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THE DASAHERA: AN AUTUMN FESTIVAL OF THE HINDUS.

BY W. CROOKE.

(Read at the Meeting, 18th November, 1914.)

THE Dasahra, which I propose to discuss in this paper, is the counterpart of the Holi, or vernal fire festival of the Hindus, described in a previous communication to this Journal.¹

There are two festivals known under this name. The first is that celebrated in Bengal in the month Jyaishta, or June, which commemorates the descent of the river Ganges from heaven. Crowds assemble with offerings of flowers, fruit, and grain on the banks of the sacred river. Bathing in it at the auspicious moment is believed to remove the sins committed during ten re-incarnations. Though this festival is in many ways interesting, we are not at present concerned with it.

The festival of the same name now under consideration is celebrated throughout Northern, Western, Central, and in parts of Southern, India. It usually takes place in the early part of October, and corresponds to what is known in Bengal as the Durga Pūja, or worship of the goddess Durga, one of the many forms of the Mother goddess, commonly known as Devi, consort of the god Siva; and to the Rāmlīla, or mystery play recording the exploits of the deified hero, Rāma. Owing to the eccentricity of the Hindu luni-solar calendar, it is not easy to fix the date in our

¹ Vol. xxv. p. 55 sq.

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almanacs with accuracy. It corresponds generally with the autumnal equinox, 23rd September. It occupies, as its name implies, ten days, each of which is provided with special ritual observances. The first nine days are called the Naurātri, or "nine nights," the tenth being the Dasahra.

Among the Rājputs and other martial tribes, for whom it is the chief annual feast, it begins with the worship of the double-edged sword, which is then removed from the hall of arms, and, after receiving the homage of the State officials, is made over to the Rāj Jogi, the leader of the body of ascetic warriors attached to the Court of the Rāna. It is taken by him to the temple of the goddess Devi; in the afternoon a buffalo is sacrificed in honour of the war horse; the Rāna visits the temple, offers two pieces of silver and a coco-nut, and does homage to the sword. Next day there is a procession to the Chaugān, or Champ de Mars, where a buffalo is sacrificed, and a second at the triumphal gate of the fort; in the evening the Rāna offers a sacrifice of goats and buffaloes to Amba Māta, another form of the Mother goddess. On the third day, after the usual procession, sacrifice is done to Harsiddhī Māta, a third manifestation of the goddess. On the fourth day the sword is again worshipped, and the Rāna in olden days used to slay a buffalo by piercing it from his litter with an arrow. He is both high priest and king, his ancestors having been first Brāhmans, then Rājputs;² "it is the power and duty of dealing the first blow which is universally characteristic of the antique priesthood."³ On the succeeding days there are similar processions and sacrifices; horses are bathed and their riders bow before them. On the ninth day the Rāj Jogi returns the sword to the Rāna, and it is restored with honour to its place in the palace. The tenth is the great feast day, when the Rāna goes in

² D. R. Bhandarkar, *The Guhilots—Journal Asiatic Society of Bengal*, N.S. vol. v. No. 6 (1909), p. 167 sq.

³ F. B. Jevons, *Introduction to the History of Religion* (1896), p. 273.

procession to worship the sacred *khejra* tree (*prosopis spicigera*), and liberates a jay, the sacred bird of the god Rāma. The festival ends with a review of the State troops, the decoration of the bazar, presentation of complimentary gifts to the Rāna, who gives presents in return to his chiefs, and the naming of the horses which have been purchased since the last festival.⁴

The strange class of unorthodox Brāhmans, the Pālewāl, worship, among other things, the bridle of a horse at the Dasahra, probably in memory of their former occupation as robbers carrying out their raids on horseback.⁵

We have another account of these celebrations from Bastar, a feudatory State, hidden away in the jungles of the Central Provinces, where, as Mr. Marten observes, "the Hindu rites are grafted in an ingenious manner on the indigenous ceremonies connected with the primitive autumn Saturnalia which celebrates, in the worship of the Mother goddess, the revival of the generative principles of the earth."⁶

The festival begins with offerings to deceased ancestors. Certain men of the Mahār, a menial caste, supposed to be temporarily under the influence of the local Bhūts or evil spirits, attend, are decorated with garlands, and venerated. A swing is set up outside the temple of the goddess, round which a Mahār girl, supposed to be possessed by the deity, walks. She goes through a mock fight with a man of her caste, and is then caught up and seated on the swing, the seat of which is made of thorns. On this she is swung gently backwards and forwards.⁷ The Chief, through the

⁴ J. Tod, *Annals of Rajasthan*, Calcutta reprint (1884), vol. i. p. 615 sq.

⁵ Major K. D. Erskine, *Gazetteer, Western Rajputana States Residency and the Bikaner Agency*, Allahabad (1909), p. 85.

⁶ *Census Report, Central Provinces* (1911), vol. i. p. 83.

⁷ Compare the swinging rites at the Holi, *Folk-Lore*, vol. xxv. p. 69. The swinging on thorns may be a form of vicarious penance. The Shushwap of British Columbia sleep on thorns to keep away the ghost of the deceased. Sir J. G. Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, 3rd ed. part ii. p. 142.

medium of one of his Pujāris or priests, offers a prayer to the goddess imploring her to ensure the due performance of the rites. The girl, as the medium of the goddess, presents through the priest to the Chief the garland of flowers which she wore, and announces that no evil spirits will interrupt the ceremonies. She also predicts the prospects of the coming year. She must be about seven or eight years old, and as in other places, impersonates the goddess of fertility. "She is allowed to take her part in the ceremony every year until she arrives at puberty, and even after that, if she is chaste and continues to live peaceably with the priest. But as the latter is generally a married man, the girl is usually made over to some other man of the caste who has no objection to take her as his wife without a formal marriage, and when this happens another girl is chosen by the priest and trained to her duties."

After these ceremonies the Rāja formally hands over the management of the State to his Diwān, or prime-minister, so that he may devote himself undisturbed to the conduct of the rites. He is subjected to various taboos: he may wear no clothing except a loin-cloth and a small sheet; his body is besmeared with sandal paste, and in place of a turban he wears a garland of flowers; he must not ride in any vehicle, nor can he wear shoes, and he must sleep on the ground; he may neither salute any one nor receive salutes. During this period of taboo an ascetic is selected and enthroned as his religious representative.⁸ Once he is consecrated, this personage must remain on the same spot during the nine days' festival; when overcome by hunger he is given only a small quantity of milk and plantains, but otherwise he is not regularly fed.⁹ The devotee is

⁸ Compare the functions of the Rāj Jogi at Mewār, who takes charge of the State sword, above, p. 29. On the subject of temporary kings see Sir J. G. Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, 3rd ed. part iii. p. 149 sqq.

