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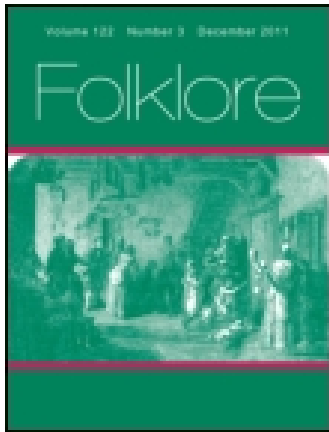
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## *PIN-WELLS AND RAG-BUSHES.*<sup>1</sup>

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THE customs of throwing pins into sacred wells and of tying rags to bushes, especially to bushes growing about sacred wells, have exercised students of folk-lore ever since folk-lore came to be studied. They seem such odd, senseless practices that, until one has learned that most human practices, however odd and senseless they appear, have their reasons and are not mere caprices, it is not easy to suppose they ever had a reasonable basis. And even when one is assured that there is an underlying reason, the question, What is that reason? has been found a very perplexing one. During the last year or two it has been brought into prominence by the enquiries of Professor Dr. Rhys in Wales and the Isle of Man ; and he has discussed it with the Folk-lore Society and elsewhere without arriving at any satisfactory conclusion. If I offer a suggestion for which I have looked in vain in the reported discussions, it is hardly in the hope of settling the matter, so much as of drawing attention to a habit of archaic thought running through many a habit of archaic practice, and possibly therefore affecting these customs.

Let us first endeavour to obtain a clear idea of the customs with which we are dealing. One or two examples will suffice for this purpose. I take them from Professor Rhys' paper, read before a joint meeting of the Cymmrodorion and Folk-lore Societies, on the 11th January 1893. He quotes a correspondent as saying of Ffynnon Cae Moch, about halfway between Coychurch and Bridgend in Glamorganshire : " People suffering from rheumatism go there.

<sup>1</sup> A paper read to the British Association (Section H) at its meeting at Nottingham, September 1893.

They bathe the part affected with water, and afterwards tie a piece of rag to the tree which overhangs the well. The rag is not put in the water at all, but is only put on the tree for luck. It is a stunted but very old tree, and is simply covered with rags." In another case, that of Ffynnon Eilian (Elian's Well), near Abergele in Denbighshire, of which Professor Rhys was informed by Mrs. Evans, the late wife of Canon Silvan Evans, some bushes near the well had once been covered with bits of rag left by those who frequented it. The rags used to be tied to the bushes by means of wool—not woollen yarn, but wool in its natural state. Corks with pins stuck in them were floating in the well when Mrs. Evans visited it, though the rags had apparently disappeared from the bushes. The well in question, it is noted, had once been in great repute as "a well to which people resorted for the kindly purpose of bewitching those whom they hated". The Ffynnon Cefn Lleithfan, or Well of the Lleithfan Ridge, on the eastern slope of Mynydd y Rhiw, in the parish of Bryncroes, in the west of Carnarvonshire, is a resort for the cure of warts. The sacred character of the well may be inferred from the silence in which it is necessary to go and come, and from the prohibition to turn or look back. The wart is to be bathed at the well with a rag or clout, which has grease on it. The clout must then be carefully concealed beneath the stone at the mouth of the well. The Professor, repeating this account of the well, given him by a Welsh collector of folk-lore, says: "This brings to my mind the fact that I have, more than once, years ago, noticed rags underneath stones in the water flowing from wells in Wales, and sometimes thrust into holes in the walls of wells, but I had no notion how they came there." This is an experience we have probably all shared.

Professor Rhys mentions several wells wherein it was usual to drop pins; but the most detailed account was afterwards furnished by Mr. T. E. Morris, from a correspondent who supplied him with the following information

relating to Ffynnon Faglan (St. Baglan's Well) in the parish of Llanfaglan, Carnarvonshire: "The old people who would be likely to know anything about Ffynnon Faglan have all died. The two oldest inhabitants, who have always lived in this parish (Llanfaglan), remember the well being used for healing purposes. One told me his mother used to take him to it, when he was a child, for sore eyes, bathe them with the water, and then drop in a pin. The other man, when he was young, bathed in it for rheumatism, and until quite lately people used to fetch away the water for medicinal purposes. The latter, who lives near the well at Tan-y-graig, said that he remembered it being cleared out about fifty years ago, when two basins-full of pins were taken out, but no coin of any kind. The pins were all bent, and I conclude the intention was to exorcise the evil spirit supposed to afflict the person who dropped them in, or, as the Welsh say, *dadwitsio*. No doubt some ominous words were also used. The well is at present nearly dry, the field where it lies having been drained some years ago, and the water in consequence withdrawn from it. It was much used for the cure of warts. The wart was washed, then pricked with a pin, which, after being bent, was thrown into the well."<sup>1</sup>

