On the Belief in Bhutas-Devil and Ghost Worship in Western India

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offer of the Cession of the Fiji Islands to the British Crown.
 Report on the South Sea Islands. Ditto, on Coolie Immigration.
 Pacific Islands Protection Bill, &c.
 From the EDITOR.—Nature (to date).

The following paper was read by the author :

On the BELIEF in BHUTAS—DEVIL and GHOST WORSHIP in WESTERN INDIA. By M. J. WALHOUSE, F.R.A.S.

ALTHOUGH the lower castes and classes in India acknowledge and reverence the Brahmanical gods, their familiar household cultus is much more especially addressed to inferior supernatural beings analogous to the evil spirits, devils, ghosts, and goblins of European superstition. According to Hindu doctrine there are ten classes of such beings, the first seven of which are demons, created aboriginally with the world, or by acts of the higher gods, on whom they wait as attendants or servants, receiving some share of their worship, and avenging any omission or neglect of ceremonies due. Though not invariably, they are for the most part evilly-disposed towards human kind, especially the female powers amongst them, which are many. But the last three classes, of whom more particularly it is now intended to speak, are of exclusively human origin, being malignant, discontented beings, wandering in an intermediate state between Heaven and Hell, intent upon mischief and annoyance to mortals; chiefly by means of possession and wicked inspiration, every aspect of which ancient ideas, as well as of the old doctrine of transmigration, they exemplify and illustrate. They are known by the names of *Bhūta**, *Prēta*, and *Pisācha*; the first name being ordinarily applied to all three, and even vulgarly to the seven superior classes. These beings, always evil, originate from the souls of those who have died untimely or violent deaths, or been deformed, idiotic, or insane; afflicted with fits or unusual ailments; or drunken, dissolute, or wicked during life. The precise distinction between the three classes is that the *Prēta* is a ghost of a child dying in infancy, or of one born deformed, imperfect, or monstrous; events attributed to neglect in performing certain ceremonies prescribed during the ten days when, according to popular notions, the limbs of the embryo are forming in the womb: such a ghost becomes a misshapen, distorted goblin. The *Pisācha*, on the other hand, is derived rather from mental characteristics, and is the ghost

* *Bhutas*.—"Malignant spirits, goblins, or ghosts, haunting cemeteries, lurking in trees, animating dead bodies, and deluding and devouring human beings."—*Thompson*.

of madmen, habitual drunkards, the treacherous and violent-tempered, as though realising the idea that the evils that men do live after them in the guise of malicious spirits. Bhūtas, however, emanate from those who die in any unusual way, by violence, accident, suicide, or sentence of law; or who have been robbers, notorious evil-doers, or dreaded for cruelty and violence. The death of any well-known bad character is a source of terror to all his neighbourhood, as he is sure to become a Bhūta or demon, as powerful and malignant as he was in life. Some of the Bhūtas now most dreaded were celebrated personages of old days. All such persons on death are liable to become Bhūtas, and attach themselves to any beings of the higher classes whom they first meet on entering the spirit-world, and derive from them power and assistance in tormenting and afflicting men and animals. As an example of how forcibly this idea possesses the popular mind, I will read an extract from a recent Indian newspaper:—"We learn from a correspondent at Cochin, that, a couple of days before the Christmas holidays, a Nair of Chenganoor, in cold blood, murdered his paramour, on suspicion of her infidelity. The noteworthy and strange feature of the case is, that when he was taken up and arraigned before the Sessions Court, he pleaded 'guilty' to the charge, but earnestly implored that the extreme penalty of the law, which he admitted he fully deserved, might be carried out, not at the usual place of execution, but at the scene of his crime, in order that he might, according to his theory of the transmigration of the soul, assume the form and life of a 'demon,' and thereby have full scope for revenging himself on the man and his associates who were the cause of leading his unfortunate victim astray." It is also held that by certain ceremonies and expiation this form of existence can be dissolved, and the unquiet spirits remitted to regions of reward or punishment, according to their deserts on earth.

In their haunts and modes of appearance Bhūtas repeat the popular beliefs of many countries. They wander borne upon the air, especially in uninhabited, dry, and desert places; and tall trees are a favourite abode. The third watch of the night, or from 12 to 3 o'clock, is the time when they wander abroad most freely; and belated travellers sometimes meet them then in the shape of dark shadows. As the ancient Jews would speak to none whom they met after midnight, for fear they might be addressing a devil, so Hindu villagers will speak to no one they may meet at that time, lest he should be a Bhūt, nor, indeed, willingly then stir out of their houses. The eddies of wind that career over plains in the hot weather, whirling up leaves and columns of dust, and flickering lights

seen gliding over marshes, are regarded as Bhūtas passing by. Objects seen indistinctly moving in the dusk or mists, are attributed to them; and so, indeed, are all visions.

Of calling shapes and beckoning shadows dire,
And airy tongues that syllable men's names
On sands, and shores, and desert wildernesses.

The Gools of Arabian superstition closely resemble Bhūtas, assuming monstrous shapes of men or animals, frequenting desert places and burial grounds, and feeding on carcases.