⁹ This abstinence may be intended as a means of purifying the Rāja's representative, or it may be a form of sympathetic magic. See Sir J. G. Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, 3rd ed. part ii. p. 157, note 2, 161.

consecrated by digging a pit in the Darbār hall, in the middle of which is a raised platform of ashes, covered with a new blanket or cloth, on which he is seated. Near him is placed holy water and a sword, and wheat is sown on an altar.¹⁰ He must remain in a sitting position, confined by a plank laid across his thighs which is pegged to the ground, while a second plank supports his head and back.¹¹ During his term of office neither he nor the Rāja may see one another. Formerly, as his remuneration for this service, he used to receive a rent-free village, but he is now rewarded by a gift of jewels and money. In olden days he was allowed to plunder the bazar after his duty was over ;¹² now he merely goes round and collects alms.

On the next, the second day of the feast, the Rāja worships the gods, for which purpose he is carried round in a car dragged with ropes by members of one of the Gond tribes. The female attendants at the temples wave lights over him, and, carrying a quiverful of arrows and a dagger, he worships the goddess of wealth and his arms. On the seventh day he performs the rite of "invitation to the *bel* tree" (*acgle marmelos*). A fruit is picked and some leaves are offered to the terrible goddess, Chāmunda. This night is known as "the great worship," and is considered the most sacred of the Dasahra rites. On the ninth day nine unmarried girls are worshipped and fed as impersonations of the goddess ; clothes are given to them, and Brāhmans are

¹⁰ See *infra*, p. 47.

¹¹ We may perhaps compare this with the immobility of the Mikado. "In ancient times, he was obliged to sit on the throne for some hours every morning, with the imperial crown on his head, but to sit altogether like a statue, without stirring either hands or feet, nor indeed any part of his body, because by this means it was thought that he could preserve peace and tranquillity in his empire." Sir J. G. Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, 3rd ed. part ii. p. 3 sq.

¹² For the custom of legalised looting of the bazar, as an incident in a *rite de passage*, see W. Crooke, *Things Indian* (1906), p. 401 ; E. Crawley, *The Mystic Rose* (1902), p. 280.

feasted. The ascetic or representative of the Rāja is now released from his platform, taken veiled to the temple, where he does worship, and is then set at large. The Rāja, bare-footed, then receives the litter containing the image of his tribal goddess, Dantesvari, "she with the great teeth," Devi in her most malevolent form. He helps to carry her litter on his shoulder to the palace, where she is installed, and the holy food offered to her is distributed to the people. Next day the Rāja is believed to be free from taboo, and re-assumes his office. On the following morning he is supposed to be abducted by his Gond subjects, and is carried away from the city. His people go in search of him, and when they find him present to him wild animals and birds, grain and money. In the evening, dressed in a yellow robe and carrying a bow and arrows, he is brought back on a car amidst a great concourse of his subjects.¹³ Guns are fired, there is a wild clash of drums and other musical instruments, and the roads are illuminated. When he reaches his palace the women wave lamps over him; Brāhmins do worship; mustard and salt are sprinkled on his head by his female relations; he prostrates himself before his goddess, Dantesvari, and worships his arms. This ends the ceremonial.

I am indebted to Mr. F. Fawcett for an account of a more grim rite performed at the Dasahra in the native State of Jeypore, in the Vizagapatam District, lying to the east of Bastar, the observances at which place have already been described. The Rāja of Jeypore is an Uriya by caste, but his subjects in the wilder parts of the State are largely Kandhs and Savaras, very primitive jungle folk. Bastar was long notorious for the practice of human sacrifice, which prevailed down to quite modern times, until it was discontinued under pressure from the British

¹³ It would be tempting to regard this annual abduction of the Rāja as a parallel to the Roman Regifugium. See Sir J. G. Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, 3rd ed. part i. vol. ii. p. 308 *sq.*

Government.¹⁴ The following account of the Jeypore ceremony was recorded about thirty years ago :

“A man representing the victim for sacrifice was, from the day of the New Moon, immured in a cage-like box in a shed specially erected for the purpose during the nine days of the festival. In front of this was placed a lamp, which was kept alight without intermission, and beside it was placed a sword daubed with sandal-wood paste and decorated with flowers. While in the cage the man neither ate nor drank, nor might he sneeze : it was said that even the ordinary functions of nature were denied him during his confinement. At midnight of the ninth day of the festival, a pure black sheep was wrapped in a cloth which covered the animal entirely, marked with red powder and adorned with leaves of the *nīm* tree.¹⁵ It was taken to the Kālī temple, where its head was shaved and rubbed over with saffron water for purposes of purification, and a red spot was marked on its forehead, as used to be done in the case of human victims. Some mystic words were whispered in its ear, and it was given rice and saffron to eat. It was then solemnly beheaded by a priest, and its blood was caught in a basin and offered to the goddess. Those present marked their weapons with drops of this blood, and certain persons ate the flesh. It was said that the ceremony represented, as nearly as possible, a human sacrifice. After the rite was over the man in the cage was released, given a present of money, and required to depart at once.” This is a very interesting account of the substitution of an animal for a human victim. The taboos imposed on the mock victim are also instructive. Mr. Fawcett adds that it is not uncommon at Brāhman deathbeds for certain needy Brāhmans, in consideration of a money present, to accept

¹⁴ *Imperial Gazetteer of India* [1908], vol. vii. p. 122 ; *Gazetteer, Central Province* [1870], p. 38.

¹⁵ Mr. Fawcett notes the importance of the *nīm* tree (*melia azadirachta*) in the village festivals of South India.

ceremonially the sins of the dying man, and then to depart without turning back. He also notes that some thirty years ago, in the Jeypore State, when an epidemic of small-pox broke out, a goat, well fed and adorned, was marched to the hill pass leading to the Plains, and sent down to carry the disease with it. If these analogies be accepted, the human victim took the part of a scape-animal.¹⁶

The rite at Ujjain, in which buffaloes are sacrificed at the Dasahra as a substitute for a human victim, is important in this connection.¹⁷

From numerous accounts of the Dasahra celebrations in other parts of India two may be selected: that by the Bhils, a primitive non-Aryan tribe in Western India, and that by the Brāhmins and Marāthas at Poona in the Deccan.

Some Bhils, on the second day of the festival, sow barley in a dish filled with earth, keep it in the house carefully screened, watered, and tended till the ninth day, when the green stalks are cut "as an offering to the goddess." The people scramble for these seedlings, wear them in their turbans till they wither, and even then cherish them as sacred relics.¹⁸ Others clean their houses and call the Badva, or medicine-man, to perform incantations to invite the gods to the feast. The Badva is supposed to be possessed by the deity, but in order to ascertain if this be really the case, they lay in his absence some fruits of the sacred *bel* tree (*aegle marmelos*) in a line, and test him by making him point out which fruit was first placed. He is also required to predict the causes and cures of certain diseases, the prospects of the next rainy season, and of the occurrence of cattle plague. He is then taken to the shrine

¹⁶ See *Folk-Lore*, vol. xx. p. 212; W. Crooke, *Popular Religion and Folk-lore of Northern India*, vol. i. p. 170 *sqq.*

¹⁷ Sir J. G. Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, 3rd ed. part iii., *The Dying God*, p. 123 *sq.*

¹⁸ See p. 47, *infra*.

of the Mother goddess, in whose honour the festival is held, and after his state of possession has passed away he sacrifices a buffalo or goat by cutting off its head with a sword, having first ascertained, by throwing water on the head of the victim, that the offering is acceptable.¹⁹ The head is placed near the image; home-made liquor is sprinkled on the ground; the liver of the animal is thrown into a sacred fire, and the rest of the meat and liquor is distributed.