Such being the rites, we will next attempt to sketch the geographical distribution of these and some apparently analogous superstitions. Pin-wells and Rag-bushes are found all over the British Isles. The observances, however, are not confined to the exact form described by Professor Rhys and his correspondents. Sir Arthur Mitchell mentions a well renowned for the cure of insanity on the island of Maelrubha in Loch Maree. Near the well is an oak tree covered with nails, to each of which was formerly attached a portion of the clothing of an afflicted person who had been brought thither; and a few ribbons are said to be still flying

<sup>1</sup> Professor Rhys' paper is printed in *FOLK-LORE*, iv, 55, and Mr. Morris' observations follow it. For other wells in the British Isles see Brand and Ellis, *Popular Antiquities*, ii, 259 *et seqq.*

from one or two of them. Two gilt buttons and two buckles are also nailed to the tree. Many of the nails are believed to be covered with the bark, which appears to be growing over them all.<sup>1</sup> This resembles the ceremony prescribed for hernia in Mecklenburg. A cross is made over the affected part with a nail on a Friday; and the nail is then driven, in unbroken silence, into a young beech or oak. The operation is repeated on the two Fridays following. A variant prescription directs the part to be touched with a coffin-nail, which is then to be driven over its head into the tree by the sufferer, barefoot and silent. As the nail is overgrown by the bark, the hernia will be healed.<sup>2</sup>

In Belgium, halfway between Braine l'Alleud and the wood of Le Foriet, two hollow, and therefore doubtless very ancient, roads cross one another. Two aged pine-trees are planted at the top of the bank at one of the corners; and formerly there stood between them a cross, which has disappeared for some thirty years. It was a very ancient custom to bury in the pines, and even in the cross, pins or nails, in order to obtain the cure of persons attacked by fevers of various kinds. The pins and nails thus employed must have been previously in contact with the patient or his clothes. If anyone took out one of these pins or nails from the pines or the cross, and carried it home, it was believed that the disease would certainly have been communicated to some member of his family. The custom is said to have fallen out of use. Yet M. Schepers, who visited the place in September 1891, and to whose article on the subject in *Wallonia*, a periodical published at Liège, I am indebted for these particulars, found not only rusty nails in the pines, but also pins quite recently planted. He was told that it was equally customary to roll round the pines, or the arms of the cross, some band of cloth or other stuff which had touched the sufferer. As soon as the nail or pin had been driven in, or the ribbon fastened, the operator

<sup>1</sup> *Proc. Soc. Ant. Scot.*, iv, 253, cited by Gaidoz, *Mélusine*, vi, 156.

<sup>2</sup> Bartsch, *Sagen, etc., aus Meklenburg*, ii, 104.

used to run away as hard as he could go. The spot was called *A l'crovè Saint Zè*, St. Etto's Cross, or *Aux deux Sapins*, The two pine-trees. Saint Etto, it seems, was an Irish missionary to these parts in the seventh century.<sup>1</sup>

At Croisic, in Upper Brittany, there is a well, called the well of Saint Goustan, into which pins are thrown by those who wish to be married during the year. If the wish be granted, the pin will fall straight to the bottom. Similar practices are said to be performed in Lower Brittany, and in Poitou and Elsass.<sup>2</sup> Girls used to resort to the little shrine of Saint Guirec, which stands on an isolated rock below high-water-mark on the beach at Perros Guirec in Lower Brittany, to pray for husbands. The worshipper, her prayer concluded, stuck a pin into the wooden statue of the saint ; and when I saw the shrine, in the year 1889, the figure was riddled from top to toe with pinholes. It was said that the prayer for a husband would infallibly be granted within a year. On the other side of Brittany, in the Morbihan, there is a chapel dedicated to Saint Uférier, credited with a similar reputation. The saint's foot, if I may be guilty of a bull, is almost entirely composed of holes. It is, however, necessary here that the pin should be a new one and quite straight ; not that the prayer will not be granted otherwise, but the husband will be crooked, hump-backed, and lame. In Upper Brittany, at Saint Lawrence's Chapel near Quintin, and elsewhere, the condition is that the pin be planted at the first blow ; the marriage will then take place within the year.<sup>3</sup>

All over France the like practices exist, or have died out only within comparatively recent years. In the Protestant villages of Montbéliard, between the Vosges and the Jura, at the moment of celebration of a wedding a nail was planted in the gallery (or, in some places, in the

<sup>1</sup> *Wallonia*, No. 3, 1893.