The before-mentioned classes are believed more particularly to afflict human beings by entering into and possessing them. Gaping or drawing deep breaths are supposed to give them opportunities for this, and no Brahman ever gapes without snapping his fingers before his mouth, as a charm to prevent an evil spirit entering. After gaining an entrance, they seat themselves in the lower part of the abdomen, and feed upon all the unclean excreta. Whilst so dwelling they are held, by interrupting digestion and circulation of the humours, to cause fits, paralytic strokes, temporary aberrations, outbreaks of madness, cramps, and rheumatic pains. All this closely tallies with the beliefs regarding possession current amongst the Jews and early Christians; the former in particular believing that unclean spirits, by reason of their tenuity, were inhaled and insinuated themselves into the human body, injuring health through the viscera, and forcing the patients to fulfil their evil desires. The grosser parts of the body and all unclean places were their especial abodes, and an evil spirit was declared by the Rabbins to inhabit every privy in the world. Besides diseases and bodily afflictions, the evil influence of Bhūtas is believed to occasion family discord, hatred between brothers, ill-temper and gloominess, the death of children during the life of parents, the non-survival of births, barrenness in women, atheism, and neglect of religious ceremonies. Although, properly speaking, they are not held to have power over human life, the villagers and common people believe they have, and outbreaks of disease, sudden deaths, and wasting away are always ascribed to their malignant power. Cattle diseases of every kind are invariably attributed to them, as in Scotland and Ireland to elf-bolts, as celts and flint arrowheads were called, and popularly supposed to be missiles formed and discharged by malicious fairies: an imagination commemorated by Collins in his *Ode on Highland Superstitions*:

There every herd by sad experience knows
How, wing'd by fate, the elf-shot arrows fly.

It may be readily conceived that superstitions like these, entering into every part of daily life, would exercise a much

deeper influence over a sequestered, ignorant rural population, than the loftier, more abstract Aryan conceptions; and they are also distinctly Turanian, to which race the great underlying stratum of the population of India appears to have belonged, and over which the subsequent Aryan invasion spread itself, each in the course of ages influencing the other, characteristics of the one cropping up, and of the other filtering down. All demonologies and ghost-systems belong to the Turanian races, and are antagonistic to the Aryan genius and feelings, though, after ages of intercourse and blending, some of the superstitions of the lower race may have crept into the intellect of the higher.*

In proceeding now to give some account of the ceremonies and worship paid to the Bhūtas, I shall confine myself principally to those current in Canara, on the Western Coast of India. The same cultus, with some variations, obtains, however, all over India and Eastern and Northern Asia; the Bhūta belief being found everywhere under different names and forms.

The edifices and observances connected with Bhūta worship are both domestic and public. In villages, and very generally in towns, there is in every house a wooden cot or cradle, placed on the ground or suspended by ropes or chains, and dedicated to the Bhūta of the spot. On these are placed a bell, a knife, or sword, and a pot filled with water, all which are collectively called the Bhandāra of the Bhūta, and kept either in a part of the house itself, or in a small separate building. The idea seems to be of placating the spirit that haunts the spot by making a sort of abode for it, much in the same way as the cream-bowl was nightly set for the "drudging goblin," or brownie, in England. On the last day of every lunar month flowers are laid on the cot, and perfume burnt before it; and once a year, towards the end of April, a ceremony called Tambīla is performed. First, a fire is lit on the spot where the cot and paraphernalia stand, to make it "shoodha," *i.e.* clean; then fried rice, mixed with coarse sugar and grated cocoanut kernel, is heaped on two plantain leaves, which are placed on the cot, together with some young cocoanuts, pierced ready to drink from. A ball is then formed of boiled rice, coloured yellow with turmeric, and laid on a piece of plaintain-leaf on a small stool, which is placed before the cot, and a lighted torch stuck on it. A fowl is held above the rice-ball and torch, its throat cut, and the blood let drop upon the ball; some perfume is burnt, and the ceremony ends. The cocoanuts placed on the

* A trace of this is, perhaps, seen in the Laws of Manu, where (xii. 71-2) it is declared that a Kshatrya who neglects his duties will, at the after-birth, be changed into a demon that feeds on ordure and carrion; and a Sudra into an evil being, that eats rotten carcases—that is, into Bhūtas.

cot are then taken and dashed on the ground, or cloven in half. If the pieces fall with the kernel upward, it signifies the Bhūta is pleased with the offering; if with the kernel downward, the reverse. Should a member of the family be stricken with any unusual attack, such as apoplexy, paralysis, cholera, &c., or should disease break out amongst the cattle, it is at once ascribed to the anger of the Bhūt, and a propitiatory sacrifice is offered. A fowl is turned three times round before the patient's face, its neck then twisted, and the blood let fall upon him, and some rubbed on his forehead and joints, the meaning being to offer life for life—the fowl in lieu of the man. Powdered sandalwood is then sprinkled over the Bhūta's cot, and water from the pot kept there dashed upon the sick man's forehead and eyes. The family priest is then consulted, who, after much grave meditation, usually recommends alms to be given to himself to satisfy the hostile stars, with a promise to perform a special ceremony to the Bhūta, and give a banquet to all the patient's castemen should he recover. Medicine is not neglected, but, in event of recovery, the credit is ascribed to the influence of the Bhūta.

