believe firmly in the resurrection of the dead.' This said, they bowed their heads and died. The day commemorating the event is still venerated by the Eastern Church, and people suffering from insomnia ask the seven martyrs for assistance.

The timely appearance of these religious heroes when the Church was threatened with heresy resembles the sleeping patriots

waiting to come when their country is in peril. These ideas may seem remote from us today, but are they really so? Siegfried, hero of the *Nibelungenlied*, traditionally slumbers in the mountain of Geroldseeck, ready to fight for the fatherland; and, because the imagination of Hitler was fired by these old legends, the motif of the slumbering hero played a prominent role in Nazi ideology – the sleeper is Germany itself.

Rage! Rage! Rage!

The alarm bells sound from tower to tower . . .

The sleepers call from their chambers . . .

The dead call from their graves

Germany awake! . . .

Woe to the people that today dreams on!

Germany awake!

The refrain of the first Nazi party anthem – 'Germany awake!' – was the Nazis' favourite slogan. It was inscribed on their banners, which were designed by the Fuehrer himself, and it was also the title of the volume which commemorated their seizure of power.

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Indispensable to the community, the smith was nevertheless regarded with a mixture of respect and fear; working amid darkness and flame, the master of fire was associated with all manner of underground beings, enemies of the gods, and sometimes with the Devil himself

SMITH

IN GERMANY, when speaking of someone who is trying to be a match-maker, the expression 'Er ist der Schmied von Gretna Green' (He's the smith from Gretna Green) is commonly used, so widely known is the story of our Border blacksmith and his part in uniting runaway couples. In England it is still popularly supposed that eloping couples who slipped into Scotland needed the services of a smith to officiate on these occasions, although in fact other tradesmen were called upon as well. Behind this belief lies a persistent folk memory of the magic-religious role within the community once occupied by the smith.

Undoubtedly the ritual importance and significance of the smith were closely associated with his role as a worker with iron, a substance which, because of its comparatively late appearance in the history of the world, made a tremendous impact on the minds of our early ancestors (see IRON). A novelty when first introduced, its magnetic properties and the spectacular processes of smelting and forging must have invested it with a sense of mystery, which

gave rise in turn to taboos and magic practices of all kinds.

For primitive peoples iron, which is dug from the depths of the earth or falls inexplicably from the sky as a meteorite, is charged with mysterious power. In folklore iron objects are traditionally protectives against witchcraft, evil spirits and malign influences, such as the universally dreaded Evil Eye. The kings of Malaya used to venerate a block of iron, and the famous Black Stone kissed by Moslem pilgrims to Mecca is probably a meteorite. The Bedouins of Sinai believe that whoever makes a sword from a meteoric iron will be invincible; death will come to an enemy who attempts to stand against this weapon. But iron serves not only the warrior; it can be seen as benefiting the new-born child. For example, on the birth of a child in the Nguon Son valley of Vietnam, the parents would sell it to the village smith, who would make a small iron ring with an iron chain attached and place it around the child's ankle. This hindered evil spirits from snatching the infant away, mortality being particularly high among new babies in undeveloped societies. When the child is grown up and this particular danger is over, the parents thank the smith for his help and ask him to break the ring.

Among some primitive peoples, such as the Tiv of northern Nigeria, if a death occurs, iron can play a part in making contact with the deceased; the metal acts as a mode of communication between the worlds of the living and dead.

In days past, when most economic necessities were supplied by a family for itself, the blacksmith, as maker of edged tools, was a particularly important craftsman. Even the water in which he cooled the iron was thought to possess medicinal properties. In Ireland he was credited with magic powers and, under the old laws, certain foods were ceremonially presented to him, since he was not himself a grower of food. He was given a tribute of corn and some of the first fruits of the crop. The head of any slaughtered animal was always his: a 19th century antiquary recollected seeing as many as 100 heads of pigs and cows preserved in the kitchen of a smith.

The blacksmiths of England liked to say that theirs was the first of the trades, since other craftsmen depended on them for their equipment. Indeed the blacksmith's tools themselves have been venerated in many countries. The people of Angola revered the hammer because it forged their agricultural implements. The Ogowé, who do not work with iron themselves, esteemed the bellows used by smiths of neighbouring tribes. The Ewes swore oaths before the hammer and anvil, which they believed fell from heaven. A smith among the Wachaga had to be very careful about handling his tools. If he pointed his hammer or tongs at anyone, or even allowed the iron-slag to spill over them, that person would die.

Here it is not only the substance from which the tools are made, but the tools themselves, forged by the skill of the smith, which possess magic properties. In certain myths, a smith god forges weapons which enable another god to defeat his foe: the Egyptian Ptah forges arms with which the god Horus defeats Seth; Indra, using weapons made by the smith Tvashtri, overcomes the demon Vritra; Hephaestus makes the thunderbolt with which Zeus will overcome Typhon; and Thor vanquishes the serpent with his hammer Mjölmir, forged by dwarfs (see HAMMER). These mythical smiths prepared thunder and lightning as weapons for the gods, and their stories stress the tremendous importance attached, not only to the manufactured tool, but to the craftsman capable of forging it.

Trade of the Devil

Another reason for the exalted position of the smiths arose from their often being outsiders, itinerant workmen who spoke a different language, practised different customs, and kept the secrets of their profession to themselves. In many countries metal workers have been found in separate groups, apart from the community: among north-western American tribes, the smith is a privileged person who hands on trade secrets to members of his family.

In Africa smiths are both respected and despised. Professor Eliade believes that

The village blacksmith (right) was formerly revered as a 'master of fire' and possessor of secret knowledge, acting as healer, charmer and practitioner of the occult. In Africa such beliefs continue, and this smith from the Sudanese bush (left) is priest and physician as well as craftsman



Camera Press, London



this ambivalent attitude arises from the history of each region. In areas where there is a culture based on iron, smiths are esteemed; but in pastoral civilizations, and among the hunters of the steppe, they are despised. To the Masai the surroundings of a smith's dwelling are infected with death, disease and misfortune. If a man has sexual relations with a woman from a smith's family, he will either go insane or die, and any children of the liaison will be unhealthy. It is most insulting to address anyone as 'smith', and if the word is spoken after sunset, the person who used it will be attacked by wild animals.

The same ambivalent attitude appears in Christian and other folklore, where the craftsman who worked with fire was often

identified with the Devil, portrayed in hell-fire, with flames coming out of his mouth. In India, where smiths were generally outcasts, the mythology associates metal workers with demons, giants and other enemies of the gods. Perhaps there is here a hint of the curse which traditionally attaches to wanderers, in this case identified with those who work underground where fires burn. Myths of the Yakut people describe how the smith was taught his trade by K'daai Maqsin, chief smith of the underworld, living in a house of iron surrounded by splinters of fire.

The prayer known in Ireland as St Patrick's Breastplate invokes the protection of God: 'Against incantations of false prophets, against the black laws of paganism,

against spells of women, smiths and druids, against all knowledge that is forbidden the human soul.' For all that, blacksmiths in England claimed St Clement as their patron saint and on 23 November, St Clement's day, anvils were fired with gunpowder and a dinner or procession held. A blacksmith in a long grey beard was dubbed Old Clem and carried in a chair by torchlight; or a dummy was prepared and put up over the door of the inn where the blacksmiths had their celebration. The dinner, known as a Clem Feast, featured a reading of the blacksmith legend. A Sussex version describes how King Alfred called together the seven trades which then existed, and said he would make that tradesman king over the rest who could manage best without the help of the others. A member of each trade was invited to a banquet and told to bring an example of his work, and the tool he had used for making it. The blacksmith brought his hammer and a horseshoe, the tailor shears and a new coat, the baker his shovel and a loaf, the shoemaker an awl and a new pair of shoes, the carpenter his saw and a trunk, the butcher his chopper and a joint, the mason his chisels and a cornerstone. Now the tailor's coat was so beautiful that he was by general consent declared King of all trades. The blacksmith, being furious at this, decided to do no more work so long as the tailor was king. After a time the King's horse cast a shoe and one by one all the other craftsmen broke their tools. Since the blacksmith had shut up his forge and gone away, they broke in and tried to do the work themselves. But the only result was a dreadful mess. The anvil was knocked over and exploded, and at this point St Clement walked in with the blacksmith. King Alfred then said: 'I have made a great mistake in allowing my judgement in this important matter to be governed by the gaudy colour and stylish cut of the tailor's coat, and in justice to the blacksmith (without whom none of us can do) proclaim him King.' The blacksmith then mended everyone's tools, and presented the tailor with a new pair of shears. The king proposed the health of the blacksmith, King of all trades, and everyone sang 'The Jolly Blacksmith'. While this was going on, the tailor crawled under the table and slit the blacksmith's leather apron with his new shears, and since then blacksmiths have always worn fringed aprons.

Master of Fire

The ambivalent attitude towards the 'King of trades' appears most closely in his role as the master of fire. If the smith is often assimilated to the Devil, there is also a considerable cycle of European folktales containing the idea of rejuvenation through fire. They describe how various saints, such as St Peter, and even Christ himself, appear in the forge as the blacksmith possessed of miraculous powers, rejuvenating the old by placing them in a hot oven or forging them on the anvil. The smith himself, the owner of the forge, then tries to imitate Christ and throws an old woman into the fire where, instead of regaining her youth, she changes into a monkey. Here the true master of fire is divine and not a demon.



The martyrdom of St Clement, who was bound to an anchor and thrown into the sea: from a 13th century manuscript. English blacksmiths claimed him as their patron saint, and on St Clement's day anvils were fired with gunpowder and a dinner or procession held

As Christ carries the cross on the road to Calvary, a smith forges the nails for the crucifixion: from a 14th century English bible. In Christian society, the craftsman who worked with fire was often associated with the Devil

In old Russian belief the celestial blacksmith Kuznets, the Vulcan of the Slavs, was transformed under the influence of Christianity into the double saint Kuz'ma-Dem'yan (St Cosmas and St Damian). The old pagan gods appeared in the role of protectors of marriage; crowns are traditionally worn by both bride and groom for an Orthodox Church wedding service, and the god who made the tools and the first plough for man was also said to have fashioned the first nuptial crown. Ancient marriage songs exist in the form of a prayer to a mysterious smith who is asked to make a golden bridal crown, and out of the tiny pieces remaining, a wedding ring and a pin to fasten the veil.

A legend about Kuz'ma-Dem'yan describes how, when he had just made a plough, a great snake tried to attack him. It licked a hole through the iron door of the smithy but the saint grasped its tongue with the pincers, harnessed it to the plough, and made it plough the land 'from sea to sea'. The snake prayed for a drink of water from the River Dnieper. But the saint drove it all the way to the Black Sea, which it drank half dry, and then burst. This tale is strongly reminiscent of the well-known legend in which St Dunstan seized the Devil by the nose with his tongs. Dunstan, patron saint of goldsmiths, was himself a blacksmith and a jeweller noted for his work in gold. Having been expelled from court, so the legend goes, he built a cell near Glastonbury, where he worked at these handicrafts. One day the Devil came and talked to him. St Dunstan kept him in conversation until the tongs were really hot, then turned suddenly and caught Satan by the nose, refusing to let go until the Devil had promised not to tempt him again.

The Iron Doctor

In mythology there is frequently a connection between trades which make use of fire, and the magic arts. Hence in Africa smiths are often greatly dreaded as possible sorcerers: the Ethiopians say that they can, if they choose, change into hyenas. Among the Wa Tchaggas, Bantu agricultural workers, if the wife of a smith is divorced, it is believed that she will be exposed to great danger. Only the smith himself can mitigate this to some extent by rubbing her all over with butter, in the presence of a female relative, before pronouncing the divorce. The 'iron doctor' of the Ba-ila tribe is a very important person. Without his magical assistance, it would be impossible to obtain iron from ore. Before smelting starts, a boy and a girl are put into the kiln. The iron doctor gives each of them a bean, to be cracked in the mouth. When this is done, it makes a noise and everyone shouts. It is forbidden to call the fire by name; it must be addressed as 'the fierce one', and the compliment will result in it burning the better.

The Kenyan Kikuyu believe that a



Wayland Smith

Puck describes how Weland has come down in the world

'... There was no trace of Weland, but presently I saw a fat old farmer riding down from the Beacon under the greenwood tree. His horse had cast a shoe in the clay, and when he came to the Ford he dismounted, took a penny out of his purse, laid it on a stone, tied the old horse to an oak, and called out: "Smith, Smith, here is work for you!" Then he sat down and went to sleep. You can imagine how I felt when I saw a white-bearded, bent old blacksmith in a leather apron creep out from behind the oak and begin to shoe the

horse. It was Weland himself. I was so astonished that I jumped out and said: "What on Human Earth are you doing here, Weland?"'...

'He pushed the long hair back from his forehead (he didn't recognise me at first). Then he said: "You ought to know. You foretold it, Old Thing. I'm shoeing horses for hire. I'm not even Weland now," he said. "They call me Wayland-Smith."

'Poor chap!' said Dan. 'What did you say?'

'What could I say? He looked up, with the horse's foot on his lap, and he said, smiling, "I remember the time when I wouldn't have accepted this old bag of bones as a sacrifice, and now I'm glad enough to shoe him for a penny."

Rudyard Kipling *Puck of Pook's Hill*

member of the guild of smiths can, by placing a spell, prevent anyone damaging a piece of forest land. If thefts have taken place in a village, the victim takes a dead person's iron bracelet to the smith, who heats and cuts it, saying: 'May the thief be cut as I cut this iron.' Or: 'May the members of that family have their skulls crushed as I crush the iron with my hammer! May their bowels be seized by hyenas as I seize the iron with my tongs! May their blood spurt from their veins as the sparks fly from beneath my hammer! May their hearts freeze from cold as I cool this iron in the water.' Curses like this are used to cast a spell over people who may be at a great distance. Most people would not dare to steal anything from the smith himself. The Bakongo are convinced that if anyone ventured even to sit on the blacksmith's anvil, his legs would swell up.

Traces of such beliefs embodying the supernatural powers of the smith can be found in traditions where he is healer, charmer, and practitioner of the occult. As possessor of the Horseman's Word, a secret charm, he was supposed to have complete control over even the wildest horses. Until the time of the Renaissance, smiths practised medicine: an Italian story places one in the role of dentist. Later still smiths were known to cauterize wounds. They were thought to possess the power of healing and to be able to read the future.

In England blacksmiths were often blood-charmers. This was a kind of magical 'first aid', used to stop bleeding in days when doctors were few and unskilful. A spectacular cure for a sick child involved seven smiths, all of whom had to be the descendants of smiths in unbroken line for three generations. The ailing child was taken at night to the forge and laid on the anvil. The seven smiths stood round, flourishing their hammers, as though about to hit the child, at the same time shouting the stroke-cry 'Heigh' very loudly. If the child seemed alarmed it would recover; and the converse was also said to apply. The men were given sixpence each and bread, cheese and ale in return for performing this service.

If the smith was a healer, he was also a divine being. Sometimes he appears in the role of culture hero. In Africa for instance, among some tribes, he taught people how to use fire, the arts of husbandry, and such knowledge as circumcision, how to give

birth, and the sexual behaviour necessary for procreation. In other cultures, India for example, he is the creator of the world, and the Japanese smith god is Ame No Ma-Hitotsu No Kami, the one-eyed god of the sky. Celtic tradition associates the supernatural smith with the divine warrior, and Goibniu, the Irish celestial smith, presides over the otherworld feast. The forge of Hephaestus, the Greek Vulcan in classical myth, was situated beneath Mt Etna (see HEPHAESTUS). He worked there with the Cyclops, and the fires from the volcano were his furnaces. Homer says the god's workshop was on Olympus. Another of his establishments was on Lemnos, a volcanic island, and when Mt Moschylus rumbled, the smith was said to be hammering in his underground forge, the dwarf Cedalion working alongside him.

Where are Wayland's Bones?

Certain traditions identify smith and dwarf. The legends of small people living deep in the earth, devoted to metallurgy, appear in northern myth as well as in Africa (see DWARFS). Familiar to us is the tale of Wayland the Smith, sometimes represented as a dwarf, sometimes as a giant. In England he was an invisible smith, haunting a stone tomb called Wayland's Smithy on the Ridgeway in Berkshire, near the White Horse. If a horse was left there, together with a coin for payment, the owner would find on return, so it was said, that the animal had been shod and the money taken.

Similar traditions are to be found elsewhere in northern Europe. The smith appears as troll, headless man, dwarf, and his forge may be located in a variety of places, including an underwater cave. Germanic legend contains various supernatural smiths. Alberich, who appears in the famous *Nibelungenlied*, keeping guard over the treasure of the Nibelung, is sometimes giant and sometimes dwarf. In Old Norse tradition the smith Regin appears as both: his brothers are an otter and a dragon. To reach Mimir, the smith in Scandinavian mythology, it was necessary to make an arduous journey through cold and darkness: presumably the realm of the dead (see SCANDINAVIA).

The belief in supernatural smiths who live in subterranean regions beneath the

ground or under the water, and who appear to be connected with the Land of the Dead, is not peculiar to Germany and Scandinavia. The Finnish national epic, the *Kalevala* describes how the smith Ilmarinen undertook to forge the *sampo*, a mysterious talisman, and in Estonian tradition, which is closely related to that of the Finns, Ilmarine forges a great sword in a mountain in the middle of the earth, located in the Land of the Dead (see FINLAND).

King Alfred, translating Boethius's famous work *De Consolatione Philosophiae* from Latin into Anglo-Saxon, wrote: 'Where are now the bones of that famous and wise goldsmith Wayland? I say the wise, since from the skilful man his skill can never depart, and can no more be taken from him than the sun can be turned from its course. Where are the bones of Wayland now, and who knows now where they may be?' In Anglo-Saxon poetry a particularly fine weapon or piece of armour is known as 'the work of Wayland'. Beowulf's corselet is so described, and in several countries of north-west Europe throughout the Middle Ages fine weapons were said to be made by Wayland.

Another tradition concerning Wayland, which dates back to Anglo-Saxon times, describes a gifted smith who was taken prisoner by a king, deliberately lamed, and forced to work for his overlord. One day the king's sons come to his workshop. He murders them, cuts off their heads, sets the skulls in silver, fashions ornaments from the eyeballs, and sends them to the parents. Their teeth are made into brooches, and given to the king's daughter, Bothvild. When she herself comes with a ring to be mended — a ring which was stolen from the smith and belonged to his wife — he stupefies the girl with drink, and rapes her. When the king asks what has happened to his sons, the smith taunts him and tells him to 'go to the smithy built for Wayland', where he will 'find the bellows covered in blood', and the sons' bodies buried beneath them. The smith then flies away, mocking his tormentor as he goes.

VENETIA NEWALL

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Snail

Used for magical healing in the past, especially in wart cures; one method was to rub the warts with a snail and then impale the snail on a thorn, so that as it slowly died the warts would fade away: snail slime was considered effective against consumption and other diseases: shut in a box or dish on Hallowe'en, a snail would trace the initials of your future lover in slime during the night.

Snake

Appears in the myths and religious beliefs of almost all societies, playing many different roles: associated with rejuvenation, immortality, longevity and wisdom, because it sloughs its skin, and with sexuality because of its phallic shape: snakes which live under rocks or in holes in the ground are connected with the underworld, the dead, fertility, the unconscious mind: in Christianity, linked with evil and sex, because of its role in tempting Eve.

See ANIMALS; FIRST MAN; SERPENT; SNAKE-HANDLING CULTS.





Natural Historical Photographic Agency, Douglas Dickens

In 1909 George Went Hensley decided that the scriptures commanded the faithful to handle snakes; and even today among the depressed rural communities of some American states snake-handling cults are carried on

SNAKE-HANDLING CULTS

THE SNAKE is a powerful symbol in many different religious traditions. In Judaism and Christianity it has generally represented the power of evil and, perhaps because the snake resembles the phallus, it is frequently identified with unbridled sexual desire (see also SERPENT).