<sup>2</sup> Sébillot, *Coutumes de la Haute Bretagne*, 96.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 97, quoting Fouquet, *Légendes du Morbihan*. As to St. Guirec's shrine, see also *Arch. Camb.*, 5th Ser., vii, 175.

floor) of the church, to "nail" or fasten the marriage. In various parts of the country there are stone or iron crosses which have doubtless replaced wooden ones. In the new crosses it is of course impossible to hammer nails, or stick pins. Devotees, therefore, content themselves with depositing pins upon the arms or pedestal, or in the joints.<sup>1</sup> The well of Moniès in the department of Tarn had, at the beginning of the present century, a great renown for the cure of various diseases. The rags which had been used in bathing with the sacred water the diseased members were left stretched out on the neighbouring bushes.<sup>2</sup> An instance where the honour and glory, not to say the substantial gains attendant on the superstition, were early annexed by the Church is that of St. Michel-la-Rivière in the diocese of Bordeaux. Both the honour and the gains were considerable in the seventeenth century, as appears from orders made, and quarrels between the *curé* and the *fabriqueur* of the church decided, by the Archbishop of Bordeaux. The sick man was required to pass through a hole called a *veyrine* at the end of the apse; and the patients left offerings not merely of linen, but also of money, wax, and other things.<sup>3</sup> Nor was this case at all singular; for similar practices obtained wherever in the diocese was a church dedicated to St. Michael. In a North-German example the object of veneration was an oak-tree; and the pilgrim, after creeping through the hole in the prescribed manner, completed the performance by burying a piece of money under the roots. As many as a hundred patients a day are said to have visited it.<sup>4</sup> Here the Church had neglected her opportunities.

Passing the Pyrenees, let us note that in the seventeenth

<sup>1</sup> Gaidoz, in *Rev. de l'hist. des Rel.*, vi, 10, 12. See also *Notes and Queries*, 8th Ser., iv, 186.

<sup>2</sup> Gaidoz, *Un vieux rite médical*, 29, quoting Clos, *Mémoires de la Société des Antiquaires de France*.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 41, quoting *Mémoires de la Société Archéologique de Bordeaux*.

<sup>4</sup> Bartsch, i, 418.



century it was usual to stick needles or pins in a certain tree belonging to the church of Saint Christopher, situated on a high mountain near the city of Pampeluna.<sup>1</sup> In Mediterranean lands we must not forget the rite practised from very early times at Rome. From the date of the erection of the temple of Jupiter Capitolinus it was the custom on the festival of the dedication, the Ides of September, for the highest person of the state to drive a nail into the right wall of the *Cella Jovis*. This was usually done by the consuls or prætor; but in case of the appointment of a dictator the latter performed the ceremony. After it was dropped as an annual performance, recourse was occasionally had to it for the staying of a pestilence, or as an atonement for crime.<sup>2</sup> Two curious parallels to this Roman custom existed almost down to the present day in modern Europe. Near Angers was an oak which bore the singular name of *Lapalud*. It was regarded as of the same antiquity as the town, and was covered with nails to the height of ten feet or thereabouts. From time immemorial every journeyman carpenter, joiner, or mason who passed it, used to stick a nail in it. Near the cathedral at Vienna was the stock of an old tree, called the *Stock im Eisen*, said to be the last remnant of an ancient forest which covered the neighbourhood. Every workman who passed through Vienna was expected to fasten a nail in it; and it was in fact covered with a complete coat of mail, consisting entirely of the heads of the nails it had thus received.<sup>3</sup>

At Athens, mothers bring their sick children to the little church of Santa Marina, under the Observatory Hill, and there undress them, leaving the old clothes behind. There is a dripping well near Kotzanes, in Macedonia, "said to issue from the Nereids' breasts, and to cure all human ills.