The general buildings dedicated to these demons are called Bhūtastāns, and when dedicated to one of the superior, or very popular Bhūtas, sometimes of considerable size; but far more commonly a small plain structure, four or five yards deep, by two or three wide, with a door at one end, covered by a portico supported on two pillars, with a thatched roof, and windowless. In front of it there are usually three or four T-shaped pillars, the use of which is not clear. They are said to denote that the building is a Bhūtastān, and flowers are placed, and cocoanuts broken on them at ceremonies. It may be worth noticing that pillars of exactly the same shape are found accompanying the mysterious Balearic Talyots, the purpose of which has hitherto baffled antiquaries. Inside the Bhūtastān there is usually a number of images roughly made in brass in human shape, or resembling animals, such as pigs,* tigers, fowls, &c. These are brought out and worshipped as symbols of the Bhūtas on various ceremonial occasions. The Bhūtas themselves are usually represented by mere rough stones. Some of the brass figures are now on the table, and the difference between the Turanian and Aryan mind will appear on comparing these rude village idols with images of the Brahmanical gods. Brass basins, bells, a peculiarly-shaped sword, and some other articles used at ablutions are also kept within. These rustic fanes are thickly scattered over

* In the British Museum there are some marble images of swine, sacred to Persephone, found in the temenos of the temple of Demeter at Cnidos, which may have been offerings, like these Indian ones of brass.

the face of the country in very various situations—under a green tree, on hill-sides, down in hollows, in jungles, on plains, by roadsides, in villages, amid rice-fields, but always on a small plot of waste ground, which is kept uncultivated, like the “guid-man’s croft” in Scotland. A rough drawing of one of ordinary size and appearance is annexed.

Once a year a festival called Kolla is held at the village Bhūtastān, in honour of the local Bhūta, at which all the villagers attend. There is no fixed time for this, but the village priest, after consulting with the principal inhabitants, determines an auspicious day. This being settled, a tall pole is fixed upright in the ground before the Bhūtastān, and a flag, that is always kept within, hoisted upon it. The Bhūt’s Bhandāra, or paraphernalia, and the images, &c., are brought out and cleaned, and a large fire kindled to purify the spot. The festival always takes place at night, and about 9 o’clock all the villagers assemble in their best attire, the women wearing all their ornaments, and their heads, as well as often the men’s, thickly garlanded with flowers. Tom-toms and drums are beaten, and the Pujāri, or priest, takes the Bhūta-sword and bell in his hands, and whirls round and round, imitating the supposed mien and gestures of the demon. But he does not aspire to full possession, which in aboriginal rites like these is only given to a representative of the aboriginal tribes, now the lowest castes. A Dhér, one of the slave caste, at other times regarded with contempt, but now advanced to the foremost post, comes forward naked, save a waist-band, and with all his head and body grotesquely and frightfully besmeared with white, yellow, and red paint. Over his head, and tied to his back, there is a sort of an arch, termed Ani, made of green cocoa-tree leaves, with their ends radiating out. For some time he paces up and down, within a ring formed by the crowd, flinging about his arms, gesticulating wildly, leaping, and shaking his body furiously. Meanwhile a dozen or more tom-toms and drums are beaten incessantly and stunningly, with a continually increasing din; and the Dhér presently breaks into a maniac dance, capering, bounding, and spinning vehemently, whilst the instruments redouble their noise, the power of the Bhūta being estimated by the fury and persistence with which the Dhér dances. The multitude around joins in raising a long, monotonous, howling cry, with a peculiar vibration. At length the Dhér stops, he is full of the demon, and stands fixed and rigid, with staring eyes. Presently he speaks, or rather the demon speaks from him, in loud, hoarse, commanding tones, wholly unlike his own, or indeed any natural voice. He addresses the head man of the village first, and then the principal inhabitants in due order, for any neglect of etiquette on this point by

the Bhūta would infallibly give rise to great resentment. After thus speaking to the principal villagers and asking whether all the people are present, the possessed Dhér goes on to say that the Bhūta is pleased with the performance of the ceremony, and exhorts all the people to behave justly and charitably to one another. Various disputes and litigated matters, especially when evidence and ordinary means of adjustment fail, are then brought forward and submitted to the decision of the Bhūta, and his award, pronounced through the Dhér, is generally, though not always, submitted to. After this the demon desires to have food, and the Dhér eats fried rice and drinks the milk of young cocoanuts; or, if the demon he represents be one of low degree, he eats animal food and drinks arrack. He then distributes areca flowers and pieces of cocoa-nut to all assembled in due order of precedence, and the Bhūta passes away from him, he loses his commanding mien and tones, and relapses into the servile drudge. The assembly then addresses itself to festivity; there is much drinking of arrack, the drumming and wild music go on vehemently, interminable songs are sung, and at the first dawn the people disperse on all sides to their homes. The houses and farmsteads composing a village in Canara lie widely scattered over a surface picturesquely diversified with hill and hollow; and not unfrequently, when riding over the country before sunrise, as Anglo-Indians do, I have met long files and troops of people returning from these nightly celebrations. They are a tall and comely race on that western coast, and looking at the women, with their many-coloured, classically-adjusted garments and garlanded heads, I have thought that troops of Bacchantes or Mænads descending from the valleys of Cithæron, where all night long the tambour and cymbals had been resounding, and the torches flaming beneath the pine trees, might not have been so dissimilar to them, and that had we exact details of the wild Bacchic orgies and rites of the Mighty Mother, manifestations might be disclosed not distantly akin to those now witnessed in the East.* It may not even be too bold to conjecture that a cultus springing from the same general idea, namely, demons or the dead, speaking through the living, may have existed in German and Gaulish forests or British valleys in the ages before the Roman invasion; and that much, looking that way, might have been picked up by any Latin archæologist who troubled

* Circe, whose name is derived from the whirling magic dance, with her herd of transformed Bhūta-like votaries, may be also cited; and the Sali, or leaping priests of early Rome. Compare, too, in Arabian story, the striking picture in Southey's "*Thalaba*" (Cant. ix.), of the terrible witch Khawla, possessed by Eblis, and uttering inspired warnings after wild gyrations and a bloody sacrifice: a shadow of such rites may survive in the spinning Dervishes to-day.

himself about barbarian folk-lore. Cæsar and Tacitus record only the names and rites of the higher gods, just as the English in India know generally something of Shiva and Vishnu, and the principal Brahmanical deities, but seldom anything of the obscurer divinities and worship of the common people.