In Judaism snake imagery is plentiful,

and circumcision, as a symbolic act that implies the regulation and social control of sexuality, also suggests the transcendence of the people, through a covenant with God, above the sinfulness of sexual behaviour into which Eve was led by the snake. Christianity employed snake imagery much less. In the gospel of St Mark, however, it is promised that signs shall follow them that believe, one of which is that 'they shall pick up serpents'.

It is this promise that is invoked to justify the snake-handling cult that has arisen in parts of the United States, and which today is practised in probably 30 or so different congregations by fundamentalists who accept Holiness teachings; they often regard themselves as anointed

The power of the Indian snake charmer, playing on his pipe to entice the cobra out of its basket can be paralleled in some rural areas of the United States by snake-handlers who pick up snakes and even caress them

saints who have experienced the second blessing of the Holy Ghost that confers upon them entire sanctification (see HOLINESS MOVEMENT). Their services commonly include a variety of dramatic practices: speaking in unknown tongues; shaking, jerking and ecstatic dancing; faith healing; and foot-washing. These independent congregations are locally controlled and served, by lay, or self-ordained evangelists. They do not constitute an organized, centrally administered movement, and they

Snake-Handling Cults



Though frequently associated with evil, the snake can also be regarded as a fount of power, partly because it is phallic and because in sloughing its skin it seems to possess the secret of rejuvenation *Facing page* In southern Italy villagers at the San Domenico festival (*far left*) twine snakes around their saints and touch them; (*left*) the local 'medicine-man' marches in the procession, snakes garlanded around his neck. In another culture, guides at the Snake Temple, Singapore (*below*) handle vipers fearlessly *Left* In Tanganyika, a snake is coiled around the body of a dancer: snake dancers attempt to invoke the magical powers of the serpent *Below* At a Tennessee snake-handling service, frenzy and ecstasy culminate in snake-handling in obedience to the words of the Bible: 'they shall pick up serpents'



Camera Press, London

William Sargent

decided that the truly faithful should handle serpents.

The snakes used in services are obtained some time beforehand, and the usual types are rattlesnakes, water moccasins and copperheads – all poisonous snakes. They are kept in a box while hymns are sung, spontaneous preaching occurs, healings are attempted and ecstatic emotions expressed. They are then taken out and handed from one believer to another. Great prestige is attached to those who first handle the snakes. In some services handfuls of snakes are taken up, thrown about, caressed: believers readily wrap them around their heads or push them under their shirts, or even kiss them. They admit that they fear snakes, but they handle them when the Lord anoints them to do so; and they see their activity both as a proof of their own sanctified condition, and as a demonstration of faith and a glorification of God.

The snakes are actually handled for about 15 or 20 minutes, a period which forms the high point of the service, which may last altogether about four hours. There is no question of these poisonous snakes having had their fangs drawn beforehand. Usually snakes are kept for only a few services and are then released, and new ones captured. Votaries of the cult are frequently bitten, but most of those who are bitten recover. There have, however, been a considerable number of fatalities in the course of half a century and most of these have been given widespread and adverse publicity. In 1955, Hensley himself, then aged



Camera Press, London

A Rattler Round the Neck

Snake-handling at Dolley Pond Church, Tennessee

The climax comes when the power is strong within the congregation, heightened by the clichéd preaching of the minister. A rope is stretched out by a member to separate the audience from the snake-handling devout, and visitors are warned that the snakes are about to be produced. This precaution may be barely accomplished before an impatient believer snatches up a snake from the angry knot in the opened box. Removing a snake from the box is regarded as a supreme test of faith, for the constantly jolted reptiles are by then thoroughly aroused and it is believed that they are most likely to strike when they are first touched. The box has been kicked, in a kind of half-jocular sin-baiting, because the snake represents the Devil, whom the spirit of God allows the true believer to overcome . . .

The snake may be held in various ways . . . Sister Minnie Parker, a buxom elderly gap-toothed woman – who walked barefoot among seventeen buzzing rattlesnakes in a homecoming service in the summer of 1946 – held a beautiful large timber rattler around her neck like a necklace, with the free neck and head of the snake along the outside of her left forearm, while cooing with closed eyes and a delighted expression on her face.

Weston La Barre *They Shall Take Up Serpents*

are linked, if at all, only by itinerant evangelists. Some of these evangelists have been responsible for introducing snake-handling to congregations which already worship in an ecstatic manner.

Snake-handling appears to have begun in 1909. In that year, George Went Hensley decided that the scriptures commanded that the faithful should handle serpents; and he introduced the practice in churches in Tennessee and Kentucky. The cult spread to neighbouring states, particularly to North Carolina, Virginia and West Virginia, and in more recent years has been encountered in Georgia, Florida and California. Despite legislation introduced in some states to prohibit the cult, it has not been eliminated by being made illegal.

The practice appears to have arisen spontaneously in Holiness churches. It is true that some North American Indian tribes practised a snake dance, and that snakes were strongly associated with rain-making by many primitive peoples, but this idea has no echo in modern Christian tradition. Indeed the populations among whom snake-handling has arisen in the 20th century have had little, if any, recent contact with Indians. Their interpretation of the practice conforms to their general literal belief in the Bible: it is done in obedience to scripture. Its ultimate rationale may be beyond man's comprehending: just as God chose to give men the gift of unknown tongues so that they might worship him in ways that transcended their understanding, so, in his wisdom, the Lord



The practice of snake-handling among white Americans seems to have arisen spontaneously, as an outgrowth of the Holiness Movement, though some North American Indians practised snake dances: painted hide of the legend of the snake clan, Arizona

and many of the population live on government relief. Snake-handlers tend to come from the poorest section of the population, and their members have little education.

Holiness religion appears to have an important function in these culturally retarded areas in asserting that, despite poverty, its adepts are more worthy than the affluent and socially respected. Their sense of superiority is powerfully reinforced by what they regard as the tangible spiritual power evident in the emotional vigour of their services, and in their ability and daring in handling snakes. The cult offers the intense excitement of real danger for people who have fewer inner resources and little creativity, and whose daily lives are marked by boredom and lack of cultural interests. Their normal social relations are emotionally impoverished, and they live in areas characterized by frustration, cynicism and repression. The element of fatalism in the cult may also serve to absolve its members from blame as social failures.

Psychoanalytic interpretation of the cult might suggest that since the snake generally symbolizes the phallus, the manipulation of snakes represents the ability to handle phallic power: the cult thus appears as a significant and ambivalent undercurrent in response to the rigorous sexual morality that is demanded in Holiness religion. In his book *They Shall Take Up Serpents*, Weston La Barre considers that 'to dominate the snake is to dominate the guilty and dangerous sexual desire': it may also be a curious sublimation of sexual desire, as indicated by episodes in which women have gained immense elation from repeatedly kissing the snake over its whole body despite being struck repeatedly by it. Psychological tests do not suggest much abnormality in snake-handlers; the older members show more cheerfulness and fortitude in the face of old age and death than do members of conventional Churches. Nor have the young proved to be particularly maladjusted. Relations of young and old in these churches appear to be more harmonious than among the general population of people in similar social circumstances. Older people are accorded respect by the young for the greater frequency with which they handle snakes and for their greater knowledge of the Bible. These results may, however, reflect the amount of authoritarianism in the belief system of Holiness Churches.

BRYAN WILSON

Museum of the American Indian, New York

70, received a fatal bite while practising in Florida. Adepts regard recovery from a bite as a miracle wrought by God, but they also profess their willingness to die when the Lord decides, since they believe that the true saint is then brought to God's throne.

The cult has been prohibited in Kentucky, Tennessee and Virginia, and also by some municipal authorities in North Carolina, but adherents are prepared to travel long distances to services in states where the practice is not forbidden. Some of the leading evangelists have been arrested at services, and police raids have occurred periodically. The notoriety that such attention from the police engenders appears to be not unwelcome. Insurance companies some years ago decided to refuse to regard

death from snake-bite at church meetings as accidental but this has apparently not affected the practice of the cult.

Excitement in a Grey World

The congregations which practise snake-handling are all located in relatively remote country areas, particularly in the Appalachian mountains. There, Holiness religion of the more extreme type flourishes, and many sects indulge in ecstatic manifestations of Holy Ghost power, with free expression of their emotions, and sometimes with tongues, jerks and rolling. This is a typical economically depressed area, and among the snake cultists even the younger members are usually unemployed. Although rural, these areas are not farming districts,

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SNEEZING

BECAUSE IT IS an involuntary process, the sneeze, like the yawn and the shudder, was once believed to have a supernatural quality. The Siamese, for example, believed that the gods were continually turning over the pages of the Book of Judgement and that a man would be forced to sneeze, whenever his name came under scrutiny. The Greeks and Romans regarded the sneeze as a signal from the soul, giving warnings of danger, or indicating good or evil prospects for the future. To sneeze during the course of a conversation was a clear affirmation from the celestial regions that the truth was being spoken. In 480 BC, just before the battle of Salamis, the Athenian leader Themistocles was offering sacrifices to the gods when an onlooker happened to sneeze; this was construed as a sign of divine favour.

In the supernatural sense, sneezing has always had a twofold aspect: there are good sneezes and there are bad. The sneeze can represent the spirit of life, as in the case of the image of clay animated by Prometheus with fire stolen from the sun, which gave proof of its vitality with a sudden sneeze, or it can represent, as it did in Aristotle's time, the first sign of recovery in a patient who was thought to be dying. In later European folklore, a sick person who sneezed could look forward to a restoration of full health, and even today in Yorkshire regular sneezers are supposed to enjoy long life. A 17th century writer observed that 'sneezing . . . is profitable to parturient women in lethargies, apoplexies and catalepsies.'

In its more sinister aspects, however, the sneeze provided clear evidence of some forthcoming tragedy: it was in fact an omen of death since it symbolized the expulsion of the breath of life from the body. According to a current American superstition, sneezing during a meal is a sure sign of a death in the family.

A sneeze was commonly regarded in the past as evidence of psychic attack or of diabolic possession, for it was believed that demons liked nothing better than to enter the human body by way of the orifices, especially the nostrils, unless these openings were protected by amulets or sometimes nose rings. The natives of the Celebes Islands in Indonesia secured the dead against the

intrusion of devils by inserting fish-hooks through their nostrils, while the Chinese plugged the nostrils with pieces of jade. A Brahmin touches his ears when he sneezes, as spirits are supposed to enter through the ears at such times. A belated relic of this old attitude may be seen in the Scottish superstition that a baby remained under the control of the fairies until its first sneeze.

The social response to the sneezer almost invariably takes the form of a blessing. The Hindu says 'live' and his friends say 'with you'. The Englishman says 'bless you' and the Zulu 'I am now blessed'. In 1542 a Spanish explorer, Hernando de Soto, was surprised to find a similar type of response among the Indians of Florida. In 17th century England it was customary to raise the hat at the first blast of a sneeze.

The connection between blessings or other precautionary formulas and the sneeze has given rise to much speculation. The Romans used to say *Absit omen* (banish the omen) after someone had sneezed, and Aristotle mentions a similar custom among the Greeks. The fact that sneezing is a symptom

It has been suggested that the familiar nursery rhyme *Ring A Ring O Roses* is a reference to the Great Plague: 'Atishoo, atishoo, we all fall down' refers to the sneeze, the fatal symptom of the plague, preceding death

of some types of plague — noted by the Greek historian Thucydides in the 5th century BC — greatly strengthened the feeling that there was a need for supernatural protection in the course of this frequently mortal disease. The custom of saying 'God bless you' after sneezing has been attributed to Pope Gregory the Great in the 6th century; he is said to have recommended its use during an outbreak of plague in Rome, and called for prayers to secure protection against the dangers of infection, accompanied by the sign of the Cross. During the ravages of the plague in the Middle Ages in Ireland, it became customary for the stricken to cry out 'God help me'.

Most modern sneezing superstitions confirm that the sneeze continues to be regarded as supernatural. When starting out on a journey or any important enterprise, it is a good sign if you happen to sneeze to the right, but a bad one if to the left, or in the general direction of a grave. It is almost as ominous to sneeze on New Year's Eve, unless you hasten to visit three houses before midnight, which offsets the curse. In parts of Europe three sneezes clearly indicate the presence of four thieves, while in Estonia, if two pregnant women sneeze simultaneously they may look forward to twins. Many Japanese believe that to sneeze once means that you are blessed, twice that you are guilty, and thrice that you will be ill.



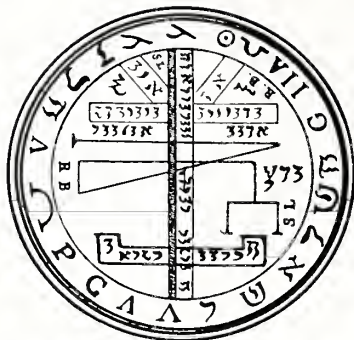
Sodom and Gomorrah

The most notorious of the 'cities of the plain' which, according to Genesis (chapter 19), were destroyed by God in a rain of fire and brimstone because of the sexual depravity of their inhabitants (hence the term 'sodomy'); thought to have been located at the southern end of the Dead Sea and perhaps to have been overwhelmed in some natural catastrophe; they became symbols of exceptional wickedness.

Solomon

King of Israel in the 10th century BC, the builder of the Temple, a younger son of David and Bath-sheba; renowned for his wisdom and wealth, and his long and prosperous reign, he flourished in legend as a master magician who controlled all demons by the power of his magic ring; he was said to have employed them in building the Temple; the *Key of Solomon* and other magical textbooks were attributed to him.

See GRIMOIRE; QUEEN OF SHEBA.



Soma

Sacred plant of ancient India, and the intoxicating drink obtained from it; it was the food of the gods and was also considered a god itself; the great warrior god Indra was particularly fond of it; the identity of the plant is uncertain but some authorities believe it to have been the mushroom *Amanita muscaria*.

See DRUGS; INDIA; MUSHROOM.



'A pox take it' was an all-purpose cursing formula used by the Somerset witches of the 1660s, who claimed to meet the Devil, 'the man in black', at their open-air meetings

SOMERSET WITCHES

'ON THURSDAY night before Whitsunday last, being met they called out *Robin*. Upon which instantly appeared a little man in black to whom all made obeisance, and the little man put his hand to his hat, saying, How do ye? speaking *low* but *big*. Then all made low obeisances to him again.' This description of a polite exchange between the Devil and his followers, and most of what is known of the Somerset witches in the 1660s, comes from Joseph Glanvill's *Sadduceism Triumphatus*, first published in 1681, a year after his death. Glanvill, who has been described as 'the father of modern psychical research', was a Fellow of the Royal Society and a former vicar of Frome in Somerset, who believed in the reality of witchcraft and had earlier published an account of the case of the Drummer of Tidworth in Wiltshire (see POLTERGEISTS).

The witches tried in 1665 seem to have belonged to two separate groups or covens. The Wincanton group numbered 14, six women and eight men, headed by Ann Bishop and including Elizabeth Style and Alice Duke. The other group, at Brewham, numbered 11, ten women and one man, and included four women named Green, who were perhaps related, and three named Warberton.

The Devil was described as 'the man in black' or 'a man in blackish clothes' and Elizabeth Style said he was handsome. He presided at the open-air meetings of the Wincanton group, sitting at the head of the white cloth spread on the ground, with his favourite, Ann Bishop, beside him, while they all feasted merrily on wine and beer, cakes and meat, which he had provided. He spoke a grace before the meal, but none after, and his voice was audible but very low. Sometimes he played a pipe or a cittern (an instrument like a guitar) and 'they danced and were merry', according to Elizabeth Style, 'and were bodily there and in their clothes.'

The other side to this peacefully rustic

picture comes out in the description of the use of wax images, which the witches called 'pictures', to harm people. The doll was brought to the meeting and the man in black baptized it, with himself as godfather and two witches as godmothers, anointing its forehead and saying, 'I baptize thee with this oil', so as to create an additional link between the image and the victim whose name was given to it. Then they stuck pins into it and said, 'A pox on thee, I'll spite thee.' Margaret Agar, of the Brewham group, 'delivered to the little man in black a picture in wax, into which he and Agar stuck thorns, and Henry Walter thrust his thumb into the side of it; then they threw it down and said, *There is Dick Green's picture with a pox on it*' (and Dick Green died soon after). They were fond of the phrase 'A pox take it', which they used as an all-purpose cursing formula.

To go to the meetings, the witches smeared on their foreheads and wrists a greenish oil, which the Devil gave them, and were quickly carried to the meeting-place, saying as they went, 'Thout, tout, a tout, tout, throughout and about'. When it was time to leave again, they cried, 'A boy! merry meet, merry part', and then each said 'Rentum, tormentum' and another word which the witness could not remember, and was swiftly carried back to her home.

They said they were sometimes 'really' present at the meetings, 'in their bodies', but at other times they left their bodies at home and attended in spirit form, and it is interesting that the word *trance* occurs in Glanvill's account of their familiar imps. Alice Duke's familiar, in the form of a little cat, sucked her right breast, 'and when she is sucked, she is in a kind of trance'. Christian Green said that the Devil had what would seem the inconsiderate habit of sucking her left breast at about five o'clock in the morning in the likeness of a hedgehog: 'she says that it is painful to her, and that she is usually in a trance when she is sucked.' When Elizabeth Style wanted to do someone harm, she shouted for Robin, and when the familiar came as a black dog, she said, 'O Satan, give me my purpose', and told him what she wanted.

Alice Duke said that, 11 years before, Ann Bishop had taken her to the churchyard, where they walked backwards round the church three times. The first time round,

they met a man in black clothes who went with them. On the second circuit a great black toad jumped up at them, and on the third round they saw something like a rat. Then the man in black spoke softly to Ann Bishop and they went home. It was after this that Alice joined the coven, and the Devil made his mark on her by pricking the fourth finger of her right hand, between the middle and upper joints.

The same mark in the same place was seen on the hands of Christian Green and Elizabeth Style. Elizabeth said that when the Devil first came to her, he promised her money and that 'she should live gallantly' and enjoy the pleasures of the world for 12 years, if she would sign in her blood a written pact giving him her soul. When she signed, with the blood he pricked from her finger, he gave her sixpence and vanished with the paper.

'Lead Us Into Temptation'

A little earlier, in 1663, a woman named Julian Cox, aged 70, had been tried at Taunton Assizes, accused of bewitching a servant girl who had refused to give her money. She had appeared to the girl in ghostly form, invisible to others, and had forced her to swallow several large pins. Evidence was given that she could transform herself into a hare, that she had a toad as a familiar, that she had driven a farmer's cows mad, and that she had been seen to fly in at her own window. She was found guilty and executed.

It was Julian Cox who gave the curious account of seeing two witches and a 'black man' flying towards her on broomsticks 'about a yard and a half from the ground' (see SABBATH). An interesting feature of her trial was that the judge attempted to test the belief that a witch could not say the Lord's Prayer. Julian Cox tried several times and repeated it correctly, except that she said 'And lead us into temptation' or 'And lead us not into no temptation' which, if she was really a member of the Devil's congregation, is the form of the prayer to which she might have been accustomed.

FURTHER READING: C. L'Estrange Ewen, *Witchcraft and Demonianism* (Muller, 1970 reprint); M. A. Murray, *The Witch-Cult in Western Europe* Oxford Univ. Press, 1967 reprint).



Socio-economic factors are important in both the act and the accusation of sorcery; the Kikuyu, when deprived of their livelihood, resorted to black magic, and the African farmer who is more successful than his neighbours may have his prosperity put down to witchcraft

SORCERY

AN ACCUSATION of witchcraft can be regarded as a culminating stage in a special process by which an individual is psychically (and often, largely unconsciously) extruded from the group, a process that resolves interpersonal tensions that might otherwise destroy the group itself. Any theory that hopes to delineate the motivation of the accuser has to recognize that much human behaviour stems from unconscious and sometimes atavistic impulses. Whatever the underlying motivation, socio-economic observations should apply not only to medieval European witchcraft but to contemporary case studies in Africa and elsewhere.