<sup>1</sup> Liebrecht, *Geru. Tilb.*, 244, quoting Jean Baptiste Thiers, *Traité des Superstitions* (Paris, 1697).

<sup>2</sup> Preller, *Röm. Myth.*, i, 258.

<sup>3</sup> Gaidoz, *Rev. de l'hist. des Rel.*, vii, 9.

Those who would drink of it must enter the cave with a torch or lamp in one hand and pitcher in the other, which they must fill with the water, and, leaving some scrap of their clothing behind them, must turn round without being scared by the noises they may hear within, and quit the cave without ever looking back."<sup>1</sup>

In the district of Vynnytzia, government of Podolia in Ukraina, there is a mineral spring much resorted to. The sick, after bathing, hang to the branches of the trees their shirts, handkerchiefs, and other articles, "as a mark", says M. Volkov, who reports the case, "that their diseases are left there".<sup>2</sup> Whether this be the original notion we shall consider presently.

Parallel superstitions exist in India. A festival called Melá is held at the beginning of the month of Mágha (about the middle of January) at the island of Ságar, at the mouth of the Hugli. A temple of Kapila, who is held to be an incarnation of Vishnu, stands on the island, and in front of it is (or was) a Bur tree, beneath which were images of Ráma and Hanumán, while an image of Kapila, nearly of life-size, was within the temple. The pilgrims who crowd thither at the festival commonly write their names on the walls, with a short prayer to Kapila, or suspend a piece of earth or brick to a bough of the tree, offering at the same time a prayer and a promise, if the prayer be granted, to make a gift to some divinity.<sup>3</sup> Elsewhere in India, as well as in Arabia and Persia, strips of cloth are suspended from shrubs and trees, which, for some reason or other, are venerated; and, in Persia at all events, not only are rags, amulets, and other votive offerings found upon the trees, but the trees are also covered with nails.<sup>4</sup>

Mr. J. F. Campbell records having found in Japan "strips

<sup>1</sup> Rodd, *The Customs and Lore of Modern Greece*, 165, 176.

<sup>2</sup> *Rev. des Trad. Pop.*, vii, 56, citing Boijdowsky, *Kievskaiá Starina*.

<sup>3</sup> H. H. Wilson, *Works*, ii, 169.

<sup>4</sup> Burton, *Sindh*, 177; Gaidoz, *Rev. de l'hist. des Rel.*, vii, 9, quoting Ouseley, *Travels in Various Countries of the East*.

of cloth, bits of rope, slips of paper, writings, bamboo strings, flags, tags, and prayers hanging from every temple", and small piles of stones at the foot of every image and memorial stone, and on every altar by the wayside; and he draws attention to the similarity of the practices implied to those of his native country.<sup>1</sup> Another traveller in Japan states that women who desire children go to a certain sacred stone on the holy hill of Nikko, and throw pebbles at it. If they succeed in hitting it their wish is granted. They seem very clever at the game, he says maliciously. Further, the same writer speaks of a seated statue of Buddha in the park of Uyeno at Tokio, on whose knees women flung stones with the same object. Describing a temple elsewhere, he records that the grotesque figures placed at the door were covered—or, as he more accurately puts it, constellated—with pellets of chewed paper shot through the railing that surrounded them by persons who had some wish to be fulfilled. A successful shot implied the probability of the attainment of the shooter's desire.<sup>2</sup>

As might be anticipated, practices of this kind are not confined to Europe and Asia. A French traveller in the region of the Congo relates with astonishment concerning the *n'doké*—which he portrays as "fetishes important enough to occupy a special hut, and confided to the care of a sort of priests, who alone are reputed to have the means of making them speak"—that when it is desired to invoke the fetish, one or more pieces of native cloth, and the like, are offered to the fetish, or to the fetish priest; and the worshipper is then admitted to plant a nail in the statue, the priest meanwhile, or the worshipper himself, formulating his prayer or his desires.<sup>3</sup>

To sum up. We find widely spread in Europe the practice of throwing pins into sacred wells, or sticking pins

<sup>1</sup> Campbell, *My Circular Notes*, i, 350.

<sup>2</sup> *Mélusine*, vi, 154, 155, quoting the *Temps*.