It is indeed striking to survey how ancient and how widely spread are the ideas and observances already described. In Tinnevely, the extreme southern province of the Indian peninsula, the popular cultus is devil-worship, essentially the same as the Bhūta-worship of Canara, and has been described minutely by the Rev. R. Caldwell, of the Tinnevely Mission. There the devil-dancer, as the officiating person is called, grotesquely arrayed and bedizened, dances, with gradually increasing frenzy, to the quickening clamour of drums and cymbals, whirling and leaping till the afflatus descends; then, when under full control of the demon, he is worshipped as a present deity, and consulted by the bystanders respecting their diseases, wants, and the welfare of absent relations. Mr. Caldwell has also pointed out that all such observances are identical, point for point, with the Shamanite worship of Siberia, the hill-tribes of South-western China, and of Northern Asia, as the subjoined passage will show:—"When the Shaman, or magician, performs his rites, he puts on a garment trimmed with rattles and bells, he cries horribly, shakes his robe, beats a drum, whilst the bystanders increase the din by striking on iron kettles. When the Shaman by his contortions, yells, and whirling has succeeded in assuming the appearance of something preternatural, the assembled multitude are impressed with the belief that the demon has taken possession of him, and regard him with wonder and dread. When quite exhausted he makes a sign that the spirit has left him, and then imparts to the people the intimation he has received." As Mr. Caldwell remarks, such identity of usages is evidence of a common origin. I have witnessed oracular responses given under the supposed control of a demon, after gesticulatory dances amongst that peculiar tribe, often mentioned before this Society, the Todas of the Nilgiri Hills. In Siam spirit-dances are held in a shed built for the purpose, in which offerings are set out for the demon, who is invited by the usual wild music to come down to the dance; but there is this peculiarity, that there the demon always enters a woman, which is scarcely ever heard of in India. She herself does not dance, but bathes and rubs herself with scent, dresses in a red waistcloth and dark silken jacket, and awaits the descent of the demon, who is incited to come by redoubled din of music and chanted incantations. When he comes she shakes and trembles, and then, assuming the airs and manners of a great personage, all present worship and pay her homage.

Sometimes the spirit of one of their ancestors, sometimes a foreign demon, is supposed to have taken possession of her body. She answers questions, and gives commands and directions in a haughty, imperative tone, and all her words are humbly listened to, and afterwards she partakes of the offerings provided for the demon. An old woman usually plays the part, and after the influence has left her, she declares she knows nothing of what took place, or what she may have said. All these practices are in full force amongst the Chinese, and are described in the most ancient Chinese works "by the Emperor Fuh, probably nearly 3,000 B.C.," says the Rev. Mr. Nevius, in his work, "China and the Chinese." "They burn incense, beat a drum to call the attention of the desired spirit," writes Padre de Mae, "and then by idolatrous methods, one of which is a spasmodic ecstasy, they get responses from the dead." Had Mr. Layard penetrated more fully into the meaning of the wild rites and dances of the Yezidis, or devil-worshippers, of Kurdistan, which he describes so vividly in his work, "Nineveh and its Remains" (vol. i. 293), or been admitted further into the secrets of the cultus, the same belief and manifestations would probably have been found to be at its root. In New Zealand the Tohunga, or priests, evoke after certain wild ceremonies the spirits of the dead, who speak through them in strange, unearthly tones. Nearly the same practices have lately been described as prevailing amongst the Greenland Eskimo. Other instances might be cited of these ideas and usages in widely-separated nations; and amongst ourselves a trace or survival of them may perhaps be discerned in the unknown tongues of the Irvingites, which were said frequently to break forth after violent contortions; amongst the Shakers and Jumpers, too, of America and England, rapturous prayers and adjurations are reported to be sometimes uttered after violent, prolonged dancing,* and in Spiritualist circles manifestations are said to be much assisted by those present joining in hymns and singing.

In face of the vast array of learning, and instances bearing on the subject, brought together with such marvellous labour and

* The newspapers contain a report of an extraordinary scene at Exeter last week (December, 1875), when "Mother Girling," the head of the New Forest Shakers, gave a lecture at that place.