To a considerable extent the European witch persecution was developed by the Holy Office of Inquisition, formally created in the 13th century to expurgate heresy (see HERESY). So effective were the inquisitors that by 1375 they had all but worked themselves out of a job. Those original medieval heretics, the Waldenses and Cathars, had been all but exterminated; and their confiscated lands and goods had provided princes and officials with considerable reason for zeal (see CATHARS; WALDENSES). It was Pope

Innocent III (1160-1216) who provided that the goods and lands of those found guilty of heresy stood forfeit. But by the 14th century this lucrative process was drying up.

Attempts were made to persuade the Pope to allow the Inquisition to transfer its attention from heresy to sorcery; but for a while the Pope wisely resisted this ploy, insisting that unless the Holy Office could show that sorcery was in fact buttressed by heresy, it was not the concern of the Church.

It was only by reviving the notion of a pact, between witches and the Devil, that earlier writers such as Augustine and Aquinas had touched on, that this particular theological problem could be solved, and the frequently lucrative benefits of the Inquisition restored (see EUROPEAN WITCH PERSECUTIONS).

If both the act and the accusation of witchcraft (and sorcery) frequently involved socio-economic motives, it is interesting to observe that English witch-hunting never really achieved the intensity that was found in Europe during the 14th and 15th centuries. Even the Witch-Finder General, Matthew Hopkins, managed only a fair living during his self-imposed year of office in 1645. In Germany, however, in the same century the direct connection between economic gain and a spate of accusations is seen clearly enough in the records of the Bamberg diocese. Between 1626 and 1629 there was an average of 100 executions a year for witchcraft. However, in 1630 an Imperial edict forbade the confiscation of

Above Pressure to allow the Inquisition to try cases of witchcraft was partly motivated by greed for the property of those condemned: 18th-century engraving

the property of condemned witches, and in that same year Bamberg's execution rate dropped to 24, and by 1631 had fallen to nothing (see BAMBERG WITCHES).

In England, where the definition of sorcery and witchcraft was often so vague that the one frequently included the other, acts of so-called *maleficium* were often transparent projections of village tensions in which the accusation was to a large extent a safety valve to protect a closeknit community. C. L'Estrange Ewen's survey of the indictments for the home counties in Elizabeth's reign contains many examples of envy of individuals who had achieved rural prosperity, resulting in acts of ill-will.

The Dangers of Success

Michael Gelfand, who has studied the Shona of Rhodesia, is not alone in pointing out that the modern African cultivator who is in any way successful lives in fear of the envy of his neighbour, who may point to his farming success as a clear demonstration of the use of sorcery. There is the story recounted by anthropologist M.G. Marwick, of an African migratory worker who returns to his village, after months of absence, loaded with purchases and savings, but who must sneak into his own dwelling after dark, so as not to be seen. Members of his large and extended family who felt he had

been mean towards them might well accuse him of sorcery or might practise sorcery against him. In a way, sorcery acts as a levelling mechanism in the economic life of a community. And although this is only one aspect of the function of sorcery, it is a function that is often overlooked. In recent times an African cultivator who had most successfully adopted European agricultural practices was murdered. Parts of his body were distributed so that the magic that he had obtained could benefit the whole community. This act was probably a completely unconscious rationalization that restored the *status quo* in a manner wholly acceptable to everyone in the community, except the dead man.

The relationship of an outbreak of witch hysteria to socially unsettled times has been noted by a number of writers and may well explain in different terms much of the disquiet during the 1970s when there were extreme sub-groups opposed to society at large. Although the rituals of such groups are no longer centred on the Devil, they are supposed to have strong sexual undertones, and in their dance routines, their drug-taking and nakedness, they come close to paralleling the fantasies of the witches' sabbath. There cannot be much doubt that world society since the Second World War has been passing through a period of change, but whether it is more anxiety-provoking than the socio-economic turmoil that followed in the wake of the Black Death in the 14th century is another matter. Social and economic change was already in progress when the plague reached epidemic proportions, so that it merely enlarged a process that had been evident for some time. But it would be unwise to undervalue its importance. It has been estimated that some 25 million people died of plague in Europe alone; and that the population of England was reduced by a figure of between one third and one half.

Search for a Scapegoat

The already decaying manorial system crumbled after the Black Death, and its collapse smashed for ever the extended family system in England, with its group responsibility towards the individual, its comfortable social loyalties and ties. From this desolation was to emerge the modern nuclear family and eventually the tougher and much more individualistic mercantile practices that are the basis of modern capitalism.

It is significant that in Britain it was only in the trail of social desolation that followed the Black Death that there was an upsurge of witchcraft accusations. A close parallel has been established in the Eket district of Calabar, Nigeria, which had been decimated by the influenza outbreak in 1918–19. A spate of witchcraft accusations followed the epidemic, and 110 persons perished after ordeal by poison, while in one small village in the area, 18 persons were hanged. The great 19th century historian, William Lecky, noted collateral evidence of a similar nature in Switzerland and Germany, where plague deaths were subsequently attributed to the malice of Jews.

Epidemic and natural disasters concern us not only because our simpler rural forefathers required some sort of theological explanation, but because, in the resultant socio-economic dislocation, they produced states of acute anxiety in the afflicted communities. It is well known that as English manors disintegrated, because of acute labour shortages, landowners turned to less labour-intensive activities such as sheep-farming. The able-bodied were advantageously freed to sell their labour anywhere, but the old and infirm were rather like people whose pension rights had been suddenly removed. Often denied all privileges they had earned in the manor, and physically enfeebled, they had no welfare state to turn to. Robert Cowley thundered: 'They take our houses over our heads, they levy great fines, they enclose our commons. In the country we cannot tarry, but we must be their slaves and labour till our hearts burst and then they have all.' Despite their brutality, our forefathers could not consciously accept the extermination of unproductive or unwanted sectors of the population. But, with theological support, the witchcraft accusation provided a quasi-legal process to eliminate thousands of economically useless old women (see OLD AGE AND WITCHCRAFT).

Link with Mental Illness

The 16th century stereotype of the witch as a mumbling old crone was well expressed in the verbal cartoon of Reginald Scot, author of *A Discoverie of Witchcraft*, and perpetuated in our times by Walt Disney. Although J. C. Baroja has noted her appearance in Spain, she is central to the English tradition. German, French, and even Scottish witches are often young and pretty. In Africa the witch is more likely to be a jealous younger wife. But European society, and particularly English society, has experienced a good deal of stress in trying to accommodate the elderly. In fact, the unending spate of 'in-law' jokes indicates underlying tensions as little resolved today as they were centuries ago. If the *maleficium* continues to exist, the ducking-chair and the stake have gone. Of course, another factor has changed. Many elderly women in our present-day society have led economically active lives and their pensions render them relatively independent. Their final retirement is marred less by want than by loneliness. In Africa, the inchoate jealousies that so easily disrupt a psychically closely related group such as a family, take other forms. Marwick's brilliant depiction of Cewa society in Zambia shows that the polygamous family is often saved from collapse by the accusation of witchcraft brought against a disruptive wife. Behaviour that is disruptive of the social life of a group is also detrimental to its economic production.

There is a further interesting link between social disruption and economic well-being. Recent descriptions of the personalities of psychotics bear a close resemblance to contemporary verbal cartoons of medieval witches (see HYSTERICAL POSSESSION). In one study, a sample of the American psychotic population was examined by Hollingshead and Redlich, and divided

into five classes. Class 5 was described as a group that was hostile, self-centred and suspicious. This group consisted almost entirely of factory hands and unskilled labourers, people with low educational standards, who had all the personality characteristics that lead to further isolation and discrimination. The authors of this study commented that these people had about them 'a spell of gloom and disaster which they exuded even when they were not depressed . . .' Centuries earlier the Swiss physician Thomas Erastus (1524–83) had described women accused of witchcraft as having a 'corrupt fantasy abounding with melancholic humour'. In the 1960s Michael Gelfand, speaking as an experienced physician, asserted that in Africa 'a sullen, sour, unfriendly personality is linked with the witch.'

If the psychotics in the American study resemble witches, both are frequently at the bottom of the economic ladder. The gradual extrusion of these difficult, un-economic members of society has been examined in a recent study by Y. Talmon. Working among ageing women in Israeli collectives, she found that they tended slowly to retreat from communal affairs and to show increasing anxiety about their shrinking economic and, therefore, social status.

The importance of the economic factor in social cohesion (and hence an important element in the dynamics of witchcraft) is evident in the work of M. J. Field in Ghana. There, shrines manned by priests are open several times a week to ordinary men and women who want to discuss their problems and troubles. These therapeutic sessions are a source of significant socio-psychological information. In Dr Field's analysis of some 2500 cases at one shrine, it is interesting to note that the highest single class of consultation was 'Complaints of "not prospering"'. 'Not prospering' includes the wrecking of one's lorry, failure to let property, bad marksmanship on the part of a hunter or personal sickness. But the African goes further with such human complaints. Why, he wants to know, is he not prospering whilst his neighbour is? Sometimes, Dr Field found, patients had their own solutions for their troubles. 'Witches have caused people to dislike me,' one reported.

The Cause of Failure

Failure is seldom seen as a personal responsibility. In African psychology there is always the outside power, apparently a projection of internal anxieties, that is responsible – the witch or the evil power that bears a personal animosity. Among the consultants at the shrine were two policemen asking for protection from their colleagues, a dismissed teacher and various schoolboys who had failed their examinations. Some applicants for help demand support because 'I want help in destroying my enemies' or 'I am not prospering because of my envious brother'. In Ghana the alcoholic is the victim of witchcraft. Economically disintegrating, the drunkard laments: 'You see how my house is spoilt. Witches have done that. My house is full of witches, and they have made me a drunkard.'

In the trail of desolation that the Black Death left in its wake there was an upsurge of accusations of witchcraft, and a similar reaction to social and economic stress is known from other societies: illustration from a 15th century Book of Hours, reflecting the terror of plague

And just as English witch lore is full of complaints about envious neighbours who have caused crops to be bewitched and reduced, so the Ghanaian farmer attends a shrine to complain about pests and disasters of climate – but he generally regards these as instruments of witchcraft and bad medicine. As Dr Field comments, financially successful men are certain that envious kinsmen will do their best by means of bad medicines to 'bring them down'.

If we move from the stresses of interpersonal relations to the macroscopic tensions that erupt into inter-group conflict, we find a close association between economic forces and atavistic expression. The Mau Mau insurrection which marred the British withdrawal from East Africa is an example (see KIKUYU). Reports during the Mau Mau period suggested a return to the practices of black magic, and although much that was sensational was frankly hysterical, it is of interest to realize that the Kikuyu revolt only came about as a result of British administrative pressures which attempted to confine the Kikuyu to agriculturally depleted reserves that were incapable of supporting the population.

The Mau Mau leadership came from migrants who had flocked to the towns, had been deported to their own reserves by the authorities and, driven by hunger, had returned again to the towns. Their oath, like almost any ritual, was a device to create unity. The Mau Mau was a large fragment of society that had splintered from its matrix; and oaths, rituals, symbols were essential anthropologically to give positive stance to a negative commitment.

The Kikuyu were described as endemically secretive, a sour, inward-looking people – an obvious stereotype, of course, and not far removed from Hollingshead's Class 5. The rehabilitation of Mau Mau detainees closely resembled many of the medieval practices. T. G. Askwith, who led the psychological cleaning-up operations, postulated the necessity of attacking feelings and emotions. Consequently the first step in the process was a confession that 'would get rid of the poison of Mau Mau'.

Living in a different period of history, we have not completely interpreted the Mau Mau insurrection as a manifestation of witchcraft, although in its rituals and in the administrative treatment of rehabilitation, it had many elements in common. Almost always, sorcery and witchcraft are associated with pressures that are not resolved by normal social procedure. They offer a means of expression to the extruded; they express the anxiety of the economically unviable without, unfortunately, in any way resolving his deeper inadequacies.

(See also FINDING OF WITCHES; WITCH-CRAFT.)

BRIAN ROSE





Sortilege

Divination by lots, from Latin *sors*, 'lot', and *legere*, 'to read': *sortes* is the type of divination which picks a passage at random from Homer, Virgil, the Bible or some other work as a guide to the future: more generally, a term for magic, sorcery and witchcraft. See DIVINATION; LOTS.

Soteriology

Technical term, from Greek *soter*, 'deliverer' or 'saviour', for the branch of theology concerned with the doctrine of salvation, the redemption of fallen man by Jesus Christ.

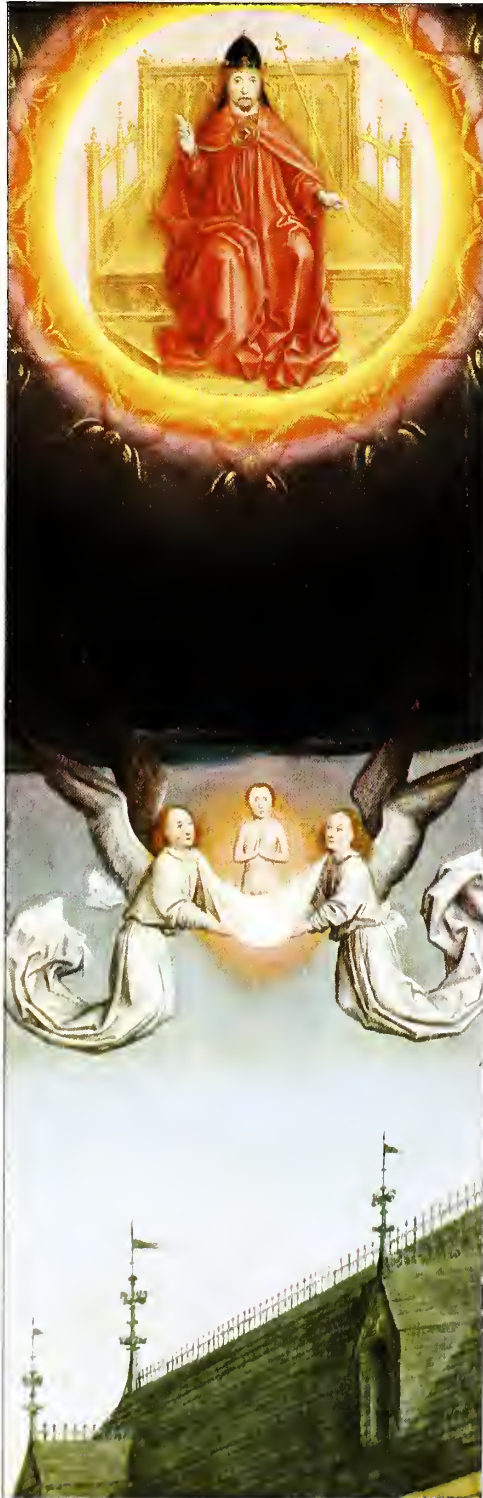
The idea of the soul as an entity which can exist outside the body occurs among many primitive peoples, some of whom believe that each person has more than one soul

SOUL

THE BELIEF in a spiritual element of the human personality distinct from the visible and tangible body is widespread among primitive peoples. Ideas about the nature of this element vary greatly and its equation with the 'soul' as conceived by Christians is only of limited relevance. There is, however, the fairly general assumption that an invisible substance, separable from the material body, is responsible for the phenomena which distinguish the living from the dead. According to the views of some peoples, this element is the 'soul' or 'life-substance' of a person, and its temporary separation from the body leads to illness or loss of consciousness, while permanent separation causes death.

The enlivening element which may be described as 'soul' is not necessarily considered as totally immaterial, for it is sometimes associated with the breath or the shadow of a person (see BREATH; SHADOW), and under certain circumstances it can manifest itself and become perceivable as a phantom or ghost. Yet the idea that the soul is not merely a function of the living body, such as the breath, but an entity by itself capable of existing outside the body occurs among many primitive populations. Frequently this element is described in terms suggesting not complete insubstantiality but a finer type of materiality such as that of breath, shadow or double (see DOUBLE). It is in the nature of a soul to be capable of surviving after the body's decomposition following death. But there is a common belief that a disembodied soul is not necessarily freed from the exigencies of earthly life; it may be in need of the attention of the living and depend on their offerings of food.

The experience of dreams has certainly influenced the development of the belief in an immaterial part of the personality which can move about freely and encounter people in distant places while the body of the sleeper is known to remain static. In the



19th century, anthropologists such as E. B. Tylor, made a great deal of the role of dreams as the source not only of the concept of the soul but also of the belief in ghosts and spirits, beings conceived in the image of disembodied souls existing and acting independent of a tangible and visible body. This theory, generally known as animism (see ANIMISM), may well explain certain concepts of ancestor spirits and demons, but it cannot account entirely for the belief in spirits and gods belonging to a sphere outside the world of men and of a nature different from that of the human soul.

How Many Souls to a Body?

Christian doctrine assumes that man is endowed with a single soul, in which his personality survives after death, but which during his lifetime has no perceivable separate existence. The views of many primitive peoples on the composition of the human personality are far more complex. Beliefs in a plurality of invisible elements associated with one body are widespread, and the idea of multiple 'souls' is current in many primitive societies. Sometimes they are thought to be localized in different parts of the body during life, and almost invariably they have separate fortunes after death. The Menomini, an American Indian tribe, used to assign one soul to the head and another to the heart. After death the former was believed to roam about aimlessly, to linger about the grave and whistle in the dark, and this soul was given offerings by the kinsmen of the deceased. The other soul was believed to travel to the realm of the spirits and to dwell there without ever returning to earth. The Bagobo of the Philippines distinguish a right-hand and a left-hand soul. The former is manifested as the shadow on a person's right side, and is believed not to leave the body until death. When a person dies, this soul goes straight from the grave to the underworld, and by purification it becomes a naturalized spirit, who joins his predecessors in a mode of life closely patterned on that of

In major religions the fate of the soul is generally believed to be determined by the dead person's conduct in life, an idea which is frequently absent from primitive beliefs: *The Soul of St Bertin Carried up to God*, by the 15th century Dutch painter Simon Marmion

A dead Egyptian and her soul in the form of a bird receive water from Nut, protectress of the dead: illustration on a funerary casket, c 1000 BC. The Egyptians believed that at death a free-moving entity separated itself from the body but remained in close proximity to it

the living. The left-hand soul appears as the shadow on the left side and also as a man's reflection in water (see also MIRROR). It is this soul which leaves the body at night to go flying about the world. These adventures are fraught with danger, for were a demon to catch it, the owner of the soul would fall ill and ultimately die. At the moment of death the left-hand soul leaves the body and then becomes merged in the company of demons who cause disease. The left-hand soul is associated with sickness and pain, whereas the right-hand soul is a source of health, activity and joy.

Some American Indian tribes attributed four souls to every human body, and certain Melanesians believe that a man possesses seven souls of different type. The implications of a belief in several distinct elements in a person's spiritual make-up are exemplified by the Gonds, an aboriginal tribe of central India. The Gonds share with many Indian tribes the belief that a child in the mother's womb is lifeless until a *jiv*, or life-substance enters and animates the embryo. This life-substance is sent into the child by Bhagavan, the supreme deity, and failing the arrival of the life-substance the child will be still-born. During a Gond's life little attention is paid to the life-substance, which is unrelated to a man's consciousness or emotions. But when a Gond's span of life draws to its end, the supreme deity recalls the life-substance and thereby causes death. When a life-substance has returned to the deity, it is added to a pool of such life-substances available for reincarnation, and the link between the personality of the deceased and the life-substance comes to an end as soon as the latter returns to this pool. Thereafter it may be reincarnated in any living creature, be it animal or man, but there is a likelihood that a man's life-substance will be reincarnated in the son of one of his sons.

Despite this belief in the possibility of reincarnation within the same family, the personality of the deceased does not adhere to the life-substance but to another element, the *sanal*, which corresponds to the 'shade' or soul of the dead in the Homeric view of the underworld. Nearly all the rites and ceremonies of Gond funerals and memorial feasts, as well as the subsequent cult of the ancestors, relate to the shade in whom the personality of the departed is perpetuated. While in the moment of death the life-substance moves to the realm of the supreme deity, the shade is believed to linger near the corpse and throughout the funeral rites the presence of the shade is very much in the minds of the mourners. From the house of death the shade follows the bier bearers to the grave or the cremation-ground and hovers close by while the mourners dispose of the corpse. Immediately after the burial or cremation the mourners go to a stream and put down a miniature seat, a twig such



C. M. Dixon British Museum

as Gonds use for cleaning the teeth, and a cup of water. They then address the departed and admonish him to sit on the seat and to rinse his mouth, in the belief that the shade should purify himself from the pollution of death. Then a goat or fowl is sacrificed, and the cooked flesh is offered to the shade with the request to eat of it and to grant his favour to the living.