<sup>3</sup> Gaidoz, *Rev. de l'hist. des Rel.*, vii, 7, quoting Charles de Rouvre, *Bull. de la Soc. de Géog.*, Oct. 1880.

or nails into sacred images or trees, or into the wall of a temple, or floor of a church, and—sometimes accompanying this, more usually alone—a practice of tying rags or leaving portions of clothing upon a sacred tree or bush, or a tree or bush overhanging, or adjacent to, a sacred well, or of depositing them in or about the well. The object of this rite is generally the attainment of some wish, or the granting of some prayer, as for a husband, or for recovery from sickness. In the Roman instance it was a solemn religious act, to which (in historical times at least) no definite meaning seems to have been attached ; and the last semblance of a religious character has vanished from the analogous performances at Angers and Vienna. In Asia we have the corresponding customs of writing the name on the walls of a temple, suspending some apparently trivial article upon the boughs of a sacred tree, flinging pellets of chewed paper or stones at sacred images and cairns, and attaching rags, writings, and other things to the temples. On the Congo the practice is that of driving a nail into an idol, in the Breton manner. It cannot be doubted that the purpose and origin of all these customs are identical, and that an explanation of one will explain all.

The most usual explanations are, first, that the articles left are offerings to the god or presiding spirit, and, secondly, that they contain the disease of which one desires to be rid, and transfer it to anyone who touches or removes them. These two explanations appear to be mutually exclusive, though Professor Rhys suggests that a distinction is to be drawn between the pins and the rags. The pins, he thinks, may be offerings ; and it is noteworthy that in some cases they are replaced by buttons or small coins. The rags, on the other hand, may be, in his view, the vehicles of the disease. If this opinion were correct, one would expect to find both ceremonies performed by the same patient at the same well : he would throw in the pin and also place the rag on the bush, or wherever its proper place might be. The performance of *both cere-*

monies is, however, I think, exceptional. Where the pin or button is dropped into the well, the patient does not trouble about the rag, and *vice versa*. Professor Rhys only cites one case to the contrary. There the visit to the well was prescribed as a remedy for warts. Each wart was to be pricked with a pin, and the pin bent and thrown into the well. The warts were then to be rubbed with tufts of wool collected on the way to the well, and the wool was to be put on the first whitethorn the patient could find. As the wind scattered the wool the warts would disappear. Upon this one or two observations may be made. It may be assumed that, when *any* tree, or *any* tree of a special kind, is prescribed, rather than some particular tree, for the doing of such an act as this, the rite only survives in a degraded form, and that originally some definite sacred tree was its object. If this be so, the rite is here duplicated. For if the pins were really offerings, to be distinguished in character from the deposits of wool, the prescription to touch the warts with them would be meaningless. But we must surely deem that whatever value attached to the rubbing of the warts with wool would equally attach to their pricking with the pins.

Moreover, the curious detail mentioned by Mrs. Evans in reference to the rags tied on the bushes at Elian's Well—namely, that they must be tied on with wool—points to a further degradation of the rite in the case we are now examining. Probably at one time rags were used, and simply tied to the sacred tree with wool. What may have been the reason for using wool remains to be discovered. But it is easy to see how, if the reason were lost, the wool might be looked upon as the essential condition of the due performance of the ceremony, and so continue after the disuse of the rags.

Nor can we stop here. From all we know of the process of ceremonial decay, we may be tolerably sure that the rags represent entire articles of clothing, which were at an earlier period deposited. There is no need to discuss

the principle of substitution and representation, so familiar to all students of folk-lore. It is sufficient to point out that, since the rite is almost everywhere in a state of decay, the presumption is in favour of entire garments having been originally deposited ; and that, in fact, we do find this original form of the rite in the Ukrainian example I have cited and (as I read the record) at Saint Michella-Rivière and elsewhere in the diocese of Bordeaux, under the fostering care of ecclesiastical officials. If we may trust the somewhat slovenly compilation of Mr. R. C. Hope on the holy wells of Scotland, a traveller in 1798 relates of the Holy Pool of Strathfillan in Perthshire, that "each person gathers up nine stones in the pool, and, after bathing, walks to a hill near the water, where there are three cairns, round each of which he performs three turns, at each turn depositing a stone ; and if it is for any bodily pain, fractured limb, or sore, that they are bathing, they throw upon one of those cairns that part of their clothing which covered the part affected ; also, if they have at home any beast that is diseased, they have only to bring some of the meal which it feeds upon, and make it into paste with these waters, and afterwards give it to him to eat, which will prove an infallible cure ; but they must likewise throw upon the cairn the rope or halter with which he was led. Consequently the cairns are covered with old halters, gloves, shoes, bonnets, night-caps, rags of all sorts, kilts, petticoats, garters, and smocks. Sometimes they go as far as to throw away their halfpence."<sup>1</sup> From this account it appears that stones from the pool, rags, garments which had covered the diseased parts of the devotees, and halfpence, had all the same value. The stones could not have been offerings, and it was evidently not usual to throw away halfpence. The gifts of rags and articles of clothing are ambiguous. If we must choose between regarding