"Mrs. Girling was listened to with some attention at first, but the audience soon began hissing and cheering. Suddenly one of the eight girls who accompanied the lectress rose from her seat, and began to dance, with eyes closed, and arms waving to and fro. This demonstration (says the *Western Morning News*) caused loud laughter at first, followed by groans and hisses, which were redoubled when Mrs. Girling explained that it was the operation of the Spirit. The dancing girl next commenced singing snatches of hymns, and one of her companions fainted for a moment and then began to dance as well. Great disorder followed. Appeals were made to the Shakers to stop the dancing, to which they replied they had no

research in Mr. Tylor's chapters on "Animism," one cannot but feel that a paper like this is superfluous. But if the almost universal belief, amongst the lower races, in their continued existence after the death of the body, may have arisen from the conclusion that the figures of the dead, seen in dreams and visions, must be their surviving souls, it may be allowable to reflect how much that supposition would have been strengthened by believing their voices were heard after death speaking to their tribe and followers. It is amongst the most primitive and savage races that such beliefs are at this day current. Modern industry and investigation are piercing somewhat further into the dim and misty morning of the yesterday we have hitherto styled antiquity; but what papyrus roll or burnt-clay cylinder will disclose what was the creed and what the gods of the flint-folk, or what the thoughts as to a hereafter of the man who traced the outline of the Mammoth on the piece of tusk in the Christie collection? These are beyond surmise, except forasmuch as those races, being human, must have dreamed dreams and seen in them the departed in their habit as they lived; and as there may have been some subject to those strange, delirious ecstasies, natural or produced, in which the very voices of the dead are imagined to be heard again, it may not be too bold to conjecture that the wild cultus and ceremonies described above may have originated in that "dim, backward, and abysm of time" and antiquity of man of which only late years have given us definite assurance. A short reference may here be made to the dancing mania, which, beginning in 1374, for two centuries plagued Germany and the adjacent countries. The amazing details respecting it may be read in Dr. Hecker's "Epidemics of the Middle Ages." Whole communities were seized with a disease of frantic dancing, continued for hours and days, during which they neither saw nor heard things external, but were haunted by visions and spirits whose names they shrieked out. Intoxicating music increased and spread the delirium, and streets and cities were filled with hundreds of raving dancers of both sexes: the disease was universally ascribed to demoniacal origin. Sympathy and contagion may have been much concerned with this strange phenomenon, often called St. John's Dance, but its roots probably existed in primitive heathen observances connected with St.

power to do so. By this time the number of dancers had increased, and a rush was made to the platform, which was speedily occupied. The scene at this time defies description—three or four girls with dishevelled hair, and faces streaming with perspiration, dancing within a circle of policemen, and an infuriated mob trying to get at them and their companions, and hustle them from the platform. One of the men of the Shaker party, who had up to this time remained comparatively cool and collected, suddenly commenced to jump, and defied the efforts of three or four stalwart men to keep him still."

John's Day.* Beside numberless local Bhūtas there are some thirty especially feared in Canara, possessing temples and shrines in various parts of the province: several are females. The most dreaded and malignant amongst them is Kālkātti, or the Stonecutter, reputed to be the spirit of Jackanachāri, a famous stonemason and architect, who between four and five centuries ago built most of the exquisitely beautiful Jaina temples that exist in Canara. Much legend has gathered about him, but he undoubtedly lived, and must have been a craftsman of marvellous skill. The tradition runs that he and his wife, having quarrelled with their son respecting a temple then in process of building, they both committed suicide and became Bhūtas so malign and feared that none dare attempt an exorcism when their presence is suspected. The next most dreaded Bhūta is *Panjurhī*, i.e. pig-rider, whose origin is forgotten, but is probably the perturbed spirit of some one once notorious. *Gūlga* is regarded as an aboriginal or earth-born demon, and has power during certain minutes on certain days to pass through the air, and strike those he meets with a rod, thereby causing fits, paralysis, or even death. His glance also causes sickness, but the hours in which, in Shakspeare's sense, he can *take*† or injure, are limited. *Chamundi*, signifying mistress of death, is a female earth-spirit,‡ and when the Kolla ceremony is offered to her, a large pile of wood is kindled, and after it has become a heap of glowing embers, the Dhér who represents and is possessed by her, dances and rolls upon them for some minutes without injury. *Munditāya* is the ghost of a Balala, or high casteman, who died by some accident, and is reputed very troublesome; sandal-wood powder and water, taken from the cot hung up to him, are, however, believed, when rubbed on, to cure snake-bites without further remedy. Most Bhūtas haunt large trees, and it is of this last one, I think, that a story is told regarding a large solitary Banian tree near a village in the province. A demon was said to live in its branches, and none dare climb it. Some Mussulmans, however, laughed at the story, and one of them climbed

* The subjoined notice of a picture, entitled "La Saint-Jean," by M. Jules Breton, representing, it is understood, an actual scene in Brittany, is not irrelevant to the general subject of this paper. "The subject is the immemorial custom of dancing round fires on St. John's Day—a custom by no means quite disused in England, and still frequent in France. A group of stalwart and rough country wenches are dancing furiously, and, with the utmost rapidity, circling about a huge bonfire which has been made on a village green. The red and orange flames rise and flash in the air between the figures; the women seem to be singing as if they were mad. In the distance are other figures, bearing and waving torches."

† "then no planet strikes,
No fairy takes."—*Hamlet*.