Among the Brāhmans and Marāthas of the Deccan a jar, either of brass or of clay, is set up as the symbol or dwelling-place of the goddess Bhavāni. Offerings, each of a different kind, are presented to young girls on each day of the feast. The image of Bhavāni, placed under a tree, as a sacred booth, is worshipped, honour is paid to Sarasvati, goddess of learning, and prayers are addressed to all implements and animals of war—the umbrella borne over the Chief, the horse, the flagstaff, the elephant, the sword, the bow and arrows, muskets and artillery. At the close of the ninth day the jar, the abode of Bhavāni, is thrown into water. On the tenth day a procession moves to the north-east to a *sami* tree (*acacia suma* or *prosopis spicigera*), at which the soldiers shoot arrows, and put the leaves as they fall into their turbans.²⁰ Under the old Mahratta

¹⁹ See *Folk-Lore*, vol. xx. (1909), p. 233 *sq.*

²⁰ This is possibly a survival of the festival in Buddhist times. "Every third year, in the month of Kattika (October-November), the kings used to hold a festival, called the Kattika Feast. While keeping this feast, the kings used to deck themselves out in great magnificence, and dress up like gods; they stood in the presence of a Goblin named Cittarāja, the King of Many Colours, and they would shoot to the four points of the compass arrows wreathed in flowers, and painted in diverse colours" (*The Jātaka*, Cambridge trans. vol. ii. (1895), p. 254; cf. v. pp. 109, 134). The object of the rite is not explained, but it possibly represents a method of putting to flight the adverse demons. The Hindus paid special attention to "the regents of the eight quarters of the sky," the Dikpāla—Indra, god of the sky, guarding the east; Agni, the fire god, the south-east; Yama, god of death, the south; Nirriti, the goddess of death, the south-west; Varuna, the sea god, the west;

rule, after a salute of artillery, the Peshwa, a Brāhman Mayor of the Palace, used to pluck a stalk of millet from a field, and the crowd, with firing of arrows and guns, rushed forward, each striving to secure a stalk of millet, the first-fruits of the season. They all shouted with joy, and spent the rest of the day in mirth and feasting. A buffalo decked with flowers and daubed with red paint was brought before the horse or elephant on which the Chief was mounted, its head was struck off by a single blow, and the blood was sprinkled over the horses. In smaller towns the buffalo was led round in procession, grain and liquor were sprinkled on the ground, and when the circuit was ended the head of the victim was cut off, sheep were sacrificed, and the flesh was eaten by all present except the Brāhmins.²¹

As we have seen, these rites in Bengal take the form of the Durga Pūja, the veneration of the Mother goddess. These complex ceremonies, a succession of puerile and often meaningless observances, invented by a degraded priesthood to satisfy a brutal people, have been described in detail by a native writer, and need not be discussed in detail.²²

The rites begin with the construction of the images which are intended to form the abodes of the goddess and of the other deities when their annual sleep is over. During the period preceding the winter solstice, when the sun reaches its most southerly declension, known to the Hindus as "the southern journey" (*dakshināyana*), that

Vāyu or Marut, wind gods, the north-west ; Kuvera, a sort of Pluto, and god of wealth, the north ; Isāna or Siva, god of destruction and reproduction, the north-east. Or, again, the eight quarters were guarded by eight mythical elephants, known as Diggaja. It may also be noted that pelting trees and plants is in some places a charm to increase their fertility (Sir J. G. Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, 3rd ed. 1911, part i. vol. i. p. 140).

²¹ Sir J. Malcolm, *Transactions Literary Society, Bombay*, vol. iii. pp. 79-96, quoted in *Bombay Gazetteer*, vol. xviii. pt. i. (1885), p. 294, note 3.

²² Pratapachandra Ghosha, *Durga Puja, with Notes and Illustrations*, Calcutta, 1871.

is, roughly speaking, from the end of June to the early part of November, the gods are believed to sleep. Until their rest is ended no marriages are performed, no one repairs the thatch of his house or makes beds for use in the household ; no one, not even the jackal, eats the new sugar-cane and other crops of the autumn harvest, garden vegetables, or jungle fruits like the wild plum or myrabolan.²³ In short, it is a feast of first-fruits, when the new food is desacralized or freed from taboo.

In Bengal the goddess is aroused from her sleep by magical methods. A twig of the *bel* tree growing in the north-eastern direction is touched by the officiant, and the goddess is invited to wake and take up her abode in it. On the first day nine mystical plants placed round this branch are bathed ; life is given to the images by invoking the deities represented by them ; they are anointed ; sacrifice is done ; minor gods are worshipped, and the day closes with the paying of devotion to a virgin girl of the Brāhman caste.

An important rite, of which an example has already been given,²⁴ is that of installing a jar (*ghata-sthāpana*) as an abode for the goddess, into which she is invited to enter by a series of rites and incantations. The tiresome ritual need not be described in detail. It closes with the ceremony on the tenth day, when the image is removed from its place, tied on a bamboo frame, and carried on men's shoulders to the riverside with all manner of music. Then it is fixed on a pair of boats and dropped into the water.

²³ J. F. Hewitt, *Ruling Races of Prehistoric Times* (1894), pp. 353, 390 ; *Census Report, Panjab*, 1901, vol. i. p. 44 sq. ; C. A. Elliott, *Settlement Report, Hoshungabad* (1867), p. 126 ; R. V. Russell, *Gazetteer of Damoh* (1906), vol. i. p. 39 ; W. Crooke, *Popular Religion and Folklore of Northern India*, 2nd ed. (1896), vol. ii. p. 299 sqq. For similar beliefs see Sir J. G. Frazer, *The Golden Bough*,³ part iv. vol. ii. p. 41 ; L. R. Farnell, *The Cults of the Greek States*, vol. ii. p. 461, note c, v. 176 sq., 178, 183 ; J. E. Harrison, *Prolegomena to the Study of Greek Religion*, p. 276 sq.

²⁴ P. 36, *supra*.

In parts of Northern India, where the cult of Rāma is popular, the observance is known as the Rāmlīla, or play of Rāma. Rāma, probably a deified king of Ayodhya, is the hero of the Rāmāyana epic, which describes his career: his banishment from his kingdom through a palace intrigue, his marriage to Sīta, the impersonation of the field furrow and the Hindu type of wifely virtue, her abduction by the demon Rāvana, Rāma's quest for his wife, the conquest of the demon, the ordeal by which Sīta establishes her chastity, the reunion of the pair and the recovery of their kingdom. This festival takes the place among Rāma worshippers of the Dasahra, and is distinguished from it by the fact that as Vaishnavas, or followers of Vishnu, they abhor blood-shedding and animal sacrifice. During the feast a sort of mystery play describing the adventures of Rāma is celebrated. As a finale, immense bamboo and paper images of Rāvana and his demon brother Kumbhakarana, "he who has ears like a pitcher," are erected in a plain, filled with fireworks, which when lighted destroy the demons, to the delight of the excited crowd.