<sup>1</sup> *Antiquary* (April 1893), xxvii, 169. Heron's *Journey* is quoted in a note, Brand and Ellis, ii, 268, in reference to the same pool and its reputed cures of lunacy.

them as offerings and as vehicles of disease, the analogy of the gifts at the shrine of Saint Michel-la-Rivière favours the former. Under ecclesiastical patronage, however, the rite had doubtless been manipulated to the benefit of the officials ; and we can use the instance no further than as proof that the deposit of garments was ambiguous enough to develop sometimes into pious gifts, if it developed at other times into devices for the shuffling of disease off the patient on another person.

M. Monseur, fixing his attention on instances like those of the Croix Saint Zè and Saint Guirec, in which pins or nails were stuck into the cross, or tree, or figure of the saint, suggests that the aim was, by causing pain or inconvenience to the object of worship, to keep in his memory the worshipper's prayer. And he refers, by way of illustration, to the tortures inflicted on children at the beating of boundaries, and to the flogging said to have been given to children in Lorraine on the occasion of a capital punishment, the intention of which incontestably was to preserve a recollection of the place or the incident.<sup>1</sup> M. Gaidoz, dealing with similar cases, and similar cases only, propounded ten years ago a theory somewhat different. In replying recently to M. Monseur, he recalls his previous exposition, and reiterates it in these words: "The idol is a god who always appears somewhat stupid ; it moves not, it speaks not, and, peradventure, it does not hear very well. It must be made to understand by a sign, and a sign which will be at the same time a memento. In touching the idol, especially in touching the member corresponding to that which suffers, its attention is directed to the prayer. And more than that is done in leaving a nail or a pin in its body, for this is a material memento for the idol." In putting it in this way, the learned professor does not desire to exclude the ideas of an offering and a transfer of disease, for he expressly adds that both these ideas are mingled with that of a memento.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Bulletin de Folklore*, i, 250.

<sup>2</sup> *Mélu sine*, vi, 155.

Let us take stock of the conditions to be fulfilled in order to a satisfactory solution of the problem. It must be equally applicable to sacred images, crosses, trees, wells, cairns, and temples. It must account not merely for the pins in wells and the rags on trees, but also for the nails in trees, the pins in images, the earth or bricks hung on the sacred tree in India, the stones or cairns, the pellets which constellate Japanese idols, the strips of cloth and other articles which decorate Japanese temples, the pilgrims' names written on the walls of the temple of Kapila, on the banks of the Hugli, the nails fixed by the consuls in the Cella Jovis at Rome, and those driven into the galleries or floors of Protestant churches in Eastern France. These are the outcome of equivalent practices, and the solution of their meaning, if a true one, must fit them all. M. Gaidoz' suggestion of a memento comes nearer to this ideal than any other hitherto put forward. But does it touch cases like those of the Lapalud, the Stock im Eisen, and the Cella Jovis, where the rite was unaccompanied by any prayer? The two former cases, indeed, if they stood alone, might be deemed worn and degraded relics of a rite once gracious with adoration, prayer, and thanksgiving. But nothing of the sort accompanied the driving of a nail into the wall of the temple of Jupiter, nor, so far as we can learn, the yet older custom observed by the Etruscans at Vulsinii, of sticking a nail every year in the temple of Nortia, the fate-goddess. On the contrary, in both these classical instances was the rite so bare and so ill-understood, that it was looked upon merely as an annual register or record. Almost as little does M. Gaidoz' explanation seem to fit the throwing of pins into a well, the burial of a coin, as in Mecklenburg, under a tree, or the marriage-nails of Montbéliard. Like M. Monseur's theory, it is applicable in its full significance only to examples of the rite as practised on statues, and it assumes that trees and crosses and other rude forms are mere makeshifts for the carven image, deteriorated survivals of idols strictly so



called. But this is to put the cart before the horse. There is no reason to suppose that the practices I have described originated later than the carving of sacred images, and were at first a peculiarity of their worship. There is every reason to suppose exactly the reverse. And in this connection it is significant that neither at Rome nor at Vulsinii (the earliest examples we have in point of time) were the nails fastened into the image, but into the temple wall.