‡ Also called the tigress, and identified with the most cruel aspect of Parvati, the wife of Shiva.

up, but when he had got well up in the branches, the goblin was suddenly revealed to him in a monstrous and frightful shape, on seeing which he screeched, let go his hold, fell to the ground, and remained raving with terror for three days; his back was injured by the fall and he became hump-backed, but lived to be 90, and would often tell the story. The tree is now half-dead, and limbs and branches often fall from it, but none will go near or pick them up. So in Denmark and Norway the elf-people frequent large linden trees, and it is not held safe to break their branches or go near them after dusk. The Dhārmāstal Temple,* situated in a wild forest track in Canara, is one of the most famous in all that part of the peninsula, and is the abode of seven or eight very powerful Bhūtas, who are so dreaded that none will assume their names. In civil suits, when the evidence is balanced or hopelessly contradictory, it is very usual for one of the parties to offer to decide it by taking an oath as to the justice of his contention before one of the Dhārmāstal deities: this, when accepted and done with certain formalities, is always held satisfactory and decisive; for the litigants know well that no one would dare to risk abiding the vengeance of those terrible Bhūtas by a false adjuration. With respect to assuming their names, it may be explained that it is very common to name children after any Bhūta who may be very popular at the time, probably with the idea that the compliment might induce him to regard the child and family with favour. I remember that a good many years ago a notorious and greatly dreaded dacoit was hung in Trichinopoly, who after death became so fashionable a Bhūt that for some time half the children born were named after him. I may perhaps mention two or three out of the instances of the belief in Bhūtas that came before me officially as judge. In a trial for murder before the Sessions Court, the prisoner was charged with having intentionally caused the death of his younger brother, whom he struck down as they were ploughing. In defence the prisoner stated, through his vakil, or pleader, that the deceased whilst at work in the field was struck by the eye of a Bhūt, of which he died; and his witnesses deposed that they had known similar instances. In another murder case the evidence of a material witness was objected to because he was well known to be under the curse of a Bhūt, and in consequence a desperate man, whose statements could not be believed. Again, a Potél, or village head-man, was charged with having entered the death of a boy in his register as natural, when he had really committed suicide:

* Round stones are sold at this temple, which are believed to carry the power of the Bhūtas with them; they receive offerings, and can be invoked against any enemy, who will forthwith be visited by all sorts of misfortunes.

in defence the Potél asserted that the boy had died from a blow by the village Bhūt, and named several similar instances. On being punished by the magistrate, he appealed to the Sessions Court, reasserting his plea, and desiring to call witnesses to prove it. These men were far from unintelligent, and the vakils, or native pleaders, acute and well able to conduct a legal argument. But we can hardly ridicule them much, when we reflect that within the last eighteen months a young farmer was sentenced to six months' imprisonment at Dorchester for savagely beating an old woman because she "hag-rode" him; another man in Somersetshire was charged for twice stabbing a woman who had "over-looked" him, that he might break the spell with her blood; and there were four other convictions, in Somersetshire and Devonshire alone, for assaults committed, or payment taken, on account of, or to cure, having been bewitched: and all the persons connected may presumably have been at school, and attended some church or chapel.*

Very often Bhūtas become a sort of house-spirits, such as are heard of in many popular mythologies, more or less mischievous and delighting in Robin Goodfellow's pranks. Howlings and unearthly shrieks and noises that cannot be traced are attributed to them. Household utensils are thrown about, and stones flung by invisible hands,† and pots and cooking vessels found filled with dirt. Women put away their best clothes carefully, and in the morning find them unaccountably on fire and smouldering away. All these are ascribed to the Bhūta, as well as what would now be called a kind of levitation, which is declared to be very frequent. Infants are missed from their cradles, and presently heard crying in the loft of the house, or on stacks of straw outside. Once riding through a village, I found the people in great excitement at a prank played by a Bhūta two days before. A woman lying apart in her room, expecting her confinement, was suddenly missed, and could nowhere be found, till some children heard her voice proceeding from a dry well in a field hard by. She was drawn up with considerable trouble,

* Since writing this it has struck me that some apology is due, both to our English and Indian west country rustics. Within the last few months a work ("Glimpses of the Supernatural") has been published by a well-known clergyman, the vicar of an important London parish, in which stories of witchcraft and injuries done by witches, the calling up and dismissal of spirits by magic rites, appearances of demons, demoniacal possession, and the like, are recounted with apparently full belief. In a remarkable article on "Demonolatry and Devil-dancing," in the *Contemporary Review* for February of the current year, Mr. E. Caldwell asks whether instances of demoniacal possession, such as are related in the New Testament, may not occur to-day in India and less civilised countries.

† One Bhūta is specially named Kaluruti, *i.e.* stone-thrower.

quite unhurt, and safely confined the same day. She said she found herself all at once at the bottom of the well, but could not in the least tell how she came there. The people insisted on showing me the well, which was about 100 yards from the house, large and square, one used for irrigation, but then dry, and from 20 to 25 feet deep. Roman Catholics are very numerous in Canara, but quite as subject to these demoniacal annoyances as the Hindus. One clerk of the Civil Court, a grave, elderly man, affirmed to me that, when passing at evening along a lane near a Bhūtastān, he encountered a dark, monstrous, shadowy shape, which grew larger and larger, on which he uttered some religious verses, when it gradually diminished and disappeared. Another story was the talk of the town, and the parties concerned assured me of its truth. Two high native officials, both Roman Catholics, were sitting at noonday in the verandah of the house of one of them, when ashes and earth came pouring in quantities from the roof. The master of the house exclaimed the Bhūta was repeating his tricks, and, bringing a gun, fired it in the air to frighten the goblin away, when instantly, as if in answer, a quantity of powder was exploded in the midst of the open yard before them, and immediately stones and pebbles were flung by invisible agency towards the house from without. These fell on the verandah, and then, my informant asseverated, went "leaping like frogs" into the house, to the great amusement of the children who had assembled, and who would cry out, "One more!" when another stone would instantly fall and go hopping in! This sort of Bhūta annoyance was declared to be not at all unfrequent. It is curious, anthropologically speaking, to observe how general this strange belief in a grotesque sort of goblin, rejoicing in a particular kind of odd, mischievous pranks, has been in widely separated countries and ages. In China such disturbances are common, and ascribed to "kitchen-gods;" in Arabia and Egypt to the jinnee or genii, who, Mr. Lane says, are believed to throw stones and furniture about in houses. He also relates that pious and learned Muslims, on locking the doors of their houses, storerooms, and apartments when going out, habitually repeat, "In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful," to secure their property during their absence from the mischief and depredations of the Jinn. The Germans have a special name for such spirits, calling them Polter Geist, or racketing-ghost, and the stories about them and their impish persecutions, all much alike, current in Germany, France, and England, are endless. Amongst published accounts it is enough to mention the "Stockwell Ghost," the "Demon of Tedworth," and the extraordinary disturbances at Woodstock, commemorated in Scott's novel. Some years