A soul in need of purification by means of a twig and water, and capable of partaking of food, is clearly not thought of as completely immaterial, but its substantiality is of a different and more subtle kind than that of living persons.

After the funeral the Gonds perform a rite whereby the shade of the deceased is joined with the company of the shades dwelling in fields and forest. This rite reflects the belief that for some time after death the shades roam the world of the living, but normally they live in the Land of the Dead, and an elaborate ritual is designed to introduce the shade of a recently departed to the company of the ancestors and the clan deities who reside with them in the underworld. There the shades lead a life very similar to life on earth, and every man and woman is believed to join ultimately his or her original spouse, even though several other marriages may have followed the first marital union. Although the souls of the departed live in a sphere of their own, they are not far removed from the living, and they come to the houses of their surviving kinsmen and partake of the food offered to them on the occasion of feasts. Far from

dreading contact with the shades of the departed, the Gonds believe in their beneficial influence and the blessings they can bestow on the living. It is only when their cult is neglected that they may withdraw their favour.

Condemned to Roam the Earth

In so far as the afterlife is concerned, the shade approximates the Western concept of the 'soul' much more closely than does the life-substance to which adheres very little of a man's personality. Being the dead person minus the material body and the animating life-substance, the shade retains the personality of the deceased, and remains within the framework of the social system which places him in certain prescribed relationships to the living as well as to the dead members of Gond society. However, Gonds believe that in exceptional circumstances, a deceased may be unable to join the company of ancestors in the Land of the Dead, but turns into an evil spirit condemned to roam this earth and haunt the living. This may be the fate of a woman who died in pregnancy or childbirth. To encounter the ghost of such a woman is highly dangerous; the mere sight of her may cause a wasting disease or even death, and women who died in childbirth are buried in such a way as to make their emergence from the grave as difficult as possible.

Different from the concept of the soul or shade, which represents a man's personality surviving after death in a transformed state, is that of a soul which can leave a

man's body even during his lifetime. Many primitive peoples, such as the tribes of central and northern Asia, believe that a man's soul has a separate existence, and they attribute disease to the soul's having strayed away or been stolen. Treatment is in principle reduced to finding it, capturing it, and obliging it to resume its place in the patient's body. Only a shaman or spirit-medium can undertake a cure of this kind, for only he recognizes that the soul has fled, and is able to overtake it. In a state of trance or ecstasy he 'sees' the spirits who may have abducted the soul and can follow them into their realm and bargain with them for the soul's release. While an ordinary person's soul may detach itself from the body involuntarily, the shaman is capable of

sending his own soul into the world of the spirits and there searching for the truant soul of his patient (see SHAMAN).

Here the soul is clearly a separate entity and not merely the personality which after the death of the body appears as a shade, as believed by the Gonds. Certain Himalayan tribes, for instance, perform at every wedding an elaborate rite in order to induce the soul of the bride to reside happily in her new home. For it is believed that if her

As the soul of a dying man is breathed out of his body, angels and demons fight for control of it; for many peoples the soul is not merely a function of the living body but is capable of survival after death: drawing from De Plancy's *Dictionnaire Infernal*, 1835



soul were to escape from her husband's house, the bride would pine and die.

The soul-concepts of north Asian peoples are complicated by the belief that man can have as many as three or even seven souls. At death one of them remains in the grave, another descends to the realm of shades, and a third ascends to the sky. Some north Asian tribes believe that at death one soul disappears or is eaten by demons, and during earthly life may cause illness by its flight.

The Vengeful Ghosts

Among primitive peoples we find two contrasting attitudes to the souls of the dead. Most Indian tribes, such as the Gonds, endeavour to maintain contact with the departed, believing that their support and favour will aid the prosperity of surviving kinsmen. In Africa, on the other hand, there is a widespread desire to turn the dead away from the living and to prevent them from meddling in their affairs. Thus the Nuer of the southern Sudan (see NUER) bury the dead with their backs to the homesteads and their eyes to the bush, in order to induce the ghost of the dead person to look outwards and leave the living alone. There is no cult of the dead and their graves are soon forgotten. The Nuer, like many other African tribes however, believe that ghosts may come to trouble the living. The dead are resentful of injustice and bear malice to those who have wronged them. Hence those who have recently become ghosts may take vengeance on anyone who harmed them in their earthly life.

We can conclude that most primitive people have a belief in an element in the human personality which survives in one form or other after death. Less general but still of considerable currency is the assumption that an intangible part of man can separate itself from the body and stray to other spheres, but that permanent separation inevitably results in the death of the body. The Christian idea of one single immortal soul, completely identified with a man's or woman's personality, is only one of numerous ideas regarding the spiritual side of human nature. The fate of the soul or other spiritual entity after death is rarely connected with a person's moral conduct in this life. More common is the belief that the circumstances of a person's death determine the future life of the surviving soul, and that those who died an accidental or violent death turn into malignant ghosts who cannot find rest and constitute a source of danger to the living.

Most of the assumptions of modern Spiritualism regarding the nature and fate of the souls of the dead are anticipated by the beliefs and practices of primitive peoples, and it would seem that a great variety of attitudes towards the spiritual elements in the human personality has persisted throughout the ages.

(For the soul in major religions, see MAN; and see also BRAHMAN; BURIAL; CULT OF THE DEAD; GHOSTS; HAUNTED HOUSES; IMMORTALITY; JUDGEMENT OF THE DEAD; PACT; PSYCHOLOGY; REINCARNATION; SPIRITUALISM.)

C. VON FÜRER-HAIMENDORF

SOUTH AMERICA

In the candomblés of Brazil, descendants of slaves beg favours equally from St Peter or the African Xango; while among their wealthier white countrymen a girl who wants her lover back will offer perfume and champagne to Iemanjá, and a man who seeks Exu's help in a lawsuit will pour whisky over the roots of a certain tree

BRAZIL IS UNIQUE in South America for it has its own language – Portuguese – and its own religion – spiritism. The Vatican refers to Brazil as 'the largest Catholic nation in the world', but the majority of its 90 million people practise a form of spirit worship that has never received the approval of Rome.

Spiritism in Brazil (not quite the same thing as Spiritualism) goes back centuries to Africa, to the enlightened and progressive West Africa of the Yoruba culture and the nation of Benin, famous for its magnificent bronze sculptures and masks. The Yoruba developed in the region known today as southern Nigeria; they had their own cities, armies, priesthoods, elites and political systems. The people were guided by a host of deities and spirits that were all-seeing and all-powerful. They were everywhere: in the sky, in the trees, under rocks and inside animals. They could be called upon at any time and for any reason, but they demanded gifts and devotion.

The god Orolum was their Jehovah. He was so omnipotent that there was no direct way to approach him. An intermediary, or *orisha*, had to be used, and he would have to be convinced of a mortal's sincerity before he would take the request to his chief.

The two most important messengers were a black Adam and Eve who descended from heaven to the African jungles to intercede for Yoruba tribesmen. They had a son named Aganju and a daughter called Iemanjá; brother and sister married and had a son named Orungan. When Orungan

Blood is poured over the head of a young boy holding a sacrificed cockerel during a Brazilian spiritism ritual: many old African beliefs and practices, originally brought by Negro slaves, have survived and have coalesced with aspects of Christianity to create vigorous new religious movements





grew to be a man he fell in love with his own mother. Iemanja repulsed his advances and tried to run away, but he caught her, knocked her to the ground and raped her. Iemanja was so ashamed of what had happened that she went into the jungle and hid. There her belly began to grow at an alarming rate. From her breasts spurted two fountains of water that became lakes. Then her womb burst open and out came the hierarchy of Yoruba spiritism: the god of thunder and the god of twins, the god of hunting, the goddess of disease, the god of wealth, the god of war, and five others. After 11 children had been born to her, she then gave birth to the sun and the moon. Thus Iemanja became the mother of all spirits and the most powerful and

The Umbanda cult of Brazil is a unique hybrid religion combining African paganism, spiritism, and Christianity; at a beach initiation ceremony drums and bottles of champagne play as vital a role as statues of Christian saints

enerated of women in Yoruba mythology.

When the Portuguese initiated the slave trade at the beginning of the 16th century, Arab buyers attacked the villages and bound the tribesmen in chains. They were herded and branded like cattle, marched to the sea and stacked in layers inside slave ships. Many of them had never seen the sea, and when the ocean rolled, and the ships felt as if they were sinking, the slaves had only one hope of salvation; the goddess Iemanja. They begged her not to let them drown and

prayed to her to calm the waters. When they arrived safely on Brazilian soil they were positive it had been Iemanja who had listened to them and who had delivered them from the terrors of a watery grave. She had guided them to safety. She and all her sons and daughters were immediately venerated in the New World.

Saints Merged with Spirits

The Portuguese were generally comparatively lenient masters, and they were also easy-going Catholics. Many of their religious beliefs were mixed with superstition and folklore, relics of centuries of Moorish influence. They believed in the Evil Eye, black magic and the power of amulets. Ideologically, Rome had always been at a

One by one the Christian saints became confused with the Yoruba spirits, and in less than a generation they were one and the same personality

distance from Lisbon, but it was almost on another planet from Brazil. The Portuguese masters were uninterested, therefore, in the gods their slaves worshipped as long as the work was done. When the Blacks set up altars to Iemanja and the other spirits they were allowed to keep them. The masters even allowed them to beat drums and light candles; and as long as the services did not end in physical injury, the masters were unconcerned.

But visiting Catholic priests were concerned, and admonished the Portuguese, insisting that their slaves should be converted to Christianity. The Church even threatened to take away slaves who remained pagan. So the masters held classes where the lives of the saints were read, and gave the slaves plaster statues of their various Christian heroes; and told them to worship them. The slaves were delighted because it gave them a new and very powerful collection of deities to pray to. If their masters worked through these white spirits, then they must be very strong indeed. They were pleased that the Virgin Mary was so important and looked so much like Iemanja. They put the image of Mary right up on the altar beside the goddess of the waters. Soon the two women were fused into one deity who would answer to either name. Other saints were also mingled with their jungle counterparts: Oxala was the god of purity and goodness, so he merged easily with Jesus. Xango was the spirit of the wilderness; he and St John the Baptist became one. Omulu was the spirit of disease and therefore a natural partner for St Lazarus, the poor man who was 'full of sores', mentioned in the parable in Luke, chapter 16. One by one the Christian saints became confused with the Yoruba spirits, and in less than a generation they were one and the same personality.

When the slaves of the northern states, Ceara and Amazonas, were freed in 1884

Iemanja, the mother of all spirits, and goddess of the sea, who saved the slaves from the perils of the journey from Africa to the New World, is still venerated; every New Year's Eve, crowds gather on the Copacabana Beach, Rio de Janeiro, to honour her *Above right* The faithful prostrate themselves before her picture *Right* The 'mother' and 'father' of the saints carry her picture to the sea



C. Waterson



C. Waterson



Left A woman prostrates herself before an Umbanda altar decorated with the images of Catholic saints: Umbanda is full of beliefs, rituals and recipes to smooth out life's daily problems, and appeasements are offered to the spirits for everything from success in business to good-fortune in love

Right Brazilian spirit doctors play a vital role in a society where there are too few medical facilities: a spirit doctor blesses a cripple whom he has just cured

lives bettered by Xango. They claim they cannot become so intimate with the gods at the Catholic Church because the spirits there do not live and breathe: they just stare down from niches on the wall. At a *candomblé* the people are in the actual presence of the gods.

Faith for the Upper Class

Down the coast, in wealthy Rio de Janeiro, the upper-class Brazilians wanted something else in a religion. Catholicism failed to provide the answers to all their questions, as did the pagan African transplant of *Candomblé*. The wealthy and educated believed in spirits and spirit healing but could not reconcile themselves to worshipping beings such as Iemanjá and Orolum. The whites needed a more 'civilized' way of believing in spirits, and found it through a Frenchman.

Alan Kardek (whose real name was Denizard Rivail) was a 55-year-old doctor of medicine in Paris. A scientist and sceptic, he trusted nothing he could not see. One evening, when he was present at an exclusive Parisian *salon*, the hostess, much to his astonishment, made her guests play 'table-rapping'. Kardek sat at a heavy round table and placed his hands on its surface along with everyone else. Shortly the table began to rap out messages. It told where Mme 'X' had misplaced her jewels and whom M 'Y' would marry. The spirit of the table identified itself as being that of a famous and long dead poet. The guests laughed at the table's messages but Kardek was not amused. He was incredulous, then appalled, and finally intrigued. He contended, as a doctor and scientist, that if these messages really came from the departed they should be taken seriously and should not be used for idle parlour games but should be seriously investigated. And if there really were spirits, then did not their very existence put an entirely new aspect on all the sciences?

He sent out teams of researchers armed with the same set of questions, to visit table-rapping parties across France. When they returned to Paris their answers were compared and found to be amazingly similar. Kardek became certain that spirits did exist and that they were trying to contact the living. He devoted the rest of his life to questioning them and compiling their answers.

In 1857 Kardek published his research,

they set up churches and called them *candomblés* (meeting places). Black women, who were the religious leaders during captivity, because they had more free time than the men for elaborate rituals, became the high priestesses. Their acolytes, also women, were chosen from the devout who wished someday to move up the hierarchy themselves. The men were limited to beating the drums.

There are some 700 *Candomblé* spirit temples in the city of Salvador, Brazil, today that are faithful to the rituals of the Afro-Christian slave churches of the past. The high priestess (called 'Mother of the Saints') trains her 'daughters' in the art of charms, spells, ritual, African dialects and cures. The congregation sits divided, men on one

side of the room and the women on the other. Drums beat and candles are lit in the four corners while special food and alcoholic drinks are placed outside to keep Exu, the Devil, away from the ceremony. The dancers swirl to the rhythm of the drums and sing imploringly for the spirits to descend. One by one the dancers become possessed and take on the physical characteristics of their particular deity. Then they are dressed in the costume of that specific spirit and are led in a trance around the room blessing and embracing those who believe.

For true adepts, it is important to be present. They believe that the spirit saints are in that very room. The devout can touch the Virgin Mary. They can ask a blessing of St Peter. They can have their

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Right As the dawn of the New Year breaks on Copacabana Beach, the crowds still cluster round their offerings to the goddess Iemanja
Facing page (left) flowers placed in the sand in honour of Iemanja and *(right)* candles still burn after the long night celebrations

calling it *The Spirits' Book*. It dealt with the spirit world, its origins, its various planes and its various classes. A small group formed around Kardek and supplied him with funds to continue his research, but on the whole he was ignored in France. In England there was a brief flurry of interest in his views, but this also died away. Then a nobleman of the Brazilian emperor's court returned to Rio de Janeiro from Europe with a copy of Kardek's book. It was just what upper-class Brazilians had been looking for. It was by a cultured Frenchman, he was a scientist and he was white. Also, he said what they had been waiting to hear: 'There is no death.'

His writings were quickly translated into Portuguese, and Kardekian centres sprang up all over Brazil. The better educated attended meetings, joined hands and received messages. They studied the rules that the spirits laid down to govern human behaviour, they learned to combine the spirits' ideas with those of Christ, and they learned how to heal by the laying on of hands.

Laying on of Hands

Kardek temples, numbering some 3000 in present-day Brazil, specialize in curing the body so that the mind can do its necessary work. Cures are performed by a medium stretching out his hands and letting jets of electricity speed from his fingers into the patient's aura, which is believed to be imbalanced. The aura, transmitter of physical health and mental balance, is regulated, thus stopping its damaging effect on the flesh of the patient.

Kardek doctors claim cures for thousands of believers after just one visit to an *Espiritista* service. Cripples have been reported to walk again, skindiseases have disappeared and the blind have regained their sight. A well-known psychic surgeon, Jose Arigo, has performed operations under strict surveillance, yet no sign of fraud or subterfuge has ever been noted. Kardek spiritists also work to orientate lost souls back to the spirit world, claiming that many confused 'souls', especially after an accident or an unexpected illness, are roaming the earth in search of their missing mortal bodies.

There is yet another form of Brazilian spiritism. It is called *Umbanda* and, at times, referred to erroneously as *Macumba*. *Umbanda* was created about 50 years ago



by a Kardek medium who felt that African Candomblé was too 'low' for the average man and Kardek spiritism too 'high'. What was needed was a mixture of the best of both creeds. *Umbanda* was the result. The primitive gods (including Iemanja), the drum beats, the candles and the body-racking possessions are present, taken from the African rituals. The Kardek rituals that were retained were veneration of Jesus Christ, communication with the dead and curing by the laying on of hands. It is a unique, hybrid religion with some 500 churches and meeting places across Brazil.

At last the majority of Brazilians had found a religion with which they could identify. At an *Umbanda* session the spirits spoke in Portuguese, not in African dialects.

One could converse directly with the Old Slave, the Devil and even the Virgin Mary. The spirits advised, they cast spells and they cured. The spirits were with the people, on their level.

Umbanda is full of beliefs, rituals and recipes to smooth out life's daily problems. There are *despachos* (appeasements) to the spirits for everything. If a shopkeeper wants success in business he lights three candles to Ogun behind his closed shop door and hangs up a carved jacaranda fist called the *figa*. If a girl wants a missing lover to return home, she lights three candles on the beach at midnight and throws such gifts as flowers, combs, perfume or champagne into the sea for Iemanja. If a man wants to win a court case he makes a photostat copy of all



C. Waterson

Foto Hetezel

the important documents and buries them at the base of a tree standing at a deserted crossroads; then he lights seven candles to Exu and pours a bottle of cheap whisky over the tree's roots. He also leaves a fresh cigar and an unopened box of matches for the spirit. When he wins the case he brings a whole box of fine cigars and a better brand of whisky in gratitude for the spirit's services.

Meeting a Secular Need

Brazil is a gigantic, sprawling land and it is difficult for the bureaucratic federal government to supply the populace with their basic needs. Both the Kardek churches and the Umbanda temples have therefore set up schools, orphanages, homes for old people, free clinics and pharmacies for their members. These charitable institutions far outnumber anything established by the government or the local Roman Catholic Church. Spirit doctors perform an important service in a nation where the ratio is around one doctor for every 4400 citizens. In some areas of the interior there is no doctor for 15,000 square miles and the people depend on spirit doctors and priests for cures. Whether the treatment is completely effective or not is not the point; the important thing is that the people do not feel abandoned. 'To be an Umbandista,' a popular saying goes, 'is to practise good for others'.

The Roman Catholic Church has made some attempt to combat spiritism in Brazil but has completely failed. Some years ago a young Franciscan priest named Bonaventura Kloppenburg was appointed by the

Vatican to denounce the various religions and reveal them, on television and in meeting halls, as fraudulent. He lectured and travelled around the nation; he made tables 'talk' and defied curses and hexes. Once he even healed a boy who was blind. He became a celebrity in his own right and was called to Rome where he tried to tell Pope Pius XII all about Brazilian spiritism. Later John XXIII asked the young priest to stop his work against the spirits and help him organize the Vatican II Congress. No one replaced him in his fight against the spirit religions.

It must be emphasized that the followers of spiritism in Brazil are not just the poorer, blacker and more ignorant classes. Such lines of wealth, race and education cannot be drawn. While it is true that the upper classes will deny their beliefs when asked about them by a foreigner, they will never do anything against a spirit organization nor belittle any deity or ritual. Almost everyone in Brazil has a friend or a relative who was cured, hexed or saved by a spirit. Wealthier homes may have a Picasso print in the living-room but they will almost always have an image of Iemanja or the Old Slave in a back bedroom. Appeasements to the gods can be seen glowing under neon lights on fashionable street corners. Steaks, bottles of alcohol and dishes of cornmeal are set out to the gods in central areas of Rio de Janeiro, yet starving dogs and hungry humans never touch them. Each New Year's Eve, Copacabana beach, Rio de Janeiro's wealthy coastal area, is filled with thousands of spirit believers who come

to honour Iemanja. They wear full white skirts or white shirts and trousers. They light candles in the sand and beat on drums, and strew the beach with flowers and gifts. Some of them will sacrifice chickens or goats. Then at midnight, as fireworks are exploding and radios from the expensive beach-front apartments play *Auld Lang Syne*, they surge into the ocean tossing presents and praying to the goddess.

