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James George Frazer

Excerpt

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CHAPTER I

MAGIC

IN *The Golden Bough* I have attempted to indicate the great part which a belief in magic has played in the early history of human thought. The belief rests on two main logical fallacies; first, that by imitating the desired effect you can produce it, and second, that things which have once been in contact can influence each other when they are separated, just as if the contact still persisted. The magic based on the first of these fallacies may be called Homoeopathic or Imitative Magic, and the magic based on the second of these principles may be called Contagious Magic. If this analysis is correct it follows that a belief in magic is wholly fallacious. All its pretensions are false, and only deceive the dupes who trust in them. Yet the belief in magic has been, and still is, enormous throughout the world, though it has always been most prevalent among backward or primitive peoples. The magician believes that by his acts and words, his magical rites and incantations, he can control the forces of Nature for his own benefit and the injury of his enemies. The effects of this belief have been disastrous. Among primitive peoples, especially in Africa, natural death has commonly, or even regularly, been ascribed to the effects of maleficent magic, and the death has been usually avenged by the murder of the imaginary but really innocent culprit.¹

But the disastrous effects of a belief in magic are not confined to the destruction of human lives. Its baleful influence has extended to the economic sphere. Speaking of the Kafir tribes of South Africa, a good authority tells us that

¹ J. G. Frazer, *Belief in Immortality* (London, 1913), i. 33 *sqq.*

“ so strong is this fear of being accused of getting rich by magic that many people purposely refrain from undue cultivation of their land, lest others should accuse them of using magical practices to increase the fertility of the soil.”¹

Among the Bangala, a tribe of the Upper Congo River, the disastrous influence of a belief in magic or witchcraft has been admirably recorded by an experienced missionary in the following striking passage. “ In judging the conservatism of natives and the way in which they have from generation to generation simply followed in the footsteps of their predecessors one must not forget that they have been, and many tribes still are, bound fast by witchcraft, fetishism, and superstition, and any tendency to burst these more than iron bands has been suppressed by fear of being charged with witchcraft. Some twenty-five years ago I knew a blacksmith who made a good imitation, from old hoop iron, of a trade knife, and when the king heard of it he thought he was too clever and threatened him with a charge of witchcraft if he made any more like it. If the man who made our locomotives had lived here, in Africa, and had given play to his inventive genius, he would not have been honoured, but killed as a witch. The native had a deep-rooted feeling that anything out of the ordinary was due to witchcraft and treated it as such. Some years ago I knew a native medicine woman who was successful in treating certain native diseases, and as she became wealthy, the natives accused her of giving the sickness by witchcraft in order to cure it and be paid for it ; for they said, ‘ How can she cure it so easily unless she first gave it to them ? ’ She had to abandon her practice or she would have been killed as a witch.

“ The introduction of a new article of trade has always brought on the introducer a charge of witchcraft ; and there is a legend, that the man who discovered the way to tap palm trees for palm wine was charged as a witch and paid the penalty with his life. That, however, did not stop the trade in palm wine. Through this fear of being charged with witchcraft, the natives would never of themselves have made any progress in art, science, or civilization. This fear was so real and so widespread that it stultified and killed every tendency to change and progress. The reasons which have

¹ Dudley Kidd, *The Essential Kafir* (London, 1904), p. 147.

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caused a lack of material progress are the same that held them fast to their religious beliefs until the white man arrived with his tools, his skill, his medicine, and his religious teaching. In their old state they maintained strict conservatism, which, however, was quickly broken down by contact with the white man, whom they are always ready to acknowledge their superior in all things and worthy of imitation wherever this is possible.”¹

The rooted suspicion of magic or witchcraft with which these African blacks regard every material improvement in the arts and crafts has had a close parallel in ancient Rome. Once on a time a certain C. Furius Cresimus, whose small farm produced heavier crops than the largest farms in the neighbourhood, was shrewdly suspected of drawing away the corn from other people’s fields by enchantment. Being brought before the public assembly at Rome to stand his trial on this charge, he produced in the sight of the people his ploughshares, his mattocks, his sturdy hinds, his sleek oxen, and pointing to them said, “These are my enchantments, gentlemen. I regret that it is not in my power to lay before you my toils and moils and sweatings.” He was unanimously acquitted.²

Perhaps the most familiar example of homoeopathic or imitative magic is the practice of making a magical image of the person whom the magician desires to injure. By cutting, stabbing, or otherwise injuring the image he believes that he inflicts a corresponding injury upon his enemy whom the image represents; by burning or otherwise destroying the image he imagines that he kills his foe. Of this practice I have cited many examples in *The Golden Bough*.³ Here I will give a few additional instances. Thus, for example, in Morocco magical images made for this maleficent purpose are either of paper or of more substantial material. Thus if the magician wishes to cause his enemy to suffer from headache he will fashion an image of him in dough and pierce the head of it with a nail before putting the image in the oven. But

¹ J. H. Weeks, “Anthropological Notes on the Bangala of the Upper Congo River,” in *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, xxxix. (1909), p. 108.

