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James George Frazer

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Aftermath

The Scottish social anthropologist Sir James Frazer (1854–1941) first published *The Golden Bough* in 1890. A seminal two-volume work (reissued in the Cambridge Library Collection), it revolutionised the study of ancient religion through comparative analysis of mythology, rituals and superstitions around the world. Following the completion in 1915 of the revised twelve-volume third edition (also available in this series), Frazer found that he had more to say and further evidence to present. Published in 1936, *Aftermath* was conceived as a supplement to *The Golden Bough*, offering his additional findings on such topics as magic, royal and priestly taboos, sacrifice, reincarnation, and all manner of supernatural beliefs spanning cultures, continents and millennia. Sealing Frazer's profound contribution to the study of religion and folklore, this work remains an important text for scholars of anthropology and the history of ideas.

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AFTERMATH

A SUPPLEMENT TO
THE GOLDEN BOUGH

BY

SIR JAMES GEORGE FRAZER

O.M., F.R.S., F.B.A.

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*O miseras hominum mentes, o pectora caeca!
Qualibus in tenebris vitae quantisque periclis
Degitur hoc aevi quodcumquest!*

Lucretius, Book II, lines 14–16.

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PREFACE

THIS book is in no sense an independent treatise ; it is simply, as the title purports, a supplement intended to provide some fresh information on certain subjects which I have discussed more at large in *The Golden Bough*. Much of the new matter which the volume contains has been gathered from works that have appeared since the third and last edition of *The Golden Bough* was completed by the publication of the index volume in 1915 ; but I have also drawn on earlier sources which had escaped me when I wrote the original work. In that work, as in all my other writings, I have sought to base my conclusions by strict induction on a broad and solid foundation of well-authenticated facts. In the present work I have extended and strengthened the foundation without remodelling the superstructure of theory, which on the whole I have seen no reason to change. But now, as always, I hold all my theories very lightly, and am ever ready to modify or abandon them in the light of new evidence. If my writings should survive the writer, they will do so, I believe, less for the sake of the theories which they propound than for the sake of the facts which they record. They will live, if they live at all, as a picture or moving panorama of the vanished life of primitive man all over the world, from the Tropics to the Poles, groping and stumbling through the mists of ignorance and superstition in the eternal search after goodness and truth. When I

first put pen to paper to write *The Golden Bough* I had no conception of the magnitude of the voyage on which I was embarking; I thought only to explain a single rule of an ancient Italian priesthood. But insensibly I was led on, step by step, into surveying, as from some specular height, some Pisgah of the mind, a great part of the human race; I was beguiled, as by some subtle enchanter, into inditing what I cannot but regard as a dark, a tragic chronicle of human error and folly, of fruitless endeavour, wasted time, and blighted hopes. At the best the chronicle may serve as a warning, as a sort of Ariadne's thread, to help the forlorn wayfarer to shun some of the snares and pitfalls into which his fellows have fallen before him in the labyrinth of life. Such as it is, with all its shortcomings, I now submit *The Golden Bough* in its completed form to the judgment of my contemporaries, and perhaps of posterity.

J. G. FRAZER

13th August 1936

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CHAPTER I.—MAGIC Pp. 1-67

Magic may be divided into Homoeopathic or Imitative and Contagious Magic. A belief in magic has greatly affected the lives of primitive people, leading to economic stagnation as well as to tragic loss of life.

A familiar example of homoeopathic or imitative magic consists in making and injuring a magical image of an enemy. Imitative magic is also employed to facilitate childbirth, as in the Malay States, to relieve pain, as in Celebes, India, and Wales, and to cause sickness or death, as in New Guinea.

Many acts are forbidden in primitive society lest they might, on the principles of homoeopathic magic, entail undesirable effects. Certain foods are also forbidden for the same reason.

A magical sympathy is often supposed to exist between people at a distance, such that the actions of the one directly affect the other. Thus rules of conduct are often imposed upon wives during their husbands' absence in hunting, fishing, or fighting. Infidelity to an absent spouse is particularly dreaded and avoided.

Homoeopathic magic is often employed at sowing and planting to promote the growth and quality of the crops.

A fruitful branch of magic consists in the employment of the relics of the dead. By sympathetic magic birth and death are often associated with the flow and ebb of the tides.

Contagious magic is founded on the belief that things once conjoined remain, even after being disjoined, in sympathetic relation. Contagious magic is supposed to exist between a man and his bodily relics, especially his hair, nails, navel-string, and afterbirth. This has led to many observances throughout the world. Clothing and bodily impressions are often employed in contagious magic.

CHAPTER II.—THE MAGICAL CONTROL OF
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An important function of magic is to control the weather, and weather-makers sometimes rise to positions of power and influence. Magicians attempt to cause rain to fall or to cease, sometimes by imitative magic and sometimes by methods that are partly magical, partly religious. Primitive man also sometimes attempts to control the course of the sun, and to cause the wind to blow or be still at his bidding. A common practice is “whistling for a wind.”