The rest of South America has accepted the teachings of the Vatican almost completely. The Spaniards, who conquered the whole of South America except Brazil and the Guianas, were devout and merciless Catholics. There are a few pockets in Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia and northern Argentina where Inca gods and beliefs are still venerated, but these ceremonies are heavily laced with Catholic ritual and ideas. The few Inca festivities that have remained take place under the tolerant eyes of local padres. Almost nothing is left of the rituals once observed by the Indians of Paraguay. Moslem mosques can be found in Guyana and Surinam because of the large immigrant population from India. Negroes from Colombia, Surinam, Guyana and French Guiana have a kind of 'voodoo' that is closer to the New Orleans and Haitian versions than the spiritism of Brazil.

(See also NEW RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS.)

DAVID ST CLAIR

FURTHER READING: D. St Clair, *Drum and Candle* (Macdonald, 1971), G. Playfair, *The Flying Cow* (Souvenir Press, 1975).

JOANNA SOUTHCOTT

'WAR, DISEASE, crime and banditry will increase until the Bishops open Joanna Southcott's box' – so say the advertisements which the Panacea Society of Bedford, England, still place in newspapers. The society is the descendant of the groups of people who surrounded a remarkable prophetess of the early years of the 19th century. A dairy-maid, turned domestic servant, born in Devonshire in 1750, Joanna Southcott had joined the Methodists in 1791, but only a year later had discovered that hers was no ordinary vocation but that she was indeed the 'woman clothed with

the sun' of Revelation, chapter 12. This assurance was backed up by a prophetic gift which caused an enormous amount of stir in the Exeter area, so much so that by 1801 she had been carefully vetted by the Rev T. P. Foley, an Anglican rector, who pronounced himself convinced and was rewarded by Joanna by being named as one of the stars which adorned her crown.

In essence, her teaching was simple. She saw that as man had first been led astray by a woman, so by another woman would he be saved. In Christian thought this parallelism is, of course, already present in the comparison between Eve and the 'second Eve' – the Virgin Mary who, as the Mother of Christ, is the instrument of man's

redemption from the original sin precipitated by the first woman.

Joanna Southcott, however, took this second Eve to be herself and set about establishing her followers as the 144,000 of the elect who were to be saved (Revelation, chapter 7). She 'sealed' them into the faith and about 14,000 people took part in such ceremonies – each paying between 12 shillings and 21 shillings for the privilege. Her followers were called upon to observe many of the Jewish laws and particular emphasis was laid upon keeping the Sabbath as well as attention to the dietary restrictions of the Old Testament. She presented each of those who were 'sealed' with a signed certificate, on which was written: 'The

Sealed of the Lord – the Elect-Precious Man's Redemption – To inherit the Tree of Life – To be made Heirs of God and Joint-Heirs with Jesus Christ.' Those who received the paper were said to be already saved.

Unfortunately, in 1809, one of the elect was hanged for murder and thus some doubt was cast on the infallibility of Joanna's selection procedures. She therefore ceased the practice but continued to bombard the bishops of the Church of England, the peers of the realm, and every member of the House of Commons with letters putting forward her views. In all, Joanna Southcott produced some 60 publications, and her correspondence books as well as some writing in her own shorthand are preserved. It is, however, not by her known writings that she is best remembered, but through the two remarkable claims she made. She left behind her a sealed box which was only to be opened by the bishops of the Church as foretold in the Apocalypse. It was this 'ark' which contained the revelations necessary to avoid the dire consequences mentioned by the Panacea Society in its advertisements, and it was the guardianship of this box and the continued pressure on the bishops to open it which has kept the Southcottians alive for nearly 200 years.

More remarkable at the time was Joanna Southcott's assertion that she was about to give birth to Shiloh, the Prince of Peace and the male child destined to rule the nations with a rod of iron (Revelation, chapter 18). She was by then, in 1814, 64 years old and was visited by large numbers

of doctors as the phantom pregnancy proceeded. Her followers' hopes were unfounded and she died at the end of the year.

But they were undaunted by the non-appearance of Shiloh and set about arguing among themselves as to who was the true successor of the prophetess. Later the disension hinged on the theological dispute as to whether Joanna actually gave birth to a spiritual child, or whether instead she would return and actually present the world with a baby.

From these arguments emerged several sects. In the north, the Christian Israelites were founded by John Wroe, while much later, their Chatham branch was taken over by James White and renamed the New and Latter House of Israel. He took the new

An X-ray of Joanna Southcott's second sealed box reveals a pistol but no sealed writings



Henry Price Library

title of James Jershom Jezreel, and with it the mystic letter J, which stood for Joanna (see JEZREEL). The 'orthodox' followers dwindled away until, by the end of the 19th century, there were only a handful left, mainly concentrated in Walworth, where they met under a railway arch.

The Sealed Box

Yet their story was not over, for in 1902 Alice Seymour was attracted to the sect and began to read Joanna Southcott's writings. In 1909, she published 'The Express', which put forward the Southcottian doctrines again. This proved popular enough for her to set up the Panacea Society, whose activities were mainly concentrated upon getting the Archbishop of Canterbury, Randall Davidson, to open up Joanna Southcott's box. He refused to do this, but the publicity was enormous and finally the box was opened unofficially, in 1927, with no bishops present. It was found to contain a lottery ticket and a woman's nightcap.

Undeterred, the followers of Joanna Southcott claimed that this had been the wrong box and that they still retained the real one, which was full of sealed writings only waiting for the bishops to open it up. There is no likelihood of this happening, but it says much for the effect of Joanna's writing and for the appeal of the mystery of a locked chest, that even after the mammoth set-backs of the phantom pregnancy and the lottery ticket, there are still those who continue to look back to the prophetess.

JOHN SELWYN GUMMER

SOUTHEAST ASIA

THIS AREA has been the scene of a second flowering of several of the great religions of mankind, but unlike India and western Asia it has not been the birthplace of any religious movement powerful enough to shape the ideology of a civilization. Today Buddhism and, in a few regions, Islam dominate the cultural life of the countries of the Southeast Asian mainland, while Hinduism, though no longer practised to any great extent in its original form, has left its imprint on folk belief and ritual traditions.

Indian cultural influence spread into Southeast Asia as early as the beginning of the Christian era. It was characterized by the introduction of a way of life based on a specific philosophical and religious doctrine. Once accepted, the Hindu ideology provided a total pattern for the organization of the social and political system such as is exemplified by some of the ancient Hindu kingdoms of Southeast Asia, but Hinduism's tolerance of a variety of cultural forms facilitated the assimilation of numerous cultural and indigenous elements. Christianity reached Southeast Asia only during the colonial period, and has become established mainly among certain minority groups, such as some of the hill tribes of Burma and some communities in Vietnam.

Throughout Southeast Asia the historic religions introduced by colonists and missionaries from India and other countries

have overlaid ancient indigenous religious traditions; but many of these traditions are still alive and are expressed in ritual practices, even among people who consider themselves Buddhists or Moslems. An analysis of the religious pattern peculiar to Southeast Asia must thus focus on the indigenous religious ideas and attitudes rather than on the doctrines imported from the homelands of such historic religions as Buddhism and Islam. These local religious phenomena are found among populations which have remained untouched by external influences, and in their comparative isolation preserve their traditional way of life. Typical of such populations are the hill tribes of Burma, Thailand and Laos as well as some of the simpler indigenous peoples of Malaya. The Lamets, a primitive hill tribe of Laos, for instance, exemplify by their beliefs in a great variety of supernatural beings, and their complex ritual practices, an ideological system unaffected by any of the higher religions. They share with other tribes the firm conviction that the human personality survives after death, and the ancestor cult occupies a central place in their religious thinking and acting. The Lamets believe that if they look after the spirits of their ancestors properly, they will enjoy good health and prosperity. These spirits are believed to live in the house, and if a new house is built they are formally invited to reside there. They are given sacrifices of buffalo and other animals when any change in the fortunes of a family occurs,

such as at marriages, burials and adoptions. The greatest feast, combined with the largest economic expenditure, is directed towards the ancestor spirits, who in return for the sacrifices are expected to give happiness and success in all undertakings of the family. Thus the ancestor cult acts as an important factor in the life of a family, and contributes to a feeling of security.

Many of the religious practices of the Lamets and similar tribes are directed towards the increase of their food supply and specifically towards the prosperity of their crops. The Lamets attribute to the rice a 'soul' which is referred to by the same term as the soul of a human being. The soul of the rice is believed to exist not only in the grains but in the whole plant and indeed in a whole rice field. Numerous rites are concentrated on the rice, and many sacrifices are performed in order to protect the soul, which is the growing power of the rice. Such rites aim not only to increase the crop, but also to keep the harvested rice securely. To a certain degree the 'soul' of the rice is treated like a spirit and equated with the soul which enlivens man.

The coexistence and interpenetration of different religious ideas and practices in Burma may serve as an example of the religious scene in all those countries of Southeast Asia where old beliefs dovetail with the ideology of Buddhism. All tribal populations of Burma, as of other regions of Southeast Asia, share the belief in a multitude of spiritual beings. Among these are

personal spirits attached to individuals, family or house spirits, communal spirits, Nature spirits inhabiting forests, hills, streams and lakes, and the disembodied spirits of the deceased. Buddhist Burmese believe in spirits of the same types, and the Buddhists retained and reinterpreted many of the beliefs in supernatural beings held by their pre-Buddhist forbears.

Most prominent among these spirits are the *nats*. They are the objects of an elaborate cult which forms part of an organized religious system. The cult of the *nats* rivals Buddhism in its elaboration and ideological systematization. The term *nat* is used to describe supernatural beings of a great variety of types, but in general they are considered more powerful than humans and able to affect men for good or evil. Most distinctive among the *nats* is a group referred to as the 'Thirty-Seven Nats', each of whom possesses a distinct, historically or mythologically determined identity. They are conceived as the spirits of outstanding men and women, who suffered a violent death, and on account of this became *nats*. They are potentially dangerous and easily offended, and some of them personify qualities abhorred by Buddhism, such as sexual profligacy, aggression and drunkenness. The festivals connected with their cult express a general saturnalian spirit, and function as an outlet for the human drives frustrated by the puritanical aspects of Buddhism. The cult of the *nats* received the support of the ancient Burmese kings, and in modern days political leaders have continued to allocate government resources to the maintenance of *nat* shrines and the lavish performance of festivals in the honour of these spirits.

Distinct from the *nats* with malevolent tendencies are benevolent spiritual beings who protect men and accede to their prayers for help. Among them are the gods of the Buddhist pantheon, whose images stand on the platforms of many pagodas, where they enjoy the worship of those visiting the Buddhist sanctuaries. The assistance of these deities is invoked by ritual offerings of food consisting of fruits and other vegetarian items.

In Burma and other countries of South-east Asia, there is also a widespread belief in ghosts and demons. Among the ghosts are the souls of those dead who were denied proper mortuary rites and therefore remain near houses and settlements and haunt the inhabitants. Since any soul is potentially dangerous, certain rites are performed to prevent it from remaining attached to the scene of its previous existence. In the case of government officials, for instance, it was customary to prepare a special document, signed by the superior officer of the deceased.

In Southeast Asia the worship of a multitude of spirits dovetails with Buddhism: spirits are propitiated to obtain earthly benefits, while Buddhism is the means of obtaining spiritual goals

Top Buddhist priest at Angkor Wat, Cambodia
Centre Buddhist priests in the gallery of the Reclining Buddha Temple, Bangkok
Bottom A family shrine in a Balinese village; the appeasement of spirits is still an important feature of everyday life



Picturepoint, London



Pepperfoto



Picturepoint, London

discharging the soul from all connections with his past position. Such discharge statements were often buried in the grave with the deceased.

Cannibal Ghosts

Ghosts are thought to be usually invisible, but to become visible in certain circumstances. Those claiming to have seen ghosts describe them as monstrous in size and terrifying in appearance. They are believed to feed on corpses, but to enjoy also the flesh of living persons whom they attack when particularly hungry or malevolent. Children are believed to be specially vulnerable to an attack by ghosts. Epidemics are attributed to the action of ghosts or evil spirits, and if an epidemic breaks out, special rites are performed to drive away the supernatural being responsible.

Ghosts and evil spirits can be controlled by practitioners of witchcraft, and those who obtain power over a spirit can compel him to do their bidding. The belief in witches is widespread, but the Burmese distinguish between those witches whose powers are innate and those whose powers are self-acquired. The former, who have become witches on account of evil deeds in a previous existence, are more powerful than those who have learned the art of sorcery. Not only can they cause illness and death, but they can transform themselves into animals and fly through the air. Sexual jealousy is a frequent motive for the malice of witches, for witches are not immune from falling in love, and they attack those who frustrate their desires.

To ward off the attacks of witches the Burmese employ various types of protection. They place trays of food outside the house, in the hope that the witch will eat of the food and desist from harming the inhabitants, or alternatively obtain protection by wearing amulets. If these preventive measures are ineffective and a witch has caused a person to fall ill, the only remedy is exorcism. Should this fail too, so that the patient dies, attempts are made to take revenge on the witch by enlisting a more powerful witch or sorcerer.

Although in Burma and in other Southeast Asian countries some intellectuals educated in Western ways of thinking are sceptical about the power of spirits and witches, the great majority of the population believes implicitly in supernatural beings of various types. This belief is in accordance with Buddhist doctrine, which acknowledges the reality not only of gods but also of harmful supernaturals. Buddhist cosmology postulates six realms, inhabited by gods, humans, demons, ghosts, infernal beings and animals, and those believing in the existence of such beings in their appropriate realm find no difficulty in accepting the idea of their influence on human affairs.

The Buddhist Way of Life

Although the belief in gods, spirits and ghosts is firmly rooted in the thought of the people of Southeast Asia, there exists a clear division between these supernatural cults and the Buddhist religion. Gods and spirits, and in Burma specifically the great

nats, are propitiated in order to obtain benefits in the mundane sphere, while Buddhism is the exclusive means for attaining otherworldly goals. To avoid rebirth in one of the subhuman realms, to achieve rebirth in the celestial abode of the gods, or to escape altogether from the cycle of rebirth and achieve the state of ultimate liberation known as Nirvana, are goals which can be achieved only by Buddhist means. Exertions in the worship of nats or other spirits have no influence on the attainment of these goals. Buddhist ritual and the cult of the nats of Burma, or equivalent supernaturals in other countries, appear thus as two distinct religious systems, though in popular practice there is some overlap, and Buddhist means are sometimes used to achieve worldly ends.

The values of Buddhism, however, clearly dominate the ethical outlook of the majority of the peoples of Southeast Asia. This is reflected in the veneration accorded to those whose conduct exemplifies the Buddhist way of life. The monk who has renounced the world and devotes his life to meditation and religious practices is highly respected by all sections of the population. To the people of the countries within its cultural influence Buddhism is the measure of all things and the criterion by which all ideas and all conduct are judged.

Not only the monks who have dedicated their lives to the pursuance of Buddhist ideals but also the ordinary laymen are conscious of the desirability of obtaining merit in the terms of Buddhist doctrine. Thus in Thailand, villagers regularly perform various acts with the specific intention of increasing their store of merit. Providing food for monks is the most common way to acquire merit, and as Thai monks are no longer wandering ascetics, but normally live in village monasteries, the monks do not go with their begging bowl from house to house, but are daily brought food by the village women. In the monastery the women serve the monks, watch them eat and receive the monks' blessings. The construction or the repair of a temple, the attendance of calendrical rites at a temple combined with the giving of gifts, and the strict observation of the principal Buddhist precepts, especially the avoidance of the taking of life and the excessive use of intoxicants, all rank highly as ways of acquiring merit.

Buddhism is the national religion not only of Burma and Thailand, but also of Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam. In all these countries, both of the main branches of Buddhism, known respectively as Mahayana and Theravada, flourished at various times over more than a millennium, but in recent centuries the Theravada ideology, which prevails also in Ceylon, has in most regions attained prominence at the expense of Mahayana sects. The function fulfilled by Buddhism in the countries of Southeast Asia resembles the role played by Christianity during a large part of the history of the West. As the state religion it is a symbol of national and social cohesion, and enjoys the protection of the king or the head of state. Religious and moral education is largely in the hands of the Buddhist clergy,

and the monks have been the main agents in the spread of literacy. In these countries it is customary that at least once in their life all young men spend several months as novices in a monastery, and during that time they wear the saffron robe and lead the celibate life of monks. This practice tends to even out social differences, for all monks, from whatever social stratum, are regarded as equals and are subject to the same rules. Apart from the purely religious instruction given in the monasteries, much of the general education is imparted by members of the clergy, and the classical languages of the Buddhist scriptures, Pali and Sanskrit, occupy a position comparable to that which Latin used to occupy in the Christian world. In these countries the Buddhist 'Church' (*sangha*) also maintains such charitable institutions as hospitals and orphanages, for the emphasis on the importance of compassion and charity has always been a characteristic feature of Buddhist societies.

Even though Buddhism preaches detachment from worldly affairs, the members of the clergy as representatives of a state religion have sometimes been drawn into political controversies, and within the Buddhist Church there are two distinct trends. The more conservative elements advocate a certain aloofness from secular problems and seek to influence the faithful simply by their example of adhering strictly to the austere pattern of the traditional monastic life. Others wish to modernize the Buddhist community and to participate more actively in the secular life in order to make it into a more useful and positive force, and prevent its decline into insignificance. In all those Southeast Asian countries which have not fallen under the sway of Communism, Buddhism has so far retained a considerable vitality, and its ideological primacy is not seriously threatened. (See also BUDDHISM; SINHALESE BUDDHISM.)

There is only one country on the mainland of Southeast Asia where Buddhism has virtually disappeared from the scene. In Malaya, Buddhist sects were already active in the first centuries of our era, and in the 8th century the Mahayana doctrine was introduced from Sumatra. But with the coming of Islam in the 14th century, and its rapid acceptance by nearly the whole of the Malay population, Buddhism as an organized religion met its doom. Many of the indigenous folk beliefs and practices have survived, however, and the Malayan Moslem is no less inclined to believe in spirits, ghosts and the power of exorcists than the Buddhist of Burma or Thailand. Thus a common sub-stratum of archaic religious concepts and practices persists throughout Southeast Asia irrespective of the nature of the historic religion which their inhabitants officially profess.

C. VON FÜRER-HAIMENDORF

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Mansell Collection

When the apostles met on the day of Pentecost, 'they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues': glossolalia has recurred on rare occasions ever since, and has greatly increased in recent years

SPEAKING IN TONGUES

SPEAKING IN TONGUES, or glossolalia, is best known as the practice of Pentecostals (see PENTECOSTALIST MOVEMENT) but it is very much older than the Pentecostalist movement and, in recent years, the incidence of glossolalic experience within Christendom has extended far beyond the boundaries of the various Pentecostal

denominations and sects. Although there is some evidence of glossolalia in the Old Testament and in ancient Egypt, and reports of it in China and among various tribes in Africa and Burma, it is in Christianity that speaking in tongues is best recorded and has been of most significance doctrinally.

Although the authenticity of the text is disputed by scholars, there is in the gospel of Mark (16.17) a promise concerning tongues. In Acts (chapter 2) the outbreak of speech in unknown tongues on the occasion of Pentecost is recorded. A case at Caesarea is reported in Acts 10.44–46, and the speaking in tongues at the baptism by the Holy Spirit in Acts 19.1–7. St Paul describes the gift of speaking in unknown tongues as a gift of the Holy Spirit in I Corinthians,

The Descent of the Holy Spirit, by Pinturicchio; Acts, chapter 2, describes the experience of Christ's disciples at Pentecost, when they 'began to speak in other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance'

chapters 12 to 14, and specifies the circumstances of the use of this gift. Pentecostal writers usually also consider that the gifts of the Spirit are alluded to in I Thessalonians 5.19–20, Ephesians 5.18–20, and in the Old Testament in Joel (2.23 and 28–29) and Isaiah (28.9–11).