² Pliny, *Nat. Hist.*, xviii. 41 sqq.

³ *The Magic Art and the Evolution of Kings*, i. 55 sqq.

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before doing so he should insert a scrap of his victim's garment in the image. If he wishes his victim to break his arm or his leg he wrenches the corresponding limb from the image. If he desires to make his victim suffer perpetual pain he beats a metal effigy of him with a hammer on the anvil for a whole day, saying, "As this hammer does not cease to strike the anvil for a whole day, so may misfortune pursue So-and-so his whole life long." Paper images are similarly treated for a similar purpose by piercing them with nails or thorns, or by tearing off a limb. In order that the victim may suffer throughout his whole life, the magician finally buries the image in a graveyard, a slaughter-house, a furnace, or a well. If the effigy is buried in the bed of a river the victim will be continually shivering from cold: if it is buried in a furnace he will constantly be hot with anger. If the image has been simply buried in the earth, without being broken or pierced, the victim will simply waste away. When the image is a statuette it suffices that it should be made by a sorcerer who recites the appropriate incantation; but if the image is of paper it should be made by a scribe who writes cabalistic phrases on the body and limbs.¹

Among the Ibo and Ijaw of Southern Nigeria "a mud, or wax image is modelled in the rough semblance of the man whom it is desired to injure, and while incantations are made, this is damaged by being pierced with a nail or spear or it is decapitated."² In Loango the magician fashions an image of his victim out of a root, pith, or wood, and with the appropriate imprecations throws it into a river or the sea or the wilderness, holds it in the fire, or hangs it in the smoke. Just as the image rots, shrivels up, or is reduced to ashes, the victim suffers a corresponding fate.³

Among the Bangala of the Upper Congo if a man loses a relative or has an enemy he goes to a magician (*nganga ya likenge*), who calls up in his saucepan of water the spirits of various people whose images are visible in the water, and the client, who sits by watching the water, allows one reflection

¹ E. Mauchamp, *La Sorcellerie au Maroc* (Paris), pp. 293 *sq.*

² P. A. Talbot, *The Peoples of Southern Nigeria* (London, 1926), ii. 182.

³ *Die Loango Expedition, 1873-1876*, von P. Güssfeldt, J. Falhrenstein, E. Pechuël-Loesche (Stuttgart, 1909), iii. 2. p. 337.

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after another to pass until the reflection of his enemy is shown in the water. That reflection or *elimo* (soul) he pierces at once with a palm splinter as a substitute for a spear, and the one who owns that soul will sicken and die. Sometimes a piece of wood or plantain stalk was roughly carved to represent the enemy, and wherever it was stuck or cut the enemy would feel intense pain in the corresponding part of his body, and to stick it in a vital part meant death.¹

Among the Bakongo of the Lower Congo “the most powerful and most feared of all the fetishes in the catalogue belongs to the medicine-man who has the *mbanzangola* fetish. It is a wooden image, and is always retained in the possession of the witch-doctor, as it is too powerful to pass into the hands of a layman. A private person can buy other fetishes, but no private individual can own a *mbanzangola* fetish. If a person desires to cause pain, disease, or death to another, he goes to a medicine-man of this fetish order, and, having paid a fee, he drives in a nail or knife where he wants his enemy to feel pain. A knife-stab in a vital part means a painful death to the man’s enemy; a nail in the shoulder, elbow, or knee means excruciating agony in one or other of those joints, and indicates that the man does not want to kill his enemy, but only wishes him to have rheumatism, abscesses, or such minor ailments. These fetish images are often stuck over with nails, knives, and other sharp instruments. This is probably the only fetish image in connection with which there is no ‘white art’ practised—it is neither a protective fetish nor a curative one, but is always used to inflict pain. On the other hand, I have heard that the nails, etc., driven into this image are offerings for benefits received; and it is possible that someone suffering from a pain in part of his body has driven in a nail in a corresponding part of the image, to pass on the pain to an enemy whom he may think sent it to him, hence he may regard such a nail as an offering for a benefit he hoped to receive.”²

A Greek inscription of the fourth century B.C. from Cyrene in North Africa records an interesting instance of the burning

¹ J. H. Weeks, “Anthropological Notes on the Bangala of the Upper Congo River,” in *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, vol. xl.

(1910), 395.

² J. H. Weeks, *Among the Primitive Bakongo* (London 1914), 225 sq.