I believe that a profounder thought forms the common ground in which all the customs we are discussing—or, as I should prefer to say, all the variations of a single custom—are rooted. When a witch is desirous of injuring a person, the first step is to get hold of something that once formed part of her foe's body, such as hair, fingernails, or excrement. Upon this she may work her will; and whatsoever she does to it will be done to the body of which it once formed part. Wherefore men everywhere burn, or hide, the combings or the cuttings of their hair, the shavings of their nails, the teeth extracted from their heads. Failing these things, however, the earth from their footprints, the remnants of their food, any articles of clothing they have once worn, or indeed any other portions of their property, are obnoxious to the same danger. Even their names may be used for the same end. A rough image is made: it is identified with the person who is to be bewitched by being dubbed with his name: any injury thenceforth inflicted on the image is inflicted on the bearer of the name, wherever he may be. These are means and methods of witchcraft all over the world. And they are based upon the hypothesis that, although the hair, the nails, the clothing, or property may be to all appearance severed from the object of the witch's wrath, yet there is, notwithstanding, a subtle physical connection still subsisting between the one and the other, just as if no severance had taken place. Equality of reasoning applies to the name, which is looked upon as a part of its owner, and, being conferred on an

effigy, identifies the effigy with the real owner of the name I will not waste time in illustrating either the practices or the hypothesis. What I want to suggest is that, in the customs to which I have called your attention at wells and trees and temples, we have simply another application of the same reasoning as that which underlies the practices of witchcraft. If an article of my clothing in a witch's hands may cause me to suffer, the same article in contact with a beneficent power may relieve my pain, restore me to health, or promote my general prosperity. A pin that has pricked my wart, even if not covered with my blood, has by its contact, by the wound it has inflicted, acquired a peculiar bond with the wart; the rag that has rubbed the wart has by that friction acquired a similar bond; so that whatever is done to the pin or the rag, whatever influences the pin or the rag may undergo, the same influences are by that very act brought to bear upon the wart. If, instead of using a rag, or making a pilgrimage to a sacred well, I rub my warts with raw meat and then bury the meat, the wart will decay and disappear with the decay and dissolution of the meat. The principle was once exalted into serious surgery, when, three centuries ago, the learned surgeon used to anoint and dress the weapon, instead of the wound which the weapon had caused. In like manner my shirt or stocking, or a rag to represent it, placed upon a sacred bush, or thrust into a sacred well—my name written upon the walls of a temple—a stone or a pellet from my hand cast upon a sacred image or a sacred cairn—is thenceforth in continual contact with divinity; and the effluence of divinity, reaching and involving it, will reach and involve me. In this way I may become permanently united with the god.

This is an explanation which I think will cover every case. Of course, I cannot deny that there are instances, like some of the Japanese and Breton cases, where, the real object of the rite having been forgotten, the practice has become to a slight extent deflected from its earlier

form. But it is not difficult to trace the steps whereby the idea and practice of divination became substituted for that of union with the object of devotion. Still less can I deny that, where the practice has not been deflected, the real intention has in most places been obscured. These phenomena are familiar to us everywhere, and will mislead no one who understands that the real meaning is not what the people who practise a rite say about it, but that which emerges from a comparison of analogous observances.

Let me, before closing, refer to one or two other practices having some bearing on those we have been discussing. The Athenian women who for the first time became pregnant used to hang up their girdles in the temple of Artemis. Here surely the meaning is clear, if read in the light of the ceremonies of witchcraft. And not less clear is the meaning of the converse case of the Ursuline nuns of Quintin. They keep one of the principal schools in Brittany. When a girl who has been their pupil marries and enters the interesting situation of the Athenian women just referred to, the pious nuns send her a white silken ribbon, painted in blue (the Virgin's colour) with the words: "Notre Dame de Délivrance, protégez-nous." Before sending it off, they touch with it the reliquary of the parish church, which contains a fragment of the Virgin Mary's zone. The recipient hastens to put the ribbon around her waist, and does not cease to wear it until her baby is born.<sup>1</sup> For the ribbon, having thus been in contact with divinity, though that contact has ceased to outward appearance, is still in some subtle connection with the goddess.