Such are the general features of this complex series of observances. They have obviously been developed from a more primitive ritual, partly by the action of the Brāhmins, who have annexed them for the service of the sectarian gods, partly by the State officials, who have converted them into a palace ritual. It may be well to investigate the primitive nucleus from which these modern practices seem to have developed.

The time of the feast is, as we have seen, the winter solstice. This represents in Northern India the meeting of two seasons. The autumn crops, rice, millet, and the like, sown at the opening of the rainy season, about the beginning of July, are now ripe; the time for sowing the cold-weather crops, wheat, barley, and so on, is at hand. In Madras the beginning of October is the change from the south-west to the north-east monsoon.

In Wakhan, in the Hindu-Kush, the feast corresponding to the Dasahra is a time of festivity in each household. A bowl of grain, half of which has been roasted, is carried out and sprinkled round the house. Then the goodman starts to begin ploughing his field, but he soon returns, clambers on the house-top, and scatters seed through the central sky-hole, which provides light and ventilation. Then, proceeding to his field, he traces a circular furrow round it, possibly to exclude evil spirits, scatters a little seed and returns home, where he finds the door barred against him, apparently because he is in a state of taboo, this condition being due partly to the fact that he is engaged on a new work of the greatest moment, and partly because his plough disturbs and causes inconvenience to the field spirits. The women do not admit him till after much entreaty. The next morning he rises before daylight and drives an ass into the house, a performance which arouses much fun and jollity. The ass is then sprinkled with flour and driven out, possibly some form of fertility magic. Stalks of barley sown near the place where the rites are performed are given to the Rāja as an emblem of prosperity, and at the close of these rites the sowing of the spring crops begins. The Rāja himself goes through the form of ploughing and sowing, in order, we are told, to take away the sin which the tilling of the land is supposed to convey; in other words, he, as ruler and priest, is alone able to risk the danger of starting this critical work. On this ceremony Major J. Biddulph, who records it, remarks: "I think there can be no doubt that in this festival we see a relic of the Hindoo Dussehra."²⁵

The propitiation or repulsion of evil spirits is an important element in the ritual of the Dasahra. An early example is that of the Vedic Mahāvratā rite, performed at the winter solstice for the purpose of driving away influences hostile to the return of the sun, when a drum was made by digging

²⁵ Major J. Biddulph, *Tribes of the Hindoo Koosh* (1880), p. 105.

a hole in the ground and covering it with a hide.²⁶ Among the Mahārs of the Deccan at the Dasahra a buffalo is wounded by the Chief, let loose and hunted, while every one tries to strike it with their hands or with some weapon. It is believed, like the scape-animal, to carry away the sins of those who are successful in striking it. After this, at the entrance of the town, its head is cut off with a single blow. The Mahārs rush on the carcass, and each one seizes a piece of the flesh. This done, they go in procession round the walls, calling on the spirits and demons, and asking them to accept the pieces of meat as offerings, which are thrown to them backwards over the wall.²⁷

Naturally at this season the sainted dead of the family are not neglected. Just before the Dasahra, at the end of August and the beginning of September, is the "Ancestors' fortnight" (*pitra paksha*), when the souls of the household dead are believed to return to their homes which have been cleared and made ready for their reception, and to eat the food provided for them. The souls of women come on the ninth day of the fortnight, and on the thirteenth the dreaded spirits of persons who have perished by a violent death, by accident, snake-bite, or other unusual causes.

During the fortnight of the dead a woman does not put on new bangles and men do not shave.²⁸ The natural relief from this period of grief and mental tension comes with the succeeding Saturnalia and rejoicings of the Dasahra. As special examples of the cult of ancestors, it may be noted that in the Central Provinces a still-born child is deemed unlucky, and at the Dasahra a coco-nut is

²⁶ A. A. Macdonell, A. B. Keith, *A Vedic Index of Names and Subjects* (1912), vol. i. p. 368.

²⁷ *Folk-Lore*, vol. xvii. (1906), p. 296, quoting *Globus*, vol. xvii. p. 24.

²⁸ E. M. Gordon, *Indian Folk Tales* (1908), p. 18. On the Feast of All Souls, see Sir J. G. Frazer, *The Golden Bough*,³ part iv. vol. ii. p. 51 sq.

broken at the grave to appease the spirit, which is dreaded because the child had not undergone the rites of purification.²⁹ The Kandhs of the same province feed the souls of the dead annually with rice at the harvest and Dasahra festivals.³⁰ Among the Kammas, when a woman dies during the lifetime of her husband, a Brāhman lady, who must not be a widow, is invited to personate the deceased at the Dasahra. She is anointed and washed with turmeric and saffron, both demon-scaring substances, and is decorated with sandal paste and flowers. Clothes, sweets, fruit, and betel-leaf are offered to her, and the women of the family bow before her and receive her blessing, believing that it comes from their dead relation.³¹

The Korachas of Mysore do not observe the Hindu mind-rite (*srāddha*) for the dead. But during the Dasahra or on the Mahālaya new-moon day (30th September) they set up a jar in the house, place new clothes near it, if they can afford to do so, and do worship by burning incense and breaking a coco-nut in the name of the deceased ancestors.³² The Rājput hero who recovered the town of Bundi from the Musalmāns left the mark of his sword on a staircase slab of the palace, and this is annually worshipped by every member of the Hara tribe at the Dasahra.³³ During the Dasahra at Kathmāndu, the capital of Nepāl, "the city at this time is required to be purified, but the purification is effected by prayer rather than by water-cleansing."³⁴

It is perhaps a symbol of these mourning and purgative rites that the images of the gods are made to sit unmoved during the first nine days of the feast. On the morning

²⁹ *Census Report, Central Provinces (1911)*, vol. i. p. 159.

³⁰ *Ethnographic Survey, Central Provinces*, part vii. (1911), p. 55.

³¹ *Ibid.* part iv. (1907), p. 34.

³² *Ethnographic Survey, Mysore*, No. vii. (1906), p. 15.

³³ J. Tod, *op. cit.* vol. ii. p. 511.