The nature and purpose of speaking in unknown tongues has been disputed, but Paul appears to have regarded the use of unknown tongues at Corinth as ecstatic utterance that was not to be understood

.iiii. tenere dicitur passiuū: paulatim aliter angustior coarctata erit. ut pondus imminet et aliis sustentare

Hanc turrem nembroth gigas construxit. Qui per confusionem linguarum migravit inde ad babiloniam. eosque ignem colere docuit.



except by divine inspiration. On the other hand, the scriptures make clear that when the apostles spoke with tongues at Pentecost, the Jews who had gathered, and who spoke many different languages, all heard them each in his own native language. However, some have regarded that incident as a miracle of hearing rather than of speech.

The Church Fathers had relatively little to say of the phenomenon of glossolalia, and it may be that after the early development of Christianity speaking in tongues became disregarded, except among those whose Christianity was doubtful or heretical, the Montanists being a case in point (see MONTANISTS). Subsequently theologians believed that the gift of tongues was not a permanent endowment, but was a sign confirming the divine authority of the teachings of Christ, especially adapted for the proclamation of the gospel in the beginning, but thereafter withdrawn. Nor did they continue to expect evidence of the baptism of the Holy Spirit such as occurred at Ephesus (Acts, chapter 19).

As the Church became fully institutionalized, control of its practices led to a severe circumscription of inspiration. The view that generally prevailed, instanced by the stories of St Pachomius, St Hildegard and later St Francis Xavier, was that God might grant men a gift of tongues, which was in fact a gift of languages, for scholarly purposes or, more usually, for promulgating his word among the heathen. Unknown tongues were clearly much more suspect and more readily simulated, and increasingly were looked upon as dubious if not heretical: most of those who gave utterance of this kind were already recognizable as heretics from their teachings.

Tarrying Meetings

A considerable number of Protestant sects have experienced glossolalia at different times. The most celebrated are the Camisards, among whom a number of children suddenly broke out into speeches in eloquent French that was considered far beyond their natural capacity (see CAMISARDS). In the 1780s, Mother Ann Lee, who had become the leader of a small religious group in Lancashire known as Shakers (see SHAKERS), whose origin is traced to the missionary activities of refugee Camisards, spoke in a number of apparently recognizable languages.

During the Welsh Revival of 1904–5 a number of converts who spoke little or no Welsh suddenly broke out into eloquent prayer in that language, which impressed observers. One of those who was deeply influenced by what he saw in Wales was an Anglican clergyman, the Rev Alexander A. Boddy who, in 1907, as Rector of All Saints,

Monkwearmouth, was a leading figure in England in introducing 'tarrying meetings' at which believers prayed together for the descent of the Holy Ghost upon them and its manifestation by glossolalic utterance. The expectation of such experience had arisen principally in Holiness groups (see HOLINESS MOVEMENT) in the United States between 1901 and 1906, and had spread to Europe in that year, after T. B. Barratt, Methodist minister in Oslo, had been converted to the new movement, Pentecostalism.

The Pentecostal denominations, which trace their beginning to the American meetings at which Barratt experienced glossolalia, were not, however, the first Christian denominations to incorporate the gift of tongues in their regular worship. In 1830 a reputedly dying woman in Scotland was reported to have spoken in unknown tongues and to have instantly recovered her health. The news fired the interest of a group of devout Christians gathered round Edward Irving, a celebrated Presbyterian preacher, who soon after established his own Catholic and Apostolic Church, in which glossolalia became a dominant feature (see IRVING). For the Irvingites, tongues were a distinct sign of the nearness of the coming of Christ, and they devoted themselves to warning the established Churches of the need to accept Irvingite teaching and organization before it was too late. Tongues had also broken out spontaneously in a church in southern Germany, and this congregation joined the Catholic and Apostolic Church, which enjoyed rapid growth, in

particular in the United States and Britain. Tongues continued as part of its devotional practice until, disappointed in the falsification of the prophecies on which the Church was based, the movement went into a decline in the 20th century.

Gift of the Spirit

Although the gift of tongues is officially accepted as part of Mormon belief, its practice was never of great importance in that movement. Only in contemporary Pentecostal churches is speaking in tongues a well-integrated, theologically justified and spiritually essential element of religious belief and practice. The need for the experience of the baptism of the Holy Spirit was accepted by many Holiness believers before speaking in tongues had actually occurred, but the full theological justification for glossolalia, and the distinction of the different occasions of its occurrence were only gradually worked out. Inevitably, some differences in doctrine arose between the various groups who came to accept tongues as an authentic experience prompted by the Holy Spirit but there is, despite differences of detail, broad agreement among Pentecostal bodies in respect of these phenomena, which are indeed the determining factors in the distinctiveness and separation of Pentecostal groups from other evangelical fundamentalist Protestant bodies.

Pentecostals distinguish between two main occasions and one subsidiary occasion when glossolalia might occur. The first of the two principal circumstances in which a



Left The Tower of Babel, French, 15th century: the original 'confusion of tongues', the many languages of humanity, was said to have resulted from man's attempt to ascend to heaven, while the gift of speaking in tongues is said to come from the descent of the Holy Spirit from heaven

Right Worshipper believed to be possessed by the Spirit, in Barbados



Illustration from a 15th century French Book of Hours, showing the Holy Spirit as a dove descending at Pentecost: St Peter described the event as a fulfilment of Old Testament prophecy

believer might speak in tongues is on receiving the baptism of the Holy Spirit. This baptism is an event that occurs after conversion, sometimes months or even years after, although there is a tendency for it to be expected sooner rather than later. Its purpose is to confer power for God's service, and it is said to prepare men for deeper communion with God and better understanding of his gospel. Not all Pentecostals believe that the baptism must be marked by glossolalia, although all agree that it is a

charismatic experience of transcendent and miraculous character, producing extraordinary effects that are visible to the onlooker. In practice, it is almost always assumed that the baptism will be evidenced by glossolalic utterance.

The baptism of the Holy Spirit is an event that occurs only once to a believer, but after the baptism he may receive one or more of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. These gifts are listed in I Corinthians, chapter 12, as: the word of wisdom; the word of knowledge; faith; the gifts of healing; the working of miracles; prophecy; discerning of spirits; various kinds of tongues; the interpretation of tongues. Without doubt the gift most frequently claimed by Pentecostals is the gift of tongues, even though Paul regarded it

as one of the lesser gifts. The gift is not at the disposal of the recipient, so contemporary Pentecostals insist: it is a gift to the Church rather than to the individual, and it should be used as the Holy Spirit directs.

Following St Paul, the large Pentecostal denominations expect there to be only two or at most three, speakers in tongues at any one meeting. It is said that many who receive messages in tongues may never be anointed to speak forth, and it is commonly maintained that the Spirit is always 'subject' and need never cause a speaker to burst forth in tongues when someone else is speaking or, indeed, at an inopportune moment in the meeting. Insistence on this precept has, of course, improved the order and decorousness of Pentecostal meetings. The glossolalia occurring at the baptism of the Holy Spirit requires no interpretation, but at other times Pentecostals maintain that when someone uses the gift of tongues there should be an interpretation from a person with this gift who is inspired by the Spirit to speak. The interpreter must be the same for all messages received in one meeting, and may be one of those who has spoken in tongues.

In the early days of Pentecostalism, before these precepts were well established, speaking in tongues was much more frequent in the meetings than (at least in the larger denominations) it is now, and often several spoke in tongues simultaneously. In the early days some used the claim to Holy Spirit inspiration to work off spites, to upbraid rivals, and to acquire influence in Church affairs. Pentecostals have increasingly come to stress that messages given in tongues must be in confirmation of the Bible, and today the interpretations often tend to be exhortatory messages, quoting or paraphrasing passages of scripture.

The third, and very much the least important, use of glossolalia is in the devotional exercise known as 'singing in the Spirit', which is merely a particular way in which God may be praised quietly in public, or in private, by a believer who has the gift of tongues. This use of tongues requires no interpretation. Pentecostals acknowledge that the gift of tongues can be easily simulated, and it has become a general and informal assumption that the ministers of the Pentecostal churches possess the gift of the discernment of spirits, by which they are enabled to distinguish genuine from doubtful gifts, and on the authority of which they may counsel individuals to desist.

The Lost and the Last

In general, it is believed that the unknown tongues given to believers are all actual languages of some people who have lived on earth, even though they may be no longer spoken. Pentecostal writers claim many occasions when foreigners have recognized their own language spoken perfectly by someone speaking under the power of the Holy Spirit, but such demonstrations of the miraculous cannot, of course, be prearranged. The theoretical justification for glossolalia is not its possible practical use, but simply that God wishes to be praised in all languages, and that it is spiritually beneficial for man to have the experience.

There is no obvious or pre-ordained form for glossolalic utterance. Many speakers in unknown tongues do not appear to be speaking a language, but rather to be uttering a few repeated syllables, often in a rhythmic and lilting way. Many of those who speak in tongues are people whose powers of articulation in ordinary speech are rather limited, and such evidence as is available suggests that women are more frequent speakers in tongues than men.

Those who have been converted to the modern Pentecostal movement come very largely from the least educated sections of the population, and some Pentecostal writers have boasted that their fellow religionists are 'the lowest, the least, the lost and the

last' among men. On the other hand, the Irvingite congregations of the last century were drawn much more extensively from the middle and upper classes. Glossolalia demands an atmosphere of considerable emotional freedom, and is itself a means by which inhibitions are reduced.

The incidence of glossolalia has probably very much increased during the last decade, with the development of a large number of informal prayer meetings by small groups of orthodox Christians who have become convinced of the authenticity and desirability of glossolalic experience. This 'charismatic movement' is now well organized, and its membership includes priests and prominent laymen from the Roman Catholic and

Anglican churches and from the major Protestant denominations. Among its well established organizations is the Full Gospel Business Men's Fellowship International, but there are also many small groups in which speaking with tongues occurs.

BRYAN WILSON

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Spectre

From Latin *spectrum*, 'vision', a ghost or apparition, especially one which is frightening: the Spectre of the Brocken is a huge shadow, often accompanied by rings of coloured light, cast by an observer on top of a hill on the upper surfaces of clouds which are below him.

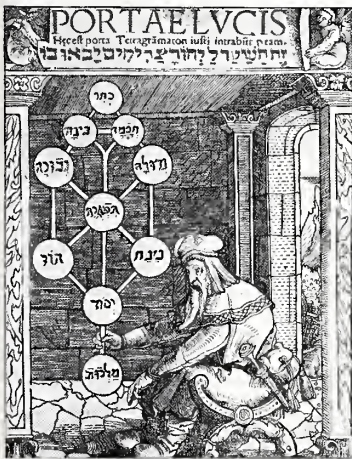
See GHOSTS; HAUNTED HOUSES; SPONTANEOUS PSI EXPERIENCES.



Spell

A word, set of words or procedure, frequently of a relatively minor kind, believed to have magical effect: an enchantment, as in the case of a person or country which has been placed under a spell.

See INCANTATION; PSYCHIC ATTACK.



Sphere

One of the hollow, transparent, concentric globes formerly believed to revolve round the earth, carrying with them the sun, moon and planets; their motion was thought to produce a harmonious sound, the 'music of the spheres'; allotting one sphere to the Prime Mover, the fixed stars, and each of the seven planets, gave a total of nine, with the earth at the centre; or the earth itself could be allotted a sphere, making ten, as in the Cabala.

See CABALA; MAGIC.



Sphinx

Hybrid creature combining human and animal parts, typically a lion's body and the head of a man (or sometimes of a hawk or ram): pairs or avenues of sphinxes guarded the entrances to palaces, temples and tombs in Egypt; the Great Sphinx is a colossal image near the pyramids of Giza; in Greek mythology, the woman-headed Sphinx of Thebes strangled passers-by when they failed to solve the riddle she put to them.

See RIDDLES.

SPIDER

'WILL YOU come into my parlour, said the spider to the fly?'. The spider inevitably suggests an evil arch-intriguer, weaving a web of duplicity in which fragile innocence is entrapped, or a blood-sucking money-lender who entangles the unwary borrower in his toils. In fact, the spider is as much preyed on as predator, providing food for lizards, wasps and other foes, and it is ironic that the fly, a creature of dirt and disease, should be equated with the innocent victim who is ensnared.

Some people have a deep loathing of spiders and could not bear to touch one, but although the spider can be a type of evil

and betrayal, and so of Satan, it has also been seen as a model of industry and wisdom, and a spider motif engraved on a precious stone makes a talisman which is supposed to confer foresight on the wearer.

Attitudes to spiders vary considerably, in fact. In West African and West Indian folklore, there is a great body of stories about Ananse, or Anansi, a spider who is a hero and trickster of infinite cunning and resource, and in some cases the Creator of the world. In European lore the spider spun a web to conceal the child Jesus from his enemies, and spiders also saved the lives of Mohammed and Frederick the Great. The famous story of Robert the Bruce and the spider points the moral that faith and persistence can bring victory out of defeat.

Or the spider's web can be regarded as the home of the eternal weaver of illusions, and the spider which spins and kills, creates and destroys, can symbolize the perpetual alternation of forces on which life depends for its precarious balance.

The cross on the back of the common garden spider has helped to preserve it from the hostility of mankind, and the spider, like the toad, has played an important part in the folklore of medicine, since both creatures were believed to contain within their bodies a powerful health-giving stone. The 17th century antiquarian Elias Ashmole claimed to have cured himself of the ague by suspending three spiders around his neck. To relieve whooping cough it was once customary to wrap a spider in raisin



飯負尉確井貞光

山手子
画



Left and above 'Earth Spider making magic in the palace of Raiko', a triptych by Kuniyoshi: the warrior Raiko is lying sick while his guards are playing go and the Earth Spider marshals its hordes of goblins above them; the picture was a satire on contemporary politicians

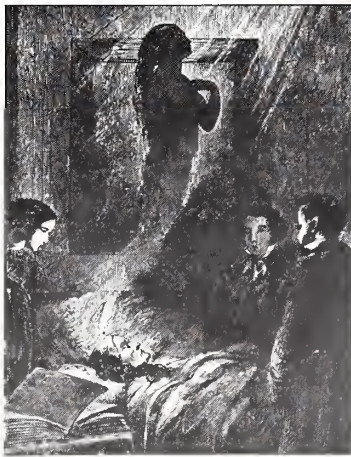
or butter, or shut one in a walnut shell, the malady fading away as the spider died. Spider's web was used as a bandage for wounds and was supposed to cure warts. On the other hand, in Suffolk in 1645, an accused witch named Mirabel Bedford admitted possessing a familiar imp in the form of a spider called Joan. In another trial, one of the accused defended himself with such eloquence as almost to sway the court in his favour, until the prosecutor

noticed a spider crawling close to the prisoner's lips and cried out warningly, 'See who prompts him'. The prisoner was sentenced to death. Spider's venom was once in demand as poison, and in Shakespeare's *Winter's Tale*, Leontes remarks, 'There may be in the cup a spider steeped'. The bite or sting of the tarantula spider was supposed to cause Tarantism, a hysterical disease characterized by an extreme impulse to dance, and the Italian Tarantella was a wild dance which was thought to be the only cure for it. The golden money spider, the living symbol of a gold coin, confers riches on anyone upon whose body it runs, and if caught and put in the pocket ensures plenty

of ready cash, or a new suit of clothes. The superstition is current in Norfolk that a money spider suspended over the head is a charm for winning the football pools. 'If you would live and thrive, let a spider run alive' is an old saying. In Britain to kill a spider brings unwanted rain, and in Scotland and the West Indies the spider-killer is sure to break his crockery or his wine glasses before the day is out. The appearance of numerous spiders is a sign of much rain. A long thread of spider's web hanging from a tree or a beam symbolizes the ladder or rope by which you can ascend to heaven, and if you should find a web inscribed with your initials near the door of your house, it will bring you luck as long as you live there. ERIC MAPLE



Spinning
Activity symbolically connected with fate; in classical mythology the three Fates spin the thread of each man's life, weave it, and sever it; the fact that spiders spin webs to catch flies has contributed to their folklore and symbolism. See FATE; SPIDER



Spirit
Related to Latin *spirare*, 'to breathe', the animating principle in living things, contrasted with the body or matter: a being or intelligence which has no earthly body, or is separated from it, such as an angel, demon, fairy, ghost or poltergeist; sometimes equivalent to 'soul', or sometimes distinguished from it, when man is said to be made of body, soul (roughly, emotions and feelings) and spirit (mental faculties). See ANIMISM; BREATH; GHOSTS; GUARDIAN SPIRITS; POLTERGEISTS; SHAMAN; SOUL; SPIRITUALISM.

SPIRITUALISM

Offering man a new view of the universe and proof of survival after death, Spiritualist beliefs derive from communications believed to emanate from the spirits of the dead

THE MODERN SPIRITUALIST movement arose in America in 1848 as a result of the publicity given to the events that occurred in the home of the Fox family in Hydesville, a small hamlet in New York State. The Fox family moved into the house in December 1847, and for the next three months they were disturbed by strange noises that frequently kept them awake at night. The family consisted of John Fox, his wife and two young daughters, Margaretta and Kate. On Friday 31 March 1848 the family retired to bed early. Mrs Fox described the events of that night in the following statement:

It was very early when we went to bed on this night – hardly dark. I had been so broken of rest I was almost sick – I had just lain down when it commenced as usual – the children, who slept in the other bed in the room, heard the rapping, and tried to make similar sounds by snapping their fingers.

My youngest child, Cathie, said: 'Mr Splitfoot, do as I do', clapping her hands. The sound instantly followed her with the same number of raps. When she stopped the sound ceased for a short time.

Then Margaretta said, in sport: 'Now do just as I do. Count one, two, three, four, striking one hand against the other at the same time' – and the raps came as before. She was afraid to repeat them.

I then thought I could put a test that no one in the place could answer. I asked the 'noise' to rap my different children's ages successively.

Instantly, each one of my children's ages was given correctly, pausing between them sufficiently long enough to individualise them until the seventh – at which a longer pause was made, and then three more emphatic raps were given, corresponding to the age of the little one that died, which was my youngest child.

I then asked: 'Is this a human being that answers my questions correctly?'

There was no rap.

I asked: 'Is it a spirit? If it is, make two raps.'

Two sounds were given as soon as the request was made.

In this way Mrs Fox and her daughters believed they had discovered a means of communication with a spirit who claimed to

have been murdered in the house. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle in his *History of Spiritualism* (1926) says that excavations on the site disclosed human remains.

The Fox family were now plagued not only by spirit noises, but by sensation seekers, and Mrs Fox and the girls went to live with her married daughter in Rochester. Their psychic abilities continued, and around them developed the first Spiritualist circle. In 1849 the girls gave a first public demonstration in Rochester and followed this up with demonstrations in many other towns in the eastern states. Their activities created sensation in the popular press, and their popularity was not affected by pronouncements made by three professors from Buffalo University, following an investigation in 1851, that the raps were produced by movements of the kneejoints, or by the subsequent alleged confession by Kate that they were produced by cracking her toes.

'Spirit rapping' rapidly became a craze in the United States, but in the early stages Spiritualism was as much a popular scientific movement as a religious movement. People who had attended a mediumistic demonstration, or had read about such events, held seances in their own homes attended by relations and friends. They were often motivated by curiosity and the spirit of scientific enquiry. They met in an attempt to test the claims of Spiritualists, they continued to meet if they felt that such claims were being confirmed by their experiences within the circle, and it was on the

basis of such successful groups that permanent organizations, societies and churches began to develop.