This is a method of conveying the divine effluence parallel to one which was a favourite during the Middle Ages. The latter consisted in measuring with a string or fillet the body of a saint, and passing the string afterwards round the patient. Many miracles performed in this way were attributed to Simon de Montfort. Pope Clement VIII

<sup>1</sup> Ploss, *Das Weib*, i, 504.

is said to have given his sanction to a similar measurement purporting to be the "true and correct length of Our Lord Jesus Christ", found in the Holy Sepulchre. Copies of this measurement were current in Germany up to a comparatively late date.<sup>1</sup>

It may be worth while to ask whether the offerings of the worshippers' own blood, as practised by the peoples of Central America, had not for their object not so much the gratification of the gods as the union of the worshippers with the deity. Dr. Stoll describes the priest in Guatemala as drawing blood from his tongue and other members and anointing with it the feet and hands of the image.<sup>2</sup> I am led to put this question because I find that, among the ceremonies of purification imposed by some of the non-Aryan tribes of Bengal upon women after childbirth, is that of smearing with vermilion the edge of the village well.<sup>3</sup> Now the vermilion in use in the wedding and other ceremonies of these peoples is, there can be little doubt, a substitute for blood. It would seem probable, therefore, that the well was originally smeared with blood, and *that* blood drawn from the offerer's veins. Other ceremonies point to the sacred character of the well, and I can only suggest that the smearing with blood had the same object as that I have ascribed to the observances at holy wells in Europe. By the ceremonial union thus effected with the divinity the woman would be purified.

A German writer, whose authority for the statement I have been unable to trace, mentions another ceremony performed at wells in Wales. He says it is the custom for a bride and bridegroom to go and lie down beside a well or fountain and throw in pins as a pledge of the new relation into which they have entered. And he adds that in clearing out an old Roman well in the Isle of Wight, some forty

<sup>1</sup> *Zeits. des Vereins für Volksk.*, ii, 168.

<sup>2</sup> Stoll, *Ethnologie der Indianerstämme von Guatemala*, 47.

<sup>3</sup> Risley, *The Tribes and Castes of Bengal*, i, 504, 535, and other places.

or fifty years ago, a number of ancient British pins for the clothes was found.<sup>1</sup> Whether or not the British pins are to be connected with the alleged custom in Wales, it is difficult to account for a collection of pins in such a situation except upon the supposition that they were purposely thrown into the well. At Gumbreyton, in Pembrokeshire, there is a holy well to which the villagers used to repair on Easter Day, when each of them would throw a crooked pin into the water. This was called "throwing Lent away"<sup>2</sup>—a name which has probably arisen since the original meaning of the ceremony has been forgotten. Both these Welsh practices (if the former be a genuine one) point to the interpretation I have placed upon the observances at pin-wells. For it will be observed that in neither case is there any disease to be got rid of, nor any prayer offered. If we could find the early shape of the former, we should probably recognise a solemn consecration of the one spouse to the domestic divinity of the other, a ritual reception into the kin. The analogy with the marriage custom of the Montbéliard Protestants is obvious, and may help to explain it. The Pembrokeshire custom may be conjectured to be a periodical renewal of union with the divinity, removed under Christian influences from the day of the pagan festival (perhaps May-day) to the nearest great feast-day of the Church.

I venture to submit, then, that the practices of throwing pins into wells, of tying rags on bushes and trees, of driving nails into trees and stocks, and the analogous practices throughout the Old World, are to be interpreted as acts of ceremonial union with the spirit identified with well, with tree, or stock. In course of time, as the real intention of the rite has been forgotten, it has been resorted to (notably in Christian countries) chiefly for the cure of diseases, and the meaning has been overlaid by the idea of the transfer of the disease. This idea belongs to the same category as

<sup>1</sup> Kolbe, *Hessische Volks-Sitten*, 163.

<sup>2</sup> *Folk-Lore Journal*, ii, 349.

that of the union by means of the nail or the rag with divinity, but apparently to a somewhat later stratum of thought. Since the spread of Christianity the reason for the sacredness of many trees or wells has passed from memory ; and it has consequently been natural to substitute any tree or any well for a particular one. This substitution has favoured the idea of transfer of disease, which has thus become the ordinary intention of the rite in later times.

E. SIDNEY HARTLAND.

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