³⁴ H. A. Oldfield, *Sketches from Nipal* (1880), vol. ii. p. 343 sq.

of the tenth day they are removed from their fixed positions and worshipped.³⁵

In Madras the goddesses Durga, Lakshmi, and Sarasvati are supposed to do penance during this nine day period, only to be aroused on the tenth, when, in the true spirit of fertility rites, the sacred marriage of Lakshmi and Vishnu is performed.³⁶

But besides prayer and propitiation of the dead other measures believed to be even more efficacious are taken. Blood sacrifices are supposed to be the most potent form of expiation. To the instances of such rites already given, the custom at Nepal may be added. On the tenth day of the festival there is a great slaughter of buffaloes at the regimental head-quarters, and of other victims at the temples of Devi or Durga. Every Gorkha officer of the higher ranks is expected to present a buffalo to the colours of his own corps. The colours are set up in a prominent position, decorated with garlands and streamers, amid volleys of muskets and artillery. The victim is brought out and tied to post with its nose touching the ground, so as to stretch the neck, and it is decapitated with a single blow of the *kukri* or curved Gorkha knife. The carcases are the perquisite of the regimental servants. The Gorkha method of decapitation is reasonably humane, but the Newār practice of slaying animals at their temples by opening the jugular vein is extremely brutal. The blood of the victim is directed so as to fall on the shrine or on the images of the gods, and over a quantity of rice offered to the deity. This last becomes saturated with blood and is appropriated by men of the menial Pauriya caste, who carry it away and eat it. As soon as the victim is dead, the persons who have done the sacrifice appropriate the head for their own consumption, and a portion is given to the temple servants as their share. Sometimes

³⁵ Balaji Sitaram Kothare, *Hindu Holidays* (1904), p. 67.

³⁶ S. M. Natesa Sastri, *Hindu Feasts, Fasts, and Ceremonies* (1903), p. 85.

the horns, daubed with patches of red paint, are hung on the shrine, as Dr. Oldfield thinks, more as a tribute of respect than as an offering. But certain Himalayan tribes place skulls of animals outside their dwellings, and these are probably intended less as trophies than as charms against evil spirits.³⁷

To quote Dr. Oldfield: "On an occasion like the Dassera, when thousands of animals are sacrificed in one day, the scene at any popular temple is very disgusting. The priests' robes and faces and hands are covered with blood; the shrine itself, the approaches to it, the gutters running from it are streaming with blood; while the groans, cries, and struggles of the still living victims, mingled with the angry altercations and upraised voice of the operating officials, the monotonous mutterings of prayer-makers, the ringing of bells to drive away evil spirits, and lastly, but not least, the mutilated and still bleeding carcasses of the recently-slaughtered victims lying about on all sides, make up a scene of savage brutality which is not easily to be forgotten, and which is all the more repulsive from its being looked on by all concerned in it as being a necessary and most meritorious part of their religion. Jang Bahadur told me that during the Dassera about nine thousand buffaloes were slaughtered for one purpose or other in Nipal. This is, I think, an exaggeration; but there is no doubt that the number of animals killed is enormous."³⁸

In like manner, at the Durga Pūja in Bengal the worshipper is directed to take a drop of the blood of a sacrificed goat, and rubbing it on his forehead, to recite the charm: "Om! May those whom I touch with my feet, those whom I can see with my eyes be subdued by me if they be my enemies!"³⁹

³⁷ L. A. Waddell, *The Buddhism of Tibet* (1895), p. 484; cf. J. Hastings, *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, vol. i. (1908), p. 499.

³⁸ *Op. cit.* vol. ii. p. 349 sq.

³⁹ Pratapachandra Ghosha, *op. cit.* p. 66. The word *Om*, of which many

Besides the efficacy of sacrifice as a mode of propitiating gods or demons, blood, as the source of life, is naturally a protective against spirit influence. Among the hill tribes of Rajmahāl, if two men quarrel and blood be shed, the offender is fined a hog or a fowl, the blood of which is sprinkled over the wounded man "to purify him, and to prevent his being possessed by a devil"; the same procedure is employed in purifying the singers of a sacred song, if one of them chances to make a mistake in his part, and thus incurs the anger of the deity who is being addressed; the same mode of purification is used for both parties in the case of sexual offences.⁴⁰ In Car Nicobar a man possessed by devils is purified by being rubbed all over with pig's blood and beaten with leaves, which, carrying the devils thus transferred to them, are thrown into the sea before daybreak.⁴¹

Another method of purification used at the Durga Pūja is that of fumigation. The ladies of the household, after offering flowers to the goddess, seat themselves in the courtyard facing her image and burn frankincense on their hands and heads; the priests throw aromatic resins into fire lighted in earthen pans which are held near the women.⁴² Among the tribes of the Hindu-Kush the wood of the deodar cedar (*pinus deodara*) is commonly used for

mystical interpretations have been suggested, is a term of solemn invocation, affirmation, benediction, and consent, so sacred that no one may listen when it is being uttered. It is the prelude of all prayers and rites, and is written at the beginning of books, as a sign of good luck, to repel the evil eye and evil spirits.

⁴⁰ *Asiatic Researches*, vol. iv. (1798), pp. 87, 50, 63, 68; cf. W. Robertson Smith, *The Religion of the Semites*, 2nd ed. (1894), pp. 344, 351, 381, note 2.

⁴¹ *Journal Royal Anthropological Institute*, vol. xxxii. (1902), p. 227; cf. W. Crooke, *Popular Religion and Folklore of Northern India*, 2nd ed. (1896), vol. ii. p. 19 *sqq.*; Sir J. G. Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, 3rd ed. part iv. vol. i. p. 299, note 2. For the use of the pig in purification, see J. E. Harrison, *op. cit.* p. 152 *sq.*

⁴² Pratapachandra Ghosha, *op. cit.* p. 76 *sq.* On purification by means of fumigation, see *The Golden Bough*, 3rd ed. part ii. 155, 177.

purification, as in the case of the bridegroom, who is thus freed from evil spirits.⁴³

We have seen that at the Rāmlīla wooden images of the demons Rāvana and Kumbhakarana are blown up with fireworks. This is doubtless a case in which a rite for the expulsion of demons in general has been adopted by the Brāhmans and attached to the Rāma cultus. We may compare these images with the wicker-work giants at Douay and other places which are, or were, paraded at the midsummer festival: Sir J. G. Frazer connects these with "the leafy framework in which the human representative of the tree-spirit is so often encased."⁴⁴ But in India they seem to represent a form of demon expulsion. We may perhaps find an analogy to the death of the vegetation spirit in the curious Indian tale that the boys who personate Rāma and his brother in the mystery play are believed never to live to attain manhood. Bishop Heber writes: "The poor children who have been thus feasted, honoured, and made to contribute to the popular amusement, were, it is asserted, always poisoned in the sweetmeats given them the last day of the show, that it might be said their spirits were absorbed into the deities whom they had represented."⁴⁵ One result of this belief is that it is not easy to induce boys to undertake this dangerous duty. The story of the poisoning of the victims is incredible, but it is possible that the legend is based on the sudden death of some performers owing to excitement or exposure to the sun during the performance. In some cases their bodies are covered with gold leaf, which, by obstructing the pores of the skin, might easily lead to a fatal result.

⁴³ J. Biddulph, *op. cit.* pp. 53, 78; Sir G. S. Robertson, *The Kafirs of the Hindu-Kush* (1896), pp. 421, 429, 462, 467, 471.

⁴⁴ *The Golden Bough*,³ part vii. vol. ii. p. 32 sq.

⁴⁵ *Narrative of a Journey through the Upper Provinces of India* (1861), vol. i. p. 191.

These methods of purification and expulsion of evil spirits at the Dasahra are closely connected with the intention to promote the fertility of men, animals, and crops, which is one of the main objects of the festival. The goddess Devi or Durga, with whom, under Brāhman influence, this festival is now associated, exercises in this her most important function.