CHAPTER III.—MAGICIANS AS KINGS. Pp. 101-113

Gerontocracy—a state of society in which authority is held by the old men of the tribe—prevalent among Australian aborigines and found elsewhere.

In Africa the political influence of the magician is great, but the rainmaker who fails to bring rain is often punished.

In England sovereigns have been regarded as a sort of divinity. A relic of this belief persisted in England and France in the notion that they could, by their touch, cure scrofula, hence called “The King’s Evil.”

CHAPTER IV.—INCARNATE HUMAN GODS. Pp. 114-123

Chiefs regarded as incarnate human gods abounded among the Polynesians of the Pacific Islands. Possession by divine spirit was not always permanent, but was often temporary. In Africa also chiefs and kings have often claimed to be deities, and Christian England has not lacked pretenders to divinity.

CHAPTER V.—DEPARTMENTAL KINGS OF
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The intercourse of the human sexes is believed to have a potent influence in stimulating vegetation, and for this reason many restrictions are often imposed at the time of sowing and planting. Twins and parents of twins are sometimes credited with a power of fertilizing at such times. Sexual offences, especially incest, are believed to blight the crops.

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In Africa women were often wedded to spirits or deities. Stories like that of Andromeda, in which the heroine is exposed to a sea-monster, may reflect an earlier custom of sacrificing virgins to water-spirits to be their wives: examples from Africa and China.

Water-spirits are often thought to bestow offspring on childless women, especially in Africa.

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The making of fire by the fire-drill, that is, by revolving a pointed stick in a grooved stick, seems to be the most widely diffused method among primitive savages: it is found almost universally. Many savages see in the working of the fire-drill an analogy to the intercourse of the sexes.

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In the kindling of new fire by the fire-drill both sexes sometimes assist. In Assam the ceremony is performed by unmarried boys. In Germany a widespread belief connects a person's chastity with his ability to blow up a dying flame.

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The soul is commonly identified with a person's likeness : hence it is feared that a person may be injured through his reflection or shadow. Sometimes a sick person is bound, to prevent his soul from leaving him, and again magicians often undertake to recover and restore the soul of a sick person when it is believed to have already left him. Examples from Indonesia, Burma, Assam, China, Africa, and North America.

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CHAPTER XXII.—TABOOED THINGS . . . Pp. 257-270

Things as well as persons are subject to the mysterious influence of taboo. Thus iron is widely avoided, and sharp-edged weapons, and blood. The human head is often regarded as particularly tabooed or sacred, and the hair, as part of the head. The disposal of cut hair and nails is often an anxious matter to primitive man, since these may be used in magic to his hurt. So, too, with the saliva. Knots are widely regarded as magically potent, and are therefore sometimes tabooed. A knot on the garment of a woman in childbed is believed to retard delivery, hence these should be untied. Knots may be turned to good account, to oppose the inroad of disease.

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through his name. Similarly primitive people are often forbidden to mention or address their relatives by marriage by name. The names of the dead are also frequently forbidden to the living.

A common taboo prohibits the telling of fairy stories at certain times and seasons, particularly during the day.

Sometimes the names of sacred chiefs and gods are tabooed. The same interdiction is frequently laid on the names of common objects of daily life, especially the names of objects for which men are searching, or of animals for which they are hunting. Thus in Malay, Assam, and Africa.

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The custom of killing a divine king upon any serious failure of his powers is very common in Africa: it was practised by the Jukun of Nigeria, the Fung of the Upper Nile, the Mbum of the Cameroons, and many other tribes. These examples suggest an explanation of the priesthood at Nemi. Primitive peoples often entertain superstitions about meteors, and connect their occurrence with certain events, such as a death.

The great games of ancient Greece were, according to tradition, originally funeral games. Such funeral games occur in Samoa and among the Indians of Alaska.

In ancient Babylon the king's tenure of office seems to have been limited to a single year, at the end of which he was put to death. The Banyoro of Uganda and Ibibio of Nigeria retain traces of a similar custom.

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in such sacrifices. The custom of killing or sacrificing first-born children has been practised in Australia, the Solomon Islands, in Indo-China, in India, and in Africa.

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The belief that the human dead come to life in the form of snakes is particularly common in Africa. So, too, is a belief that dead infants may enter once more into the wombs of their mothers and be born again. Hence infants are buried at places to which their mothers often go.

Among the Australian aborigines conception is often attributed to the entrance into the woman of an ancestral spirit, and is regarded as independent of sexual intercourse. A precisely similar belief has been discovered among the Trobriand Islanders, and in the Merinas of Madagascar.

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 Such a story reflects a belief in the ability to deposit the soul externally, a custom commonly practised in Northern Rhodesia, in Nigeria, and elsewhere. The external objects with which human lives are believed to be bound up are often plants or trees.
 A primitive custom exists of passing sick people through a cleft tree as a mode of cure. Again, some tribes pass through a cleft tree or stick or other narrow opening after a death, no doubt in order to evade the dead man's ghost.
 Many primitive people believe that their lives are so bound up with those of animals that when the animal dies the man dies. This belief common in Africa.
 According to some primitive people, every human being possesses several souls.

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