The National Union

The Spiritualist movement was introduced to Britain in 1852 when Mrs Hayden, an American medium, gave demonstrations. She was followed by other mediums and, as in America, a short-lived craze swept the country. The early days in Britain were similar to those in America, the movement of that period consisting of 'home circles' either of friends who met to experiment or of followers who gathered round a successful medium.

The visits of D. D. Home to Britain in the 1850s and 60s created considerable interest. Home was probably the most remarkable medium of the 19th century and, unlike most well-known mediums, was never detected committing a fraudulent act (see HOME). There were only two known professional mediums in London as late as 1867, though there were many private mediums in that period, including the infant prodigy of mediumship, Master Willie Turketine.

*Below The Fox sisters, who in 1848 claimed to have discovered a way of communicating with the spirit of a dead man: the intense interest this aroused was the starting point of the modern Spiritualist movement Right That the dead can communicate with the living is, of course, a very old belief: a ghost warns of approaching doom in this illustration from *The Astrologer of the 19th century**







A medium and her spirit guide, a statue by G. H. Paulin. The key role in the Spiritualist movement is played by the medium, through whom the spirit world communicates with the material world: in some cases messages from the dead come through a spirit 'guide' or 'control' whose personality temporarily replaces the medium's normal personality, and whose function is to protect the medium and to regulate the attempts made by the departed to communicate through her

During the 1860s Spiritualist societies began to appear, as the more successful circles developed organizations. These first appeared in London and in the Keighley area of Yorkshire, which formed the two centres from which Spiritualism spread. Outside London the movement in the second half of the 19th century was most successful in the industrial towns of Yorkshire and Lancashire and the mining areas of the northeast. The first national organization, the British Association of Progressive Spiritualists, was formed in 1865 at a meeting held at Darlington. They were attacked by the more conventional Spiritualists for being 'anti-Christian' and their organization collapsed in 1868.

At this time many Spiritualists feared the development of organizations which they held would destroy the freedom and spontaneity which were essential to the movement, and would lead to the growth of bureaucracy and oligarchy. A writer of the period expressed these feelings by pointing out that the movement would become 'controlled by the lower stratum of minds – minds that live and work almost solely for the interests of organizations.'

In spite of misgivings of this sort a further attempt to establish a national organization in 1873 led to the rise of the British National Association of Spiritualists. It consisted mainly of Spiritualists from the London area and was gradually forced to recognize its failure to acquire national status. In 1883 it was re-constituted as the London Spiritualist Alliance.

In the 1870s and 80s local Spiritualist societies in many areas began to associate with each other for mutual benefit and to form district organizations. The first of these, the Lancashire Association, was formed in 1875, and by 1912 there were fifteen of these associations. The first effective national organization was formed in 1890; the Spiritualists' National Federation was a federation of local churches which made rapid progress, mainly in the north, and by 1896 had 58 societies affiliated to it. In order that the movement could obtain legal status the Federation was re-constituted as the Spiritualists' National Union Ltd in 1902, and this remains the largest organization of Spiritualists in Britain.

In Britain the Spiritualist movement grew most rapidly in the period between the

Non-Christian Spiritualists frequently held that Spiritualism was a new religion which would ultimately replace Christianity, while others saw Spiritualism as the basis of all religion

two World Wars, a period in which there was no lack of able mediums, including Rudi Schneider and Mrs Leonard (see LEONARD; SCHNEIDER BROTHERS), and the movement was also greatly assisted by the work of three able proponents, none of whom seems to have had any psychic gift themselves. Sir Oliver Lodge was an eminent scientist whose account of communications with his son, who had been killed in the First World War, was published under the title of *Raymond* in 1916. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, then at the height of his fame as the creator of Sherlock Holmes, was converted in 1917 and until his death in 1930 worked ceaselessly to promote Spiritualism (see DOYLE). Hannen Swaffer set out to investigate Spiritualism for *The People*, of which he was the editor. In the course of his investigations, Swaffer believed that he had received evidence of the survival of his old 'chief' - Lord Northcliffe. He organized a public meeting at the Queens Hall in January 1925 to announce his conversion. Swaffer became an active protagonist and it was through the medium in Swaffer's private circle that the messages of the guide named Silver Birch were communicated.

Science or Religion

Although the Spiritualist movement seems to have arisen out of a semi-scientific curiosity about the nature of 'psychic phenomena', religious aspects began to appear at a very early date. The idea of communication with spirits is readily associated with religious concepts, and since many early Spiritualists were searching for a system of belief to replace Christianity they quickly seized on the 'messages' that were given by spirits through the mediums, for although these were often evidence intended to prove survival, many spirits could not resist the temptation to preach their philosophy. Spiritualist meetings also began to develop rituals which included music, hymn singing, prayer and Bible reading. Such rituals are claimed to create an atmosphere conducive to the appearance of phenomena and to the prevention of the disruption of the seance by evil spirits. By the 1870s many societies were adopting the title of churches.

Non-Christian Spiritualists frequently held that Spiritualism was a new religion which would ultimately replace Christianity while others saw Spiritualism as the basis

of all religion. The Christian Churches as a whole attacked Spiritualism, arguing that communication with the dead was forbidden by the authority of the Bible, and that the spirit communicators were evil entities dispatched by the Devil to mislead men. The Roman Catholic Church has maintained this attitude, as have such sects as the Jehovah's Witnesses and the Pentecostal movement, but the 'Free Churches' and the Anglicans have moved towards a more tolerant position, reflected in the establishment of the Churches' Fellowship for Psychical Study in 1953. Christian Spiritualists have always argued that they were attempting to restore to the Church those practices which were commonly accepted by the early Christians.



Photograph by A. Martin, of Denver, Colorado, showing Houdini, the famous escape artist and fierce opponent of Spiritualist mediums, with spirit forms

Spiritualists were subjected not only to verbal attack by the Churches, the Press and rationalists, but to legal prosecution up to 1951, when the Fraudulent Mediums Act was passed. As late as 1945 a Spiritualist church at Redhill had been forced to close as a result of threats of prosecution, and in the previous year the medium Helen Duncan had been sentenced to imprisonment for nine months. Under earlier acts the professional practice of mediumship (even if admitted to be genuine) could be construed as illegal, but the new act made it necessary for the prosecution to prove that fraud had been committed, thus implicitly accepting that genuine mediumship was a possibility.

One of the main sources of conflict within the movement has centred around the acceptance of Christian teachings. While accepting a broadly religious basis, the Spiritualists' National Union has consistently refused to adopt specifically Christian doctrine. After the failure in 1928 of Conan Doyle's attempt to convert the S.N.U. to Christianity and of a number of attempts to organize Christian Spiritualists, the medium Winifred Moyes established the Greater World Christian Spiritualist League in 1931. The League was an immediate success and by 1935 it had 580 affiliated churches.

In the United States, Spiritualist associations include the National Spiritualist Alliance of the USA, founded in 1913, with its headquarters in Lake Pleasant, Massachusetts, and the International General Assembly of Spiritualists, in Norfolk, Virginia, which dates from 1936. On the whole, however, the movement consists of small, independent churches and groups, held together by the personality of an individual minister or medium. Services are similar to those in Protestant churches. Women have always had a strong position in the leadership.

The Seven Principles

Spiritualism is a movement and not an organization. It consists not only of international and national associations but of many independent local societies and of numerous 'home circles' and individuals who are unattached to any formal organization. You do not have to join any organization to be a Spiritualist. There is no agreement on a Spiritualist creed of beliefs, beyond the two

The Mediumship of W. S. Moses

Mr. Moses himself, in his published writings, was wont to attach considerable importance to the evidence for the doctrines of Spiritualism afforded by the communications, ostensibly from the spirits of deceased persons, received through his mediumship. Of communicators who thus claimed to furnish definite proof of their identity, Mr. Myers, who has collected the evidence under this head in a convenient form, reckons thirty-eight in all. Of these thirty-eight persons some had been known in life to Moses himself or to other members of the circle; some, such as Bishop Wilberforce, Swedenborg, or President Garfield,

were historical personages; yet others were individuals of no special eminence, and without any point of contact with Mr. Moses or his circle.

In one important particular the evidence of identity in these cases is superior to that generally furnished through so-called clairvoyant mediums. In marked contrast to the vague generalities which commonly pass for tests, Mr. Moses' spirits were prodigal of names, dates, and other concrete facts which lend themselves to ready verification. Here is an example: 'On February 28th, 1874, a spirit came by raps and gave the name "Rosamira". She said that she died at Torquay on January 10th 1874, and that she had

lived at Kilburn. She stated that her husband's name was "Lancaster"; and added later that his christian name was "Ben". As a matter of fact the whole of these particulars, given at the seance at the end of February, are to be found in the notice of the death in the *Daily Telegraph* of January 15th preceding.

The case is typical. Mr. Moses' spirits habitually furnished accurate obituaries, or gave such other particulars of their lives as could be gathered from the daily papers, from published biographies, or from the *Annual Register* and other works of reference.

F. Podmore *Modern Spiritualism*

broad beliefs already mentioned.

Spiritualist beliefs are the result of messages received from the spirits through a medium, and the teachings of the spirits display wide differences. Spiritualists explain that spirits are human beings who have survived death; transition to the after-life does not immediately make a man wise, he takes with him the ideas he had in life, and continues to hold to these beliefs at least during his stay in the lower planes of the afterlife. Spirits who have moved upwards after death, to increasingly high planes of existence, find it more difficult to communicate through mediums, so that communications usually come from the recently dead and those who have made little progress in the afterlife. It is not surprising therefore to find a wide diversity of belief held by Spiritualists.

In Europe and Latin America, where the teachings of the French Spiritualist Alan Kardec predominate, most Spiritualists believe in reincarnation, while in England and America few Spiritualists do. Some Spiritualists are agnostic, since there appears to be no greater proof of the existence of God in the lowest levels of the spirit world than on earth.

If there is no Spiritualist creed neither is there a Spiritualist bible. The most widely accepted book is *Spirit Teachings*, a series of communications from the spirit world transmitted through the automatic writing mediumship of Rev W. Stainton Moses (see AUTOMATIC ART).

A widely accepted credal statement is to be found in the Seven Principles subscribed to by all members of the Spiritualists' National Union, which were derived from a spirit communication received through the medium Emma Hardinge-Britten. The principles are: the fatherhood of God; the brotherhood of man; the communion of spirits and the ministry of angels; the continuous existence of the human soul; personal responsibility; compensation and retribution hereafter for all the good and evil deeds done on earth; eternal progress open to every human soul.

The S.N.U., which is the largest of the two national organizations in Britain, has about 460 affiliated churches with some 15,000 members and represents the non-Christian element in Spiritualism. The other organization, the Greater World

Christian Spiritualist League, with over 200 churches represents the specifically Christian influence in the Spiritualist movement. There are also many churches not affiliated to either of these organizations offering a variety of beliefs and practices.

While it is difficult to generalise about Spiritualist beliefs, most Spiritualists in Britain and America would probably accept the following beliefs. Man is an immortal being composed of two elements, a body and a soul or spirit, and on death the spirit leaves the body and enters a phase of existence in a 'spiritual plane'. The universe consists of seven such planes of existence, of which the material (earth) is the lowest. After death most souls awake into the second plane, known to many as the Summerland, a level of existence in which life is not unlike that on earth except for the absence of pain and suffering. In this plane, as on earth, each soul has the opportunity for spiritual development which opens up the possibility of ascent to high planes.

Every individual has the opportunity of rising through the ascending order of spiritual levels until he reaches the seventh heaven, in which he will finally be united with God and all the great souls who have preceded him. Great souls such as Jesus are said to have risen directly to the seventh heaven, but just as goodness leads to spiritual advancement, so evil leads to decline; men are not punished, they punish themselves by opting for a course of action which prevents their spiritual development.

Evil men find themselves after death in a condition of limbo in which they perceive themselves as alone and lost in a fog, but this situation is not irretrievable. Through remorse and repentance they may find their way back to the light. Some Spiritualist societies organize 'rescue circles' with the aim of contacting and aiding such lost souls, and Lord Dowding's book *The Dark Star* (1951) contains graphic accounts of the work of these circles.

Those who are over-attached to earthly things may find themselves unable after death to leave the material world. Such 'earthbound' spirits may be perceived by those who have psychic abilities as ghosts, but these may also free themselves from their attachments and develop spiritually.

Many Spiritualists also believe that animals have souls and are active in antivivi-

section and other animal welfare movements. Some believe that the spiritual universe is not only inhabited by human spirits but by many spirits who have never been incarnated as humans, ranging from poltergeists and earth elementals, such as fairies, to cosmic powers of good and evil, angels and demons.

Spirit and Matter

Spiritualists' beliefs are derived from communication with the spirit world and such communication may take any one of a number of forms. The spirits may speak directly through the medium who is in trance, or the medium may use his own voice to convey the message. In the case of automatic writing the medium's hand is controlled by the 'spirit', and the ouija board is a device which facilitates this form of communication (see OUIJA BOARDS). Other methods (far less common today) are the raps (used by the Fox sisters) and slate writing, a popular Victorian technique, both of which methods were open to fraud. Clairvoyance and clairaudience in which the medium sees, hears, or senses information which he attempts to transmit to the sitter are the most common forms of mediumship.

From the early days Spiritualism has involved phenomena in which material objects have been moved by what many have claimed to be supernatural forces. As early as 1849 there is the record of a table being levitated six inches. The first instance of the levitation of a human being, a Mr Gordon, was reported in the journal *Spirit World* in February 1851. Materialization of a spirit and the 'apport' or mysterious appearance of a physical object were also early forms of manifestations. At some seances coloured lights appeared which floated round the room, and at others musical instruments were mysteriously played.

Spiritualism aroused violent antagonism and criticism, concentrating particularly on the physical phenomena occurring at seances, which opponents claimed were faked: the famous conjurer J. N. Maskelyne put on long-running shows (above) to demonstrate his ability to duplicate Spiritualist phenomena Below A 'rapping hand', used at fraudulent seances and probably controlled pneumatically through rubber tubing

Between the First and Second Parts of the Entertainment
MR. CHARLES WOODMAN
 Will introduce his wonderful Musical Novelties.

Exposition of Spiritualism (so-called)
LIGHT AND DARK SEANCE
EXTRAORDINARY.

Mr MASKELYNE briefly opens the subject, requests the audience to elect a Committee to examine the Cabinet, the Stage, and every thing that may be considered auxiliary in producing the manifestations.

After the light in the Hall has been subdued the spiritualists' most favourite spirit-form of
JOHN KING,
 appears rising from the stage, and distributes amongst the audience, flowers from the spirit garden.

SELF-LEVITATION AND OTHER MANIFESTATIONS.

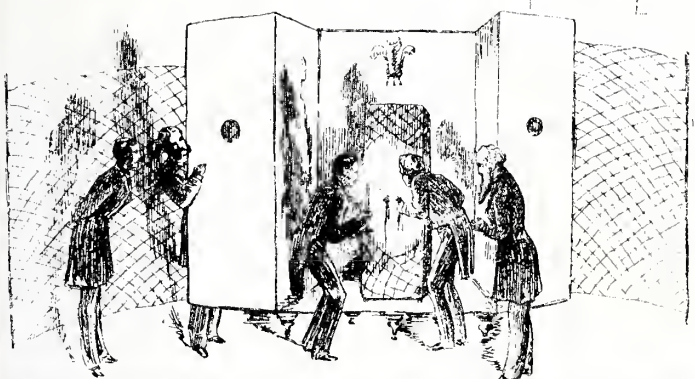
MR COOKE FLOATS INTO THE HALL, TAKING WITH HIM THE CABINET IN WHICH HE IS SECURED.

Luminous musical instruments are distinctly seen moving about the room, and the audience generally participate in the peculiar pleasures of the Dark Seance.

ZOE!

In preparation, and shortly to be presented. Mr MASKELYNE'S new Writing and Sketching Automaton, *ZOE*, Psycho's mysterious, lady companion.

Price 6d.—A book containing a full description of the Entertainment, and brief biography of Mr MASKELYNE, can be had in the Hall.
 Price 1s.—Spiritualism (Raps for the Rappers), being a short account of the History and Progress of Modern Spiritualism, with exposures of the frauds of so-called Spirit Media, by JOHN SEVILL MASKELYNE, can also be obtained of the attendants.

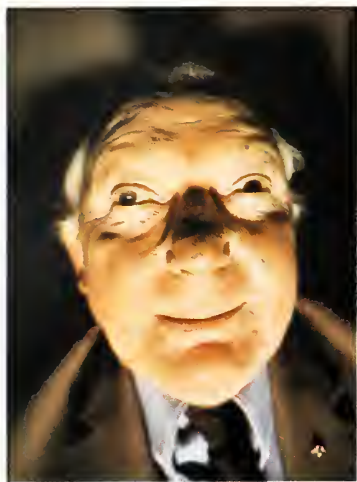


A large, ornate advertisement for Messrs. Maskelyne and Cooke. At the top, two portraits of men in suits are shown. Below them, the text reads: "MESSRS. MASKELYNE AND COOKE THE ROYAL Illusionists and Antispiritualists. EGYPTIAN LARGE HALL, PICCADILLY. DAILY AT THREE and EIGHT O'CLOCK. FOURTH YEAR IN LONDON." Below this, the seating arrangement is listed: "Fauteuils, 5s. Stalls, 3s. Area, 2s. Balcony, 1s." and "Seats can be booked at any time during the day, at the Box Office, free of charge." At the bottom, it states: "Messrs. MASKELYNE & COOKE had the distinguished honour of a Royal Command to perform before H.R.H. the Prince of Wales, at Sandringham, on Monday, January 11th, 1875. W. MORTON, Manager." The advertisement is decorated with various illustrations, including a figure at a podium, a figure in a dark suit, and a portrait of a man in the bottom right corner.



Harry Price Library

Harry Price Library



Spirit photography was first practised by William Mumler, a Boston photographer, in 1862, but his work was soon exposed as fraudulent. Frederick Hudson was the first spirit photographer in Britain, but he was exposed by the well-known Spiritualist writer W. H. Harrison in *The Spiritualist* in 1872. The most famous spirit photographer was William Hope (died 1933) who worked with the Crewe circle: his work was also exposed, but he found a faithful champion in Sir Arthur Conan Doyle.

There appears to have been a decline in physical mediumship since the Second World War, which cynics have attributed to the greater ease of detecting fraud by modern scientific methods. From the first, Spiritualists practised 'spirit healing', and

this has become an increasingly important part of their work.

The key role in the Spiritualist movement is played by the medium, who is quite literally the medium through which the 'spirit world' communicates with the material world. In theory all people are potential mediums, but it is clear that while some people are endowed with psychic abilities which may appear spontaneously, others require years of training before they can make use of their abilities. Many of the most gifted mediums report that they had spontaneous psychic experiences when they were children. The claims of Spiritualists have frequently been investigated by critics and during the 19th century psychic phenomena were subjected to rigorous study by

a series of eminent scientists. Some were convinced that not all Spiritualist manifestations could be explained by theories of fraud or illusion, but in spite of a considerable body of accumulated evidence most scientists have remained unconvinced by the Spiritualist interpretation.

A Latter-Day Druid

Britain and the USA were the main centres of Spiritualism down to the Second World War, but the movement's most spectacular growth since the middle of this century has occurred in Brazil. The key figure in this development was a Frenchman, Hypolyte Léon Denizard Rivail (1804-69), who called himself Allan Kardec. Born at Lyons, he studied under the famous Swiss educa-



John Moss

Left and above A medium in trance: though fraudulent mediums flourished in the earlier days of the movement, there have always been genuine mediums, and Spiritualists are convinced that communications coming through them constitute conclusive proof that human beings survive death

tionist Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi. Failing to set up a school on Pestalozzi lines in France, he practised as a doctor, wrote numerous books on science and mathematics, joined the French Society of Magnetists and became interested in Mesmerism (see MESMER).