First, we find the worship of young girls, who have not attained puberty, as embodiments of the goddess. This has already been mentioned in the Mahratta ritual and in that of the Durga Pūja.⁴⁶ A few years ago two unmarried girls in the Kapurthala State were announced to be incarnations of the goddess. They were worshipped, they visited various parts of the Jalandhar District, and were treated with great reverence; but as no good results followed, the cult died out.⁴⁷

Secondly, we find in connection with this festival the production of the so-called "Gardens of Adonis," which have been recently discussed in great detail by Sir J. G. Frazer, who regards them "as charms to promote the growth and revival of vegetation; and the principle by which they were supposed to produce this effect was homœopathic or imitation magic."⁴⁸ Instances of this form of magic have been already described in the Deccan and among the Bhils.⁴⁹ The Hindus of Gujarāt plant various kinds of seed grains on the first day of the festival in a corner of the house oratory or god-room, and worship them on the tenth day as representing the goddess. A lamp fed with butter, and an unsheathed sword, the emblem of the goddess, are placed beside them. When an exorcist grows these seedlings he becomes possessed by the goddess on the eighth day of the feast, and walks about accompanied

⁴⁶ Pp. 36, 38, *supra*.

⁴⁷ *Census Report, Panjab* (1901), vol. i. p. 126.

⁴⁸ *The Golden Bough*, 3rd ed. part iv. vol. i. p. 236 sq.

⁴⁹ Pp. 35, 37, *supra*.

by women, one of whom bears the seedlings in a basket. People suffering from spirit seizures sit on the road and are believed to be cured if the exorcist leaps over them.⁵⁰ The only agricultural work the mên of the Kāfir tribe ever do is to grow these seedlings.⁵¹ Probably with the same intention, during the feast in Gujarāt, the main gates of the temples are festooned with the ears of as many kinds of grain as are procurable.⁵² In Southern India the Dasahra is immediately followed by the Gauri festival in honour of the goddess, "the brilliant one," the impersonation of the golden grain of harvest. She is believed to have saved the corn from the Rākshasas or malevolent demons, and she is represented by a bundle of rice ears carried in procession, while the women sing songs describing her life and exploits.⁵³

A similar explanation may be given of the custom of swinging the Mahār girl during the festival.⁵⁴ It will be remembered that the swing on which she sits is covered with thorns, partly perhaps with a penitential object. But, further, Sir J. Frazer has given an instance from Borneo where the priests and priestesses are swung in order that they may receive inspiration from the spirit: "thus suspended in the air they seem to be in a peculiarly favourable position for catching the divine afflatus."⁵⁵ It is not possible to explain swinging rites in various parts of the world in the same way; but the promotion of the growth of plants seems to be one of the leading motives.⁵⁶

Again, as we have seen,⁵⁷ the image of the goddess at the Durga Pūja is solemnly thrown into the river, and in

⁵⁰ *Bombay Gazetteer*, vol. ix. part i. (1901), p. 392.

⁵¹ Sir G. S. Robertson, *op. cit.* p. 466 sq.

⁵² *Bombay Gazetteer*, vol. ix. part i. (1901), p. 390.

⁵³ W. Francis, *Gazetteer of Vizagapatam* (1907), vol. i. p. 71.

⁵⁴ P. 30, *supra*.

⁵⁵ *The Golden Bough*, 3rd ed. part iii. (1911), p. 280.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.* p. 283.

⁵⁷ P. 38, *supra*.

Bengal at various festivals the deities are immersed in the same way.⁵⁸ We may interpret this as a rain or fertility charm, or suppose that the object is to purify and re-invigorate the goddess and fit her for the performance of her duties in the coming year. During the Ganggor festival in Rājputāna, at the opening of the Hindu year, the image of the goddess Gauri is taken to a lake and bathed by women, no male being allowed to attend the rite. The ritual is accompanied by the growing of "Gardens of Adonis," women joining hands and singing round the seedlings, which they present to men to wear on their turbans.⁵⁹

Another, and perhaps the most important phase of the Dasahra rites, represents a *rite de passage*, like the Holi at the opening of the Hindu year.⁶⁰ The great Dasahra day is considered highly auspicious for the undertaking of any new work or business. Children who are commencing their studies generally attend school on that day for the first time. It is also considered to be a suitable day for a couple who have been married at an early age to commence living together.⁶¹ In Cochin the child beginning his studies at the Dasahra is seated near a bell-metal vessel full of rice, with a lighted lamp placed beside it. The teacher writes with a gold coin on the child's tongue an invocation to the deities Vishnu, Sarasvati and Ganapati, who favour all kinds of enterprises. Sometimes the opening of the child's education on that day is marked by his parents presenting him with writing materials.⁶² In Sindh the rite of tonsure of a child is performed at the Dasahra

⁵⁸ H. H. Wilson, *Works*, vol. ii. (1862), p. 191.

⁵⁹ J. Tod, *op. cit.* vol. i. p. 602 sq.

⁶⁰ *Folk-Lore*, vol. xxv. (1914), p. 78.

⁶¹ *Bombay City and Island Gazetteer* (1909), vol. i. p. 172 sq.; E. Thurston, *Castes and Tribes of Southern India* (1909), vol. vii. p. 73 sq.

⁶² Anantha Krishna Iyer, *Cochin Tribes and Castes*, vol. ii. (1912), pp. 61, 204.

under the sacred *kani* tree (*prosopis spicigera*), possibly with the intention of associating the boy with its vigorous life. The guests present gifts to the barber, and the child is bathed and dressed in new raiment.⁶³ In Nepal this is the time fixed for the renewal of the services of all State officials, and all private or domestic servants commence or terminate their employment on this day, masters rewarding those who have given satisfaction.⁶⁴ It is also the time for starting trade. Last year at the town of Najibābād in the United Provinces of Agra and Oudh, owing to a squabble between the Muhammadans and the Hindus, the latter insisting on parading the sacred steel quoits (*chakra*) and flags at the Dasahra, the ceremonies were abandoned, and the Dasahra being the day on which all new accounts are opened, every Hindu shop was closed and all business was at a standstill until the British officers intervened and settled the dispute.⁶⁵ At Hoshangābād in the Central Provinces it is said that on the night before the Dasahra the Sunārs or goldsmiths hold a feast by the river bank, and take an oath that they will not disclose the amount of alloy which any fellow-craftsman may fraudulently mix with the precious metals which he works into jewellery.⁶⁶ Harvest and sowing, as we have seen, begin on this day. As might have been expected, this sometimes disturbs the farmer's arrangements. Thus, in Hoshangābād sowing should begin at the Dasahra; but in this part of the country ploughing

⁶³ E. H. Aitken, *Gazetteer of Sind* (1907), vol. A, p. 214.

⁶⁴ H. A. Oldfield, *op. cit.* vol. ii. p. 343 *et seq.* Among the Santāls the Māgh-sim festival, held in the month of Māgh, when the jungle grass is cut, marks the end of the year. Servants are paid their wages and fresh engagements are entered into. On this occasion all the village officials go through the form of resigning their appointments, and all the cultivators give notice of throwing up their lands.—H. H. Risley, *Tribes and Castes of Bengal* (1891), vol. ii. p. 233.