ago the London papers had accounts of similar mysterious occurrences in a house in Bayswater; and even as far back as A.D. 1188 the "Itinerary through Wales" of Giraldus Cambrensis, translated by Sir Richard Hoare, mentions like stories and manifestations.

Charms or amulets against the evil influence of Bhūtas are—wearing the tooth or nail of a tiger on the neck or near the loins, or an iron ring set with pearls on the finger. In all ages and countries *iron* is sovereign against evil powers. A lime in the turban, or a figure of Hanumān, the monkey-god, engraved on any ornament, are also efficacious, especially on Sundays and Tuesdays. But the most powerful remedy must have been when, in the days of the Rajahs of Coorg, a principality bordering on Canara, it was customary for the Amildars, or native heads of divisions, to issue notices and orders to the Bhūtas, in the name of the Rajah, not to molest any particular individual, to quit any tree they haunted which was required to be felled, and to desist from any particular act or annoyance. It is stated that these behests of the Government were never disobeyed, which, indeed, is not unlikely, as the last Coorg Rajah was not a man who understood being trifled with, either by man or demon. After his deposition, the native officials continued the same style of orders, in the name of the British Government, for some time before the authorities were aware of it!

To conclude this subject, the idea is quite familiar that Bhūtas may be perturbed ghosts, "doomed for a certain term to walk the night," but longing to escape from their thralldom and be laid to rest. For the repose of any such unhappy spirit the following ceremony is prescribed:—An image of Vishnu must be engraved on a gold plate, arrayed with a yellow cloth, and washed with water from a holy stream. Around this, placed in the centre, similar images of the other principal gods must be arranged, arrayed and washed in like manner. Then a sacrifice of all manner of perfumes, and quantities of ghee and milk, must be offered, and all the funeral ceremonies in honour of the deceased gone through, and the funeral cakes offered anew in presence of the golden images of the gods. Next a banquet must be given to thirteen pure Brahmans, presenting each with a mattress, a horse, and a gold pot full of milk. Their united mantrams (*i.e.*, incantations) will then release the soul from its unclean Bhūta state and remit it to salvation. But all this seems a device of later times, invented by the Brahmans to increase their influence and the authority of their gods over the low-caste deities. It would also be a costly ceremony, and I never heard of its having been actually performed.

M. J. W.

C. F. Hall 19th. London.

BHUTASTAN, IN SOUTH CANARA.

BHUTA SACRIFICIAL SWORD (Iron.) FROM S. CANARA.

EXPLANATION OF PLATES XX. AND XXI.

Plate xx.—Bhūta Temple in S. Canara: from a sketch by Mr. Walhouse.

Plate xxi.—Bhūta sacrificial sword of wrought iron. A narrow plate of silver formerly covered the back, and extended a quarter of an inch on each side of the blade, where it was secured by studs or rivets, composed apparently of an alloy of silver and copper. Ornamental plates on the blade, adjoining the guard, were also, it appears, once covered with silver. The pattern chased on the half-guard, *b*, is drawn with great freedom, whilst the corresponding ornament on the half-guard, *b b*, is regular, and more or less geometrical. In the centre circle there are rectangular rays, alternating with an oval or almond-shaped ornament, the outer band being filled with twelve pelta-like forms. The pommel is peculiar, having three concave guards, and an ornamental termination to the hilt.

DISCUSSION.

Major GODWIN AUSTEN said: Mr. Walhouse's paper is of much interest; it shows how very similar are the forms of demon-worship among the hill-tribes of India. Much that we have heard this evening is common to the tribes of the N.E. frontier, viz. the Gáros, Khásis, Nágás, Duflas, &c. Their demons or spirits are innumerable; every wood, every stream, is the haunt of one, the great point of difference being that, in the N.E. frontier, they are never represented by idols or figures of any kind, nor are temples erected, as it appears is the case in the south-western side of the Indian Peninsula, where Hindu influences have acted on the older forms of religion. The only people who are not demon-worshippers are those of Bhūtan, who Mr. Walhouse has referred to, and seemed to think their name was associated and derived from ghost-worship. In this I do not agree with him. The Bhūtas are Bhudists, and the term "Bhūt," or "Bhot," is applied even to the people of Ladak, and all the intermediate Thibetan people, also Bhuddists, so that I think the word is quite as likely derived from the Hindustani "Bhūdistān," the country of Bhudha or of the Bhūts.