In the 1850s Rivail took up 'Spiritism' with enthusiasm, founded and led the Parisian Society for Spiritist Studies, ran a monthly magazine, *La Revue Spirite*, and wrote a string of books exploring his new field, including *The Book of Spirits* (1857) and *The Book of Mediums* (1861). Both of these are said to have been dictated from the spirit world to a medium through automatic writing, in part by the spirit of the departed Franz Mesmer. Rivail now adopted the pseudonym Allan Kardec, which combined names he believed had been his in previous lives – as revealed to him by Spiritualist mediums – in one of which he had been a Druid in ancient Gaul.

Kardec believed that spiritual progress is gained only through a succession of reincarnations and was convinced that the spirits had entrusted him with a mission to humanity. Much impressed by automatic writing, he poured cold water on many of the phenomena of physical mediumship which were all the rage at the time – spirit voices, ectoplasm and the rest – and his scepticism helped to delay the development of serious psychical research in France.

Kardec has remained almost unknown to Spiritualists in North America and Britain – though the Spiritualist writer Anna Blackwell translated his books into English in the 1870s – but disciples planted his ideas in Brazil. Translated into Portuguese, they found fertile soil there and the Brazilian Spiritist Federation was founded in Rio de Janeiro in 1874. Though Kardec had prided himself on his scientific attitude to the phenomena of mediumship, in Brazil his teachings were clothed in religious garments and blended readily with both the established Roman Catholic Christianity of

the country and the Voodoo-style cults which had originated among Brazil's African slaves. By 1950, though it was officially calculated that 'Spiritists' numbered only 2 per cent of the population, the movement was growing at phenomenal speed, in its own right and as a vigorous ingredient of the Afro-Christian Umbanda religion (see SOUTH AMERICA).

The Sociology of Spiritualism

If psychic phenomena are a universal feature of human life, why did the modern Spiritualist movement arise in the US and Britain in the 19th century? Sociologists attempt to explain the rise (or decline) of social movements in terms of the conditions affecting the lives of the members of a society, in terms of the processes going on within the society and of the changes in the structure of that society.

Modern Spiritualism is one of a particular type of religious movements known to sociologists as cults. Such movements are characterized by two general features; they are outside the major religious tradition of the society in which they originate (as already mentioned, Spiritualism owes more to non-Christian than to Christian sources), and they are attempts to solve the problems of individuals, particularly those problems that arise out of man's attempts to understand the world in which he lives, to give meaning to his life and to experiences of a psychic or mystical nature. Spiritualism certainly offers man a new view of the universe and man's place in it and is particularly concerned with the place of psychic experiences in human life.

Cults seem to arise in the greatest profusion, and to gain the most adherents, when a society is disorganized by rapid changes. In such circumstances the old religious traditions are challenged and men find the old views of life no longer satisfying. American society in the middle of the 19th century was going through a period of particularly rapid change as the result of the influx of emigrants, mainly from Europe, as well as the early effects of the industrial revolution. In Britain the industrial revolution was changing the traditional way of life; in particular this was the period of rapid urban expansion, and Spiritualism was from the first predominantly an urban religion.

The rationalism of the 18th century intel-

lectual was beginning to spread more widely through society and men began to demand proof of religious claims. While not claiming to offer proof of the existence of God, Spiritualism did claim to provide proof of the survival of the soul beyond death.

Many of the early Spiritualists were agnostics or atheists, men who had ceased to find Christianity credible but who nevertheless sought a philosophy of life which went beyond scientific materialism, while yet remaining consistent with science. Spiritualism was at first closely connected with psychical research, though the two movements gradually drifted apart. In common with many modern cults, it started as an attempt to study phenomena which were not seriously studied by orthodox science, and indeed which did not 'fit' the established scientific theories of the time. In each case the movements developed into religions, because they offered solutions which were not only intellectually but emotionally satisfactory to certain key problems in the lives of individuals. The 19th century was obsessed with death but many people were losing faith in the Christian explanation, as a result of the growth of belief in science. Death was a major source of tension in the lives of such persons, who were not satisfied with faith but needed proof of the survival of the soul after death. Spiritualism was attractive because it offered evidence of survival.

It was during the First World War and in the following years that the movement experienced its greatest growth, thus reflecting the tension created by the high death rate. In the second half of the 20th century death has ceased to be such an obsession and many people are more concerned with a search for the meaning of life; this has meant on the one hand that the Spiritualist movement has ceased to grow, and on the other that within the movement there is less concern with proofs of survival and a greater interest in the philosophy of Spiritualism. (See also MEDIUMS; PSYCHICAL RESEARCH.)

G. K. NELSON*

FURTHER READING: R. Brandon, *The Spiritualists* (Prometheus Books, 1984); S. Brown, *The Heyday of Spiritualism* (Hawthorn, 1971); William S. Moses, *Spirit Teachings* (Arno, 1976); G. K. Nelson, *Spiritualism and Society* (Schocken, 1969).

SPITTLE

THE FLUIDS of the body, the blood and the saliva, have an importance in the history of magic in that they are both aspects of soul power. Among some communities in the past, expectoration was regarded as a deeply religious act since it involved the sacrifice of an essential element of the person to the gods. The close connection between the flow of saliva and the emotions probably contributed to this idea: one spits with disgust, or licks the lips in anticipation of some delight.

Since it is a holy fluid, spittle has had an important role in consecration and anointing, for it sanctifies and protects whatever it touches. In some primitive communities, property was protected against theft by being spat upon, and spittle was used for the ratification of agreements. Among the Masai in Africa the equivalent of the European handshake was mutual spitting, and in some societies it was customary for the respective parties to an agreement to spit into one another's mouths.

Saliva has also been credited with therapeutic properties, the most effective type being the first spittle of the day, known as fasting spittle. Pliny insisted that fasting spittle could cure snakebite and boils, and English country healers of the 19th century used it for the treatment of abrasions, skin irritations and eye disorders. A modern Japanese cure for headaches involves a matchstick steeped in spittle which is placed in the centre of the forehead. An old treatment for a crick in the neck was to convey spittle by means of the right hand to the right knee, and by the left hand to the left knee. To a minor extent the New Testament has been responsible for the continued respectability of saliva therapy among Christians, for Christ used spittle to restore sight and speech to the afflicted.

Then there is the importance of spittle as an aid to economic activity. Handsel money, the first coin of the day received by a trader, is frequently spat upon, ostensibly to attract further money, but basically to ensure that it does not vanish away like a fairy gift. Similar action is often taken in respect of money found in the street. Anglers, before casting their lines, spit on their hooks, and deep-sea fishermen are known to expectorate soulfully into their trawls.

At one time it was customary to spit on any member of the family before he or she embarked upon a long journey, as protection against the hazards of the road. A few years ago it was reported in the newspapers that a woman in Oxford always spat at her daughter on the day of an important school examination, and at her husband before he played in a bowls match. On the other hand, it is an old belief that your spittle can be used by an enemy to work magic against you.

Where the fear of the Evil Eye remains strong, spittle is sometimes used as an antidote. The stranger who unthinkingly praises the child of a Mediterranean fisherman may be astounded when the outraged mother spits into its face three times, three being a lucky number. In some cases a mixture of



spittle and dirt is used to anoint the child's forehead and lips. The ill effects of boasting, a presumptuous act calculated to provoke the angry intervention of the gods, can be countered if you spit thrice into your own bosom. People who are conscious of having violated some taboo or feel vulnerable to psychic attack will often spit as a matter of course. Scottish fishermen who incur the wrath of higher powers by uttering tabooed words like 'dog', 'salmon', 'rabbit', 'pig', 'kirk' or 'minister', can restore their fortunes by 'spitting out the names'. The clergy are often in bad odour among the superstitious, and at one time the working men of Birmingham used to expectorate whenever they passed a parson in the street.

Dressmakers have been known to spit on

In folklore, spittle has healing properties because it contains part of the body's life-energy: Christ touches a blind man's eyes with spittle, a fresco in Ravenna

their work to ensure the customer's satisfaction, boxers will spit on their hands before commencing a fight, and gardeners before they begin to dig. Although few people are still given to spitting into their right shoe or their urine for luck first thing in the morning, spitting superstitions have not quite died out. Some people invariably spit thrice on seeing the new moon for the first time, and others studiously spit three times whenever they see a dead dog, a magpie, or that rarity, the piebald horse.

ERIC MAPL

SPONTANEOUS COMBUSTION

ON THE COLD MORNING of Monday 5 January 1835, James Hamilton, professor of mathematics at the University of Nashville, was checking the meteorological instruments on the porch of his house when he felt 'a steady pain like a hornet sting, accompanied by a sensation of heat' in his left leg. Looking down, he saw a bright blue flame, 'about the size of a dime in diameter, and somewhat flattened at the top', flaring several inches out of the leg. He beat at it several times without effect, then cupped his hands over the flame to starve it of oxygen. Eventually it was extinguished, and Hamilton realized that he had experienced – and, unusually, survived – a rare phenomenon that had puzzled and terrified people for many centuries: spontaneous combustion.

It is the relative rarity of the occurrence that has made spontaneous combustion so difficult to document and investigate – that, and the obstinate scepticism of doctors, police and fire officers. Typically, the body of an elderly person (but sometimes it is a teenager, or even a child) is found indoors, the upper part so totally burnt that it is reduced to ashes, but with one or both legs largely intact. Floorboards or carpet beneath the body will be burnt through, but the rest of the room, even combustible materials close by the body, are untouched, except for being stained with soot. Consider the following case.

Dr J. Irving Bentley, a 93-year-old retired physician, lived on the first floor of an apartment building in Coudersport, northern Pennsylvania. Early in the morning of 5 December 1966, North Penn Gas Company worker Don Gosnell entered the building's basement to read meters, and noticed 'a light blue smoke of unusual odour' and a pile of ashes.

Since he had received no answer to his shouted greeting when he entered the building, Gosnell decided to look in on Dr Bentley. There was more of the strange smoke in the apartment, but no sign of the old physician. When Gosnell peered into the bathroom he was met with a horrific sight.

A hole about a yard across had burnt right through the floor to the basement below, exposing the joists and pipework. On the edge of the hole Gosnell saw 'a brown leg from the knee down, like that of a mannequin. I didn't look further!' he later said, and he ran from the building.

John Dec, deputy coroner, reported: 'All I found was a knee joint atop a post in the basement, the lower leg from the knee down, and the now-scattered ashes 6 feet below.' Yet the fire, which had burned so fiercely that it had completely consumed the rest of Dr Bentley's body, left his walking frame untouched beside the hole. Firemen testified that, although they found a few embers around the hole, and a slight scorching on the bathtub about a foot away, there was no other damage.

One of the strangest features about the majority of cases of this sort is the speed

with which the fire strikes. The victims seem to have been rendered incapable of movement, either from fear or because they rapidly became unconscious. In 1960, five severely charred bodies were found in a burnt-out car near Pikeville, Kentucky. The coroner commented: 'They were sitting there as if they'd just gotten into the car. With all that heat it seems there'd be some kind of a struggle to escape. But there hadn't been.' Charles Fort (see FORT) collected many newspaper accounts of the occurrence of spontaneous combustion, and drew attention to the fact that the victims seemed often to be unaware of their predicament: 'in their grim submission' he wrote, 'it is almost as if they had been lulled by the wings of a vampire'.



The remains of Dr Bentley; his walking-frame and the surroundings were almost untouched

The Death of Krook

Mr Guppy takes the light. They go down, more dead than alive, and holding one another, push open the door of the back shop. The cat has retreated close to it, and stands snarling - not at them, at something on the ground, before the fire. There is a very little fire left in the grate, but there is a smouldering suffocating vapour in the room, and a dark greasy coating on the walls and ceiling. The chairs and table, and the bottle so rarely absent from the table, all stand as usual. On one chairback hang the old man's hairy cap and coat... They advance slowly... The cat remains where they found her, still snarling at something on the ground, before the fire and between the two chairs. What is it? Hold up the light.

Here is a small burnt patch of flooring; here is the tinder from a little bundle of burnt paper, but not so light as usual, seeming to be steeped in something; and here is – is it the cinder of a small charred and broken log of wood sprinkled with white ashes, or is it coal? Oh Horror, he is here! and this from which we run away, striking out the light and overturning one another into the street, is all that represents him.

Charles Dickens *Bleak House*

Another remarkable characteristic is the extreme intensity of the heat of the fire. On the night of 1 July 1951, Mrs Mary Reeser, a widow of 67, of St Petersburg, Florida, burnt to death in her armchair, leaving nothing but a pile of ashes. The chair itself was burnt down to its springs, and a small circle of carpet was charred; but, apart from an area of soot on the ceiling above, the surroundings were untouched, and a pile of papers nearby was not even scorched. Dr Wilton M. Krogman, a forensic scientist from the University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine, with experience of death by fire, reported:

I cannot conceive of such complete cremation without more burning of the apartment itself. In fact the apartment and everything in it should have been consumed. Never have I seen a human skull shrunk by intense heat. The opposite has always been true: the skulls have been either abnormally swollen, or have virtually exploded into hundreds of pieces... I regard it as the most amazing thing I have ever seen. As I review it, the short hairs on my neck bristle with vague fear. Were I living in the Middle Ages, I'd mutter something about black magic.

Dr Krogman said that he had made observations of bodies in crematoria, which burned for over eight hours at 2000°F without the bones being turned to ashes; and that it required a temperature over 3000°F to cause bone to melt. Another reported case is that of Léon Evcille, found burnt in his locked car at Arcis-sur-Aube, France, on 17 June 1971. The heat had melted the windows. It has been estimated that a burning car normally attains a temperature of about 1300°F, but that the temperature must have reached over 1800°F to melt the glass.

What can be the cause of such a remarkable fire? The medical profession is understandably sceptical of any supernatural explanation. In Victorian times it was believed that heavy drinking resulted in a build-up of inflammable material in the tissues; this was certainly the explanation given by Charles Dickens for the complete destruction of Krook in his novel *Bleak House*. And Mark Twain wrote, in *Life on the Mississippi* (1883):

Jimmy Finn was not burned in the calaboose, but died a natural death in a tan vat, of a combination of delirium tremens and spontaneous combustion. When I say natural death, it was a natural death for Jimmy Finn to die.

The celebrated chemist Justus von Liebig (1803-1873), who investigated the phenomenon but refused to believe in it – on the grounds that he had never observed it – commented on the case of an 80-year old alcoholic woman, who was reduced to ashes as she sat drinking brandy: 'the chair, which of course had not sinned, did not burn'. He showed conclusively that alcohol-saturated flesh would burn only until the alcohol was consumed.

Other explanations followed. In *Forensic Medicine and Toxicology* (1914), Dixon Mann and W.A. Brend report the case of a very fat man who died two hours after his admission to Guy's Hospital, London, in



Gathering the ashes after Mrs Reeser's death

1885. The following day the corpse was found bloated with gas, although there were no signs of decomposition. 'When punctures were made in the skin, the gas escaped and burned with a flame like that of carburetted hydrogen [methane]; as many as a dozen flames were burning at the same time.'

The theory that the fire was fuelled by the fatty tissues gained ground, and was generally given as a contributory cause of death in inquests. Recent reports have suggested reasons why the upper part of the body is consumed, but not the legs: 'the cause is a "candle effect", in which fat from the ignited head of the body saturates clothing, which acts as a wick.'

However, in *Medicine, Science and the Law* (1965), Dr D.J.Gee, a lecturer in forensic medicine at Leeds University who proposed this effect, described experiments he had performed. He managed to ignite small samples of fatty tissue, but the burning could only be sustained in a strong draught, and even this resulted in slow smouldering rather than the fierce blaze characteristic of so many reported cases.

Speculation has also been directed to the build-up of phosphagens – compounds of phosphoric acid with amino acids involved in the complex biochemical reactions that take place in muscle contraction. A paper in *Applied Trophology* (December 1957) suggested:

Phosphagen is a compound like nitroglycerine... It is no doubt so highly developed in certain sedentary persons as to make their bodies actually combustible, subject to ignition, burning like wet gunpowder under some circumstances.

The drawback to this explanation is that phosphagens are completely unrelated to nitroglycerine.

And none of these theories explains how the fire begins, nor why it appears to come from within, so that in certain cases the clothing is untouched. An Italian surgeon

named Battaglio described the death of a priest, Bertholi, in Filetto in 1789. He was left in his room reading a prayerbook, but only a minute or two later he was heard screaming, and was found lying on the floor surrounded by a pale flame. A devout man, Bertholi wore a sackcloth shirt beneath his clothes; although his outer clothing was burned away, and his charred flesh came off in shreds, the sackcloth was unburnt.

Possibly the first explanation of a supernatural (or at least abnormal) cause is to be found in Wu Ch'eng-en's famous classic of the 16th century, *Monkey*:

...Heaven will send down a fire that will devour you. The fire is of a peculiar kind. It is neither common fire nor celestial fire, but springs up from within and consumes the vitals, reducing the whole frame to ashes...

Some modern theorists have proposed the (as yet) unexplained phenomenon of ball-lightning as a plausible cause of spontaneous combustion, something which accords closely with Wu Ch'eng-en's text. This would certainly go some way to accounting for the events of 7 April 1938. On this one day, Willem ten Bruik, an 18-year-old Dutchman, spontaneously combusted at the wheel of his car near Nijmegen, Holland; George Turner died similarly in his truck at Upton-by-Chester, England; and John Greeley was reduced to a 'human cinder' at the wheel of the SS *Ulrich*, some 100 miles of Land's End. In all three cases, there was almost no fire damage to the victims' surroundings.

Support for this theory comes from a report in the magazine *Fate* (April 1961), by Rev. Winogene Savage. An acquaintance was woken one morning by his wife's screams and, running downstairs, found her ablaze on the living-room floor, with a strange 'ball of fire' floating over her burnt body. The flames were extinguished, but the lady subsequently died. Witnesses reported

that, although her clothes were badly burnt, there were no burns on the rug where she had been found lying.

In 1975, Livingstone Gearhart advanced another (but possibly related) hypothesis in *Pursuit*, a journal devoted to 'Fortean' topics. He reported that he had found a significant correlation between the occurrence of cases of spontaneous combustion and variations in the Earth's geomagnetic flux. The strength of the planet's magnetic field varies considerably in relation to the occurrence of solar flares and sunspots, and Gearhart found that a suspicious number of cases had been at times when the flux was at or near a peak. Whether there is any direct connection between observed ball-lightning phenomena and the geomagnetic flux has yet to be established.

The most detailed investigation of cases of spontaneous combustion has been made by the writer Michael Harrison in his book *Fire from Heaven*. He drew attention to the fact – not realized before – that a number of cases had occurred in close proximity to an extensive body of water: the sea, a large lake, or an important river. This might be taken as supporting, in some measure, the ball-lightning theory. However, Harrison also pointed out that, in numerous cases, the victims had subsequently been found to have been in a heightened emotional state. He summarised his conclusions as follows:

1. Spontaneous combustion is one of a wide range of phenomena associated with poltergeist activity (see POLTERGEIST).

2. Physical phenomena of any kind ascribed to the poltergeist are due to what he called 'ekenergy', controlled consciously or subconsciously by the human focus. This ekenergy is part of a cosmic force not normally apparent, because of the balance that usually exists between the corporeal body and the 'parallel' body evidenced by Kirlian photography (see KIRLIAN PHOTOGRAPHY).

3. Spontaneous combustion and other forms of ekenergetic phenomena are triggered when this balance is disturbed by the will – conscious or subconscious – of the focus. That the force generated is of human rather than external origin is evidenced by the fact that it can be directed – which would explain the remarkable localisation, even selectivity, of the consuming fire, as well as most other poltergeist activity.

Harrison finally concluded that 'the nature and purpose of the Fire from Heaven will be discovered through what is already accepted as a fact, especially by those scientists working directly on the various problems of the paranormal: that the Fire is merely one manifestation of that wide range of physico-psychic activity that we classify under the general heading of "the unexplained" or "the paranormal".'

FURTHER READING: Charles Fort, *Complete Books* (Dover, 1976); Vincent Gaddis, *Mysterious Fires and Lights* (Dell, 1968); Michael Harrison, *Fire from Heaven* (Sidgwick & Jackson, 1976); Maxwell Cade and Delphine Davis, *Taming of the Thunderbolts* (Abelard-Schuman, 1969).