⁶⁵ *The Pioneer Mail*, 7th October, 1913, p. 14.

⁶⁶ *Ethnographic Survey, Central Provinces*, part viii. (1911), p. 91; *Census Report, Central Provinces* (1911), vol. i. p. 239.

is hardly finished by this time and the cold weather has only just begun.⁶⁷

Again, the festival marks the resumption of communications with neighbouring towns and villages which were interrupted during the rainy season. The procession of the Rāja into the country appears to be a symbol of this. Like all arrangements which depend on the regularity of the seasons, this was a very ancient practice. In the Vedas the Kuru-Panchāla princes march forth on raids in the dewy season which follows the rains, and return in the hot season.⁶⁸ Manu, it is true, directs the Rāja to set out for war in January, February, and up to April, "according to the condition of his army."⁶⁹ But Manu was a Brāhman arm-chair philosopher, not a strategist. The old Germans used to hold a feast in honour of Odin about the beginning of summer, when the campaign opened, and the ways, whether by land or sea, became easy of passage.⁷⁰ It is not long since European armies habitually went into winter quarters owing to difficulties of transport, and awaited the coming of spring, when operations were resumed. In India this was the custom of the Mahrattas and the Pindhāris, who deferred their raids until the country became open after the rainy season. These bandits, says General Sleeman, "always took the auspices and set out kingdom-taking (*mulkgiri*) after the Dasahra, in November, as regularly as English gentlemen go partridge-shooting on the 1st September."⁷¹

This also is the time which some tribes in India select for their annual hunt, which Sir J. G. Frazer interprets as

⁶⁷G. L. Corbett, R. V. Russell, *Hoshangabad Gazetteer* (1908), vol. i. p. 92.

⁶⁸A. A. Macdonell, A. B. Keith, *A Vedic Index of Names and Subjects* (1912), vol. i. p. 165.

⁶⁹*Laws of Manu*, vii. 182.

⁷⁰F. R. Gummere, *Germanic Origins* (1892), p. 422.

⁷¹W. H. Sleeman, *Rambles and Recollections of an Indian Official* (1893), vol. i. p. 355.

“a religious or magical rite specially designed to bestow fertility on women as well as to ensure a supply of game and rain.”⁷² It is a good start for the season’s hunting on which many of these tribes depend. We have seen that part of the Dāsahra rites is the expedition to a sacred tree, at which arrows are shot, and the leaves are carried away as trophies,⁷³ possibly symbols of a good season for raids and sport. In the Konkan the village headman, when the time comes for manuring the rice fields, opens the season by plucking a leaf from the tree occupied by a spirit, a feat which no one else dares to perform; he also takes the command in the annual hunt, and offers part of the game at the village spirit-shrine.⁷⁴ The Badagas of Madras, just before the ploughing begins, catch two fowls in a net, and make a pretence of spearing them. Then the net is fixed in a game-path in the jungle, and some wild animals, a *sāmbhar* stag (*cervus unicolor*), if possible, is driven into it and slain, the flesh being divided among the villagers.⁷⁵ The dates of these annual hunts are not clearly defined, but generally occur in spring and autumn, both critical periods for farming. The Santāls used to have their hunt in the hot season, just before the rains broke, but violent thunderstorms interfered with it, and some beaters were killed by lightning. So they fixed it earlier in the year, in May. The dates, however, vary in different parts of their country. While the goodman is hunting, his wife is obliged to keep looking into a bowl of water till, to her eyes, it turns into blood, which ensures a successful result—a good piece of sympathetic magic. Before the hunt sacrifices are offered, apparently to the forest gods, the headman is tied to a tree, only his hands being left loose to enable him to concentrate his attention on his magic-working. In the evening there is a council to decide tribal affairs with much

⁷² *Totemism and Exogamy* (1910), vol. iii. p. 200, note 2.

⁷³ P. 36, *supra*.

⁷⁴ *Folk-Lore*, vol. xxii. (1911), p. 230.

⁷⁵ E. Thurston, *op. cit.* vol. i. p. 101.

singing and dancing, followed on the next day by a second and less important hunt.⁷⁶ The Koyis of Madras, after the autumn crop of millet is reaped at the end of October, go out to hunt, and every man must bring back some game, be it only a bird or a mouse.⁷⁷ The Malayālis of the same province have their annual hunt just after the Pongol or harvest-home.⁷⁸ In the month of October girls of the Mūnda tribe at Rānchi in Chota Nāgpur go out armed with sticks, spears, and axes, and kill and carry off any fowls, kids, pigs, or lambs they can secure, the owners, in their turn, retaliating on them by similar raids. This is said to occur every twelfth year, and is the occasion for much drinking and merry-making among men and women.⁷⁹ In Bihār on the last day of the Bengali year, people daub themselves with mud and shower it on all whom they happen to meet. In the afternoon they go out with clubs and hunt jackals, hares, and any other animal they may come across in the village.⁸⁰ A similar custom of men dressed as women killing goats "at certain times of the year" is reported from the Central Provinces.⁸¹ In Travancore this has become a State ritual, the Palli Vetta or "Royal hunting," when the Mahārāja goes in procession to the suburbs and shoots three times with a bow and arrow at two or three unripe coco-nuts placed at the foot of a tree during the Dasahra.⁸² Other tribes have their hunt in the spring, about March-April. This is the rule with the Gadabas,

⁷⁶ F. B. Bradley-Birt, *The Story of an Indian Upland* (1905), p. 271 sqq. ; E. T. Dalton, *Descriptive Ethnology of Bengal* (1872), p. 216 sq. ; *Census Report, Bengal*, 1911, vol. i. p. 475 sq. For the similar custom among the Hos, see F. B. Bradley-Birt, *Chota Nagpore* (1903), p. 107 sqq. For other examples of telepathy in these annual hunts, see Sir J. Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, 3rd ed. part i. vol. i. p. 122 sqq.

⁷⁷ E. Thurston, *op. cit.* vol. iv. p. 65. ⁷⁸ *Ibid.* vol. iv. pp. 417, 429.

⁷⁹ *North Indian Notes and Queries*, vol. iii. (1893), p. 98.

⁸⁰ G. A. Grierson, *Bihar Peasant Life* (1885), p. 400 sq.

⁸¹ *Punjab Notes and Queries*, iv. (1857), p. 167.

⁸² S. Mateer, *The Land of Charity* (1871), pp. 167, 188.

Urālis and Valayans, the Bedars or Boyas of Madras and some Chutiya Nāgpur tribes. The rule with the Gadabas is that the women abuse and pelt the men if they return unsuccessful.⁸³

The rite, though some of its details still remain obscure, seems to be connected with the more critical periods of agriculture, and is a part of the observances which include purification and expulsion of demons.