Mr. MUGGERIDGE said: Mention was made of superstitious observances in our own island. I may, therefore, be permitted to bring to your notice a curious custom that not long since was still extant in South Wales and some of the adjoining counties, that of the Sin-eater. More than two centuries ago a well-known writer, Aubrey de Gentilésisme, gives a full account of this observance in Herefordshire, where he was fortunate enough to "interview" the Sin-eater himself. Among the mountains of South Wales I find a similar ceremony prevailing down to almost our own times. When a person died, the Sin-eater of the district was called in. On his arrival he

received a plate, on which he poured some salt. Upon the salt he placed a piece of bread, laid the plate on the chest of the defunct, muttered words of charmed power while bending over the corse, then eat the bread, whereby he eat up and appropriated to himself all the sins of the deceased, received two shillings and sixpence for his services, and quickly retired from the pitying gaze of those present, who regarded him as one utterly and irremediably lost.

Mr. JEREMIAH said: I was very much interested in the paper just read. With reference to the alleged custom of *sin-eating* in Wales, mentioned by Mr. Moggridge, I would remark that the discussion raised by the Rev. D. Silvan Evans in the *Academy* (November 5, 1875) appears to have gone adrift for want of the Welsh word for *Sin-eater*. The discussion arose, as all must be aware, from a statement made by a writer in *Blackwood's Magazine* for last month, in an article on the 'Legend and Folk-lore of North Wales,' where he says, in reference to a funeral custom, that the "Scapegoat . . . is currently called a 'sin-eater.'" Dr. Evans demanded the Welsh equivalent, which the author of that article could not give, in consequence of, he says, "my ignorance of Welsh." (*Academy*, Nov. 27, p. 555.) Had he referred to Bingley's "North Wales," vol. ii. p. 278, he would have seen a way out of his difficulty, and a clear answer to the query put by Dr. Evans; and Mr. Moggridge will also see, I think, that the custom was not known as *sin-eating*, although the original meaning may have been of that nature. Bingley says, "It is usual in several parts of North Wales for the nearest female relation to the deceased, be she widow, mother, sister, or daughter, to pay some poor person of the same sex, and nearly the same age with the deceased, for procuring slips of yew, box, and other evergreens, to strew over and ornament the grave for some weeks after interment, and in some instances for weeding and adorning it on the eves of Easter, Whitsuntide, and the other great festivals for a year or two afterwards. This gift is called *DIOPLYS*, and it is made on a plate at the door of the house, where, at the same time, the body is standing on a bier. It had its name from a custom, which is now discontinued (1804), of the female relative giving to the person a piece of cheese with the money stuck in it, some white bread, and afterwards a cup of ale. When this previous ceremony is over, the clergyman, or, in his absence, the parish clerk, repeats the Lord's Prayer, after which they proceed with the body to the church." It appears, then, that the custom means simply a "gift of ale or beer," and not *sin-eating*. Pennant's (in his "Tours in Wales," vol. iii. p. 159, edition 1810) account is slightly different. He says: "Previous to a funeral it was customary, when the corpse was brought out of the house and laid upon the bier, for the next-of-kin, be it widow, mother, sister, or daughter—for it must be a female—to give, over the coffin, a quantity of white loaves in a great dish, and sometimes a cheese with a piece of money stuck in it, to certain poor persons. After

that they presented, in the same manner, a cup of drink, and required the person to drink a little of it *immediately*. When that was done they kneeled down, and the minister, if present, said the Lord's Prayer, after which they proceeded with the corpse, and at every crossway between the house and the church they laid down the bier and knelt, and again repeated the Lord's Prayer, and did the same when they first entered the churchyard." This custom, and that of the alleged sin-eating, are conclusively one and the same, viz. that of DIODLYS.

Mr. EDKINS and the PRESIDENT also made a few remarks.

Portions of a skeleton found in a stone coffin, 11 feet below the surface, in Bishopsgate-street, were exhibited by Mr. John Staples.

Mr. HOOPER MAY exhibited and presented a skull found at Fulbourn under the following circumstances :—

In making a cutting through some rising ground, about half a mile on the Cambridge side of the Fulbourn Station of the Newmarket and Bury Railway, the workmen came upon three pits or wells sunk in the chalk. These pits were about three feet from each other, and were situated upon the summit of the low hill through which the cutting was made. The largest of them—that next the Fulbourn Station—was a circular shaft sunk for about ten feet in the chalk. It was carefully built up. The inner surface was smooth, and coated with a layer of hard cement, about three inches thick. Then came an outer and thicker layer of coarse concrete, about ten inches thick, which was reddened by the action of fire. At about six feet from the top, the shaft was abruptly reduced in diameter from nine feet three inches to six feet three inches, leaving a set-off or ledge twenty inches wide, and was carried down to a further depth of nearly four feet in the chalk. The inner surface of this lower and smaller portion was blackened, as if by the combustion of wood and other vegetable substances, and contained masses of black carbonaceous matter. The workmen stated that at the junction of the sides with the floor they found some slabs, placed obliquely, so as to construct a sort of flue for draught, but of this there were no traces. The upper and larger portion of the pit was filled partly by the surface soil, below which was a thick layer, two or three feet thick, of a very soft calcareous deposit, which the workmen called "butter," composed of slaked lime, containing a considerable quantity of water. By exposure to the air it became quite dry and hard. Below and by the side of this soft layer of lime was a layer of vesicular, spongy, calcareous matter, very light, and composed of pure chalk—carbonate of lime. It has not at all the appearance of having been produced by burning. At the