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of wax images for the purpose of destroying the malefactors whom they represented. Cyrene was founded by Greek colonists from the island of Thera in the Aegean, and in founding it the Thereans passed a very stringent decree directed against all such recreants as either refused to sail with the colonists or having sailed with them should afterwards desert the colony and return to Thera. Waxen images of all such traitors were to be made and burned, no doubt for the purpose of bringing down destruction on their heads.¹

In Egypt, which borders on Cyrene, similar magical practices were rife in antiquity. On the subject Dr. Wallis Budge writes as follows: "There were, however, in Egypt many men who professed the art of Black Magic, the object of which was to do harm. In their hands the powers of magic were generally misused, and disastrous results, if we may believe the papyri, were the consequence. One of the commonest ways of working evil was by means of the wax figure. A man employed a magician to make in wax a figure of his enemy, whose name was cut or written upon it, and then to work magic upon it by reciting spells over it. If the spells contained curses they were supposed to take effect upon the living man; and if the figure were stabbed, or gashes made in it with a knife, the living man suffered terrible pain, or wounds appeared in his body. If the figure were destroyed by fire or by any other means, the death of the living man ensued. The Westcar Papyrus tells us that the wife of one Aba-ner committed adultery in his garden with one of his servants. When the news of this was brought to him, he made a model of a crocodile in wax, and told his servant to go and place it in the river at the spot where his guilty wife's paramour was in the habit of bathing. As soon as this man entered the water on the following day, the wax crocodile turned into a huge living crocodile, which quickly devoured him. The Rollin Papyrus states that certain evil men succeeded in stealing a book of magic from the Royal Library, and that by following the directions contained in it they

¹ A. D. Nock, "A Curse from Cyrene," in *Archiv für Religionswissenschaft*, vol. 24 (1926), p. 172, and Dr. Ferri, "Alcuni iscrizioni di

Cirene," in *Abhandlungen der Königlich-lichen Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin*, v. (1925) 19 sqq.

succeeded in making wax figures, on which they worked magic with the view of injuring or killing the king of Egypt. This was held to be treason in the first degree, and the malefactors seem to have suffered the death penalty. The use of the wax figures was not disdained by the priests of Amen-Ra at Thebes, for they regularly burnt a wax figure of the fiend Apep, who daily endeavoured to prevent the sun from rising. This figure was in the form of a serpent of many folds, on which the name Apep was written or cut. A case made of papyrus inscribed with spells containing curses was prepared, and, the wax figure having been placed inside it, both case and figure were cast into a fire made of a special kind of plant. Whilst they were burning the priest recited curses, and stamped upon them with his left foot until they were rendered shapeless and were finally destroyed. This magical ceremony was believed to be very helpful to Ra, the Sun-God, who uttered over the real Apep spells which paralysed him, and then killed him by the fiery darts of his rays, and consumed him.”¹

In Burma similar magical practices of the injury of a foe are still in use, as we learn from a good observer, Mrs. Leslie Milne, who writes as follows: “As in many other countries, in former times and even at the present day, small figures of men and women are made to represent an enemy, and are subjected to the injury they would inflict on that person. In southern Italy a lemon is sometimes named after an enemy and needles or splinters of wood are stuck into it with the idea of harming the person that it represents. I have never heard of fruit being so treated among the Palaungs, nor have I heard of the drowning of a figure as in Kashmir, or of the melting of a wax image in front of the fire as was done in Europe. The figures are made of earth, and as that in the Palaung hills is not very plastic, it is moistened and modelled on a piece of board in the manner of a rough bas-relief. As the board is kept horizontal, the figure retains the shape. One that was made for me as a specimen, by a wise man, was ten inches long. I hoped to bring it home, but it fell to pieces on the journey. Incantations are said over these figures, and splinters of bamboo are stuck into them, or a hand or foot is

¹ E. A. Wallis Budge, *Osiris and the Egyptian Resurrection* (London, 1911) ii. 177 sq.

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cut off. The name is sometimes scratched on the figure while it is still damp. This can only be done by those who can write: those who cannot, whisper over it the name of the enemy.”¹

In Annam a common form of maleficent magic is to sculpture or to fashion out of paper a representation of the person whom the magician wishes to injure. This effigy is cut with the stroke of a knife or a nail, and hidden in the woodwork of the house or under the threshold of the person whom the magician desires to injure. It is believed that the master of the house will suffer an injury corresponding to the wound inflicted on the effigy. In Tonquin a similar maleficent magic is practised on wooden figures which represent the foes of the magician. The persons represented are supposed to suffer injuries corresponding to those which have been inflicted on their images. If the image is decapitated, the man soon dies. Malevolent carpenters will sometimes introduce into the roof of the house they are building little figures of wood or paper, carrying in their hands a stick, a knife, or a bucket. In the first two cases the figure is supposed to create domestic strife or robbery by armed burglars. In the last case all the good luck of the household is thought to be drained away by the mysterious action of the bucket. Further, in the chimney of the kitchen they place two images which by the action of the draught of air with the smoke are made to turn on their axes. This is supposed to breed perpetual quarrels between the householder and his wife, who are apparently thought to turn from each other as the images turn in the chimney.²

The Sedang, a warlike branch of the primitive Moï race in Indo-China, on the borders of Annam and Laos, employ the magic of images to secure success in hunting or war. Before setting out for war or the chase they fashion an image of the men or animals which they wish to kill, moulding them either out of the sand by the river-bank or the earth of their cultivated fields. Having done so they pierce the image with their spear, saying: “May the man or the animal thus perish with the thrust of my spear this very evening.” They are

¹ Mrs. Leslie Milne, *The Home of an Eastern Clan* (Oxford, 1924), p. 263.