Such observances account for the worship of the implements and animals used in warlike operations which occurs at the Dasahra. The Rāja of Sakti in the Central Provinces worships the wooden sword, a primitive weapon used before the age of metals by the two brothers who are said to have founded the State.⁸⁴ The Marāthas worship their swords at this feast, and it used to be the rule that warriors should ride stallions and landowners mares. Hence warriors worshipped their stallions on the first day of the feast, and cultivators their mares on the ninth day. Raghuji Bhonsla, the first Rāja of Nāgpur, held his Dasahra on the ninth day, to proclaim the fact that he was really a farmer and only incidentally a man of war.⁸⁵ Instances of the worship at this festival of tent-ropes, the club of the watchman, the bridle of the horse, daggers, spears, arrows, boats, and the account-books of the tradesman are common.⁸⁶

An obvious parallel to these forms of worship is the Roman Quinquatrus or Quinquatria, celebrated on 19th March, when there was a lustration of the *ancilia* or sacred shields, which were brought out to be ready for the cam-

⁸³ J. F. Hewitt, *op. cit.* p. 53, note; E. Thurston, *op. cit.* i. 191, ii. 249 sq., vii. 246, 278.

⁸⁴ E. A. de Brett, *Chhatisgarh Feudatory States Gazetteer* (1909), vol. i. p. 194.

⁸⁵ *Ethnographic Survey, Central Provinces*, part ix. (1911), p. 131.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.* part ix. (1911), p. 149 sq.; part iii. (1907), p. 6; *Census Report, Central Provinces, 1911*, vol. i. p. 83; R. V. Russell, *Damoh Gazetteer* (1906), vol. i. p. 47; K. D. Erskine, *Western Rājputāna States and Bikaner Agency Gazetteer*, vol. iii. A. (1909), p. 85; *Panjab Census Report, 1911*, vol. i. p. 448.

paingning season.⁸⁷ Probably the same object was attained by the Hebrews, when they anointed their shields with oil as a mode of consecration.⁸⁸

The cult of fertility, the desire to expel evil spirits, the vague quest for good luck, all, in different ways, account for the worship of trees at the Dasahra. The sacred trees are the *sami* (*prosopis spicigera*) and the *āpta* (*bauhinia racemosa*) which the Rāja and his attendants visit, break off a few leaves or branches, and distribute them to their friends, saying that they are gold. In Bombay they do this with the invocation: "O great supreme forest king! The greeting of friends and relations is sweet as sweet food. May our enemies be worsted!"⁸⁹ There is nothing particularly grand or beautiful about these trees, and the reasons why they were selected as bringers of luck are obscure. General Sleeman observes that the *sami* tree is held sacred because when Rāma set out with his army to recover his wife he is said to have worshipped a tree of this kind which stood near his capital, Ayodhya,—another attempt, like the Rāmlīla celebrations, to associate the Dasahra tree-cult with the worship of one of the great Hindu gods. "It is a wretched little thing," he adds, "between a shrub and a tree; but I have seen a procession of more than seventy thousand persons attend their prince in the worship of it on the festival of the Dasahra."⁹⁰ It may, however, be noted that the Bharvāds of Gujarāt use the same tree to make their marriage-post, and believe it to be the home of the Māmo, or ghost of a maternal uncle, who is greatly feared.⁹¹ The practice of demon-scaring may, therefore, be at the root of the cult. The same tree in the Panjab is called the *jandi*,

⁸⁷ W. W. Fowler, *Roman Festivals of the Period of the Republic* (1899), p. 58; W. Smith, *Dictionary of Antiquities*,⁸ vol. ii. p. 535 sq.

⁸⁸ *Encyclopaedia Biblica*, vol. iii. (1902), p. 3469.

⁸⁹ *Bombay City and Island Gazetteer* (1909), vol. i. p. 172 sq.

⁹⁰ *Op. cit.* vol. i. p. 213, note 1.

⁹¹ *Bombay Gazetteer*, vol. ix. part i. (1901), p. 269 sq.

and the bridegroom, when he is going to fetch his bride, cuts down a branch of it, it is believed as an emblem of the destruction of his enemies. More probably the intention is, to scare the evil spirits which are supposed to make their home in this tree and may interfere with the wedding-rite.⁹² It is also to be noted that, as among the Celts, the lives of Rājas and Chiefs are connected with a sacred tree, possibly as representations of the spirit of vegetation embodied in it, and under its shadow they were inaugurated.⁹³

There are also indications that it was the custom to celebrate the Dasahra under booths erected in the forest. At the festival at Sakti in the Central Provinces the Rāja goes outside the town to a place where the potters have a goat tethered to a tree in the midst of a temporary booth made of twigs of the *sonpān* tree. His retainers attempt to behead the goat, while the potters retaliate by throwing clods at them. The winner of the head gets a reward from the Rāja, and the potters receive the trunk of the victim.⁹⁴ This use of sacred booths is common at harvest observances, like the Jewish Feast of Tabernacles, and at Greek sanctuaries.⁹⁵

The cult of birds at the festival is another example of a form of sympathetic magic. The birds usually worshipped are the jay, the peacock, and the kingfisher, all adorned with beautiful plumage. The Mahrattas at the Dasahra

⁹² *Panjab Census Report*, 1911, vol. i. p. 274; H. A. Rose, *Glossary of Tribes and Castes of the Punjab and North-West Frontier Provinces*, vol. ii. (1911), p. 371. The custom of shooting arrows at the tree may possibly be a mark of respect. The Ostyaks are said never to have passed a sacred tree without shooting an arrow at it as a mark of respect. Sir J. G. Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, 3rd ed. part I. vol. ii. p. 11.

⁹³ J. A. MacCulloch, *The Religion of the Ancient Celts* (1911), p. 201.

⁹⁴ E. A. de Brett, *op. cit.* p. 194.

⁹⁵ *Encyclopaedia Biblica*, vol. iv. (1903), p. 4875 sqq.; Sir J. G. Frazer, *Pausanias* (1898), vol. ii. p. 165 sq. 204.

go out into the fields in the hope of seeing a blue jay.⁹⁶ Many of the Bombay tribes pay similar worship to the jay and the kingfisher, and at Nāgpur the Rāja used to release a jay amidst the discharge of artillery and musketry.⁹⁷

A curious example of the magical ideas underlying these celebrations is found in Nepāl, where it was the custom to close the Courts of Justice and to remove from the city of Kathmāndu to a neighbouring village all the under-trial prisoners and convicts imprisoned in the jail, and to keep them there till the festival was over, when they were brought back and the Courts reopened.⁹⁸ Similarly, at the Greek festival of the Thesmophoria, the Law Courts and the Boulē were closed and prisoners were released, obviously with the intention that the spiritual activities current at these festivals should not be trammelled by knots or other forms of bonds.⁹⁹

The custom of the Jogi taking the place of the Rāja at Mewār and Bastur is remarkable. The Mahārāna of Udaipur is, as we have seen, both priest and king. But even he appears to be unable to discharge the duties of royalty and the ceremonies connected with the feast at the same time, or, possibly, his conduct of the rites makes him too holy to undertake secular duties. The Jogi seems to be the descendant of the tribal medicine-man or