² P. Giran, *Magie et Religion Annamites* (Paris, 1912), p. 88.

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persuaded that by this ceremony they ensure the success of their enterprise.¹ Among the Man Coc, a mountain tribe of Tonquin, when a man wishes to avenge himself on an enemy for some minor offence without killing him, he fashions an image of his enemy out of paper, fastens it to a tree, and shoots it with an arrow or a gun. This is supposed to make the culprit fall ill; but for more serious offences the procedure is different and more complicated. The injured man writes the name and village of his enemy on a piece of paper, which he gives to a he-goat to swallow. Then he hangs the goat from a tree, and inflicts upon it a severe beating, saying all the time, "I am sorry to inflict such a punishment upon you, but the cause is my enemy, who has done me grievous wrong. You will have to bear witness of this before the divinities to whom you are despatched. If you fail to discharge this duty, your soul will never be reincarnated, but will float for ever in the air." After that he releases the unfortunate goat and lets it wander and die of hunger in the forest. He awaits with confidence the result of the message which he has sent by the goat to the heavenly powers, convinced that he thus ensures the death of his enemy and all his children.² In this last ceremony the goat is probably a substitute for an image of the man's enemy.

In Japan the practice of attempting to injure an enemy by maltreating an effigy representing him is common, and takes a variety of forms. The common mode of carrying out the charm is to form a lay figure of straw, pierced with nails, and to bury it beneath the place where the person to be punished usually sleeps. To avenge the infidelity of a husband or lover a jealous woman "will take an image of the faithless one, or, as the case may be, of his frail companion, or of both, and nail it to a tree within the grounds of some shrine. At whatever part of the effigy the nail is driven, there will be injury inflicted on the original in the flesh, but if she should meet the ghost of an enormous bull and exhibit terror at the apparition the potency of the charm is lost, and can only be revived with incantation and imprecations on the offending pair. Another

¹ "L'Envoûtement par l'Image chez les Moï, Annam," in *L'Anthropologie*, xxiii. (1912) p. 245.

² E. Diguët, *Les Montagnards du Tonkin* (Paris, 1908), p. 117.

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account says that at two o'clock in the morning the operator goes to the shrine of her patron god (usually the *Ujibami*); on her bosom a mirror is hung; sometimes she wears a crown formed of an inverted iron tripod bearing three candles. She carries a straw effigy of the victim in her right hand and a hammer in her left. She nails the image to the sacred tree before the shrine, and while so engaged she adjures the gods to save their tree, impute the guilt of desecration to the traitor, and visit him with their deadly vengeance. She visits the tree each night until the victim has sickened and died. Two other very similar forms of this type were described to me at Yokohama. In one the operator goes at night to the sacred tree of a shrine near her home, and, stating her purpose and the number of times she intends to come, drives in a nail through the image; she then pays the specified number of visits, on each occasion driving in a nail; after a number of nails have been inserted blood will issue from the tree if the victim is to die. In the other, among the details mentioned were the holding of a lighted incense-stick, by the operator, in each corner of her mouth, and the necessity of the most complete secrecy if the operation were to succeed in its object."¹

The same method of injuring an enemy by injuring a magical effigy of him is known and practised by the Malays. "To destroy an enemy, there is prescribed in Malay versions of Muslim treatises a world-wide method of sorcery. A cabalistic symbol is inscribed on wax. The wax is moulded in the form of a man. Then the eyes of the figure are pierced with a needle, or its belly stabbed, while a purely Arabic charm is recited to call down upon the victim the anger of Allah! To rob an enemy of power to harm, it suffices to draw his portrait in the dust of cross-roads, grind one's heel on his navel, tread on his pictured heart, beat the face with a stick, and recite a short imprecation."²

Thus among the Looboos, a primitive tribe of Sumatra, who differ from their neighbours in culture, language, and appearance, images of persons are made and ill-treated in all sorts of ways in order that by this means the persons themselves

¹ W. L. Hildburgh, "Notes on Some Japanese Magical Methods for Injuring Persons," in *Man*, xv. (1915) p. 118.

² R. O. Winstedt, *Shaman, Saiva, and Sufi* (London, 1925), pp. 165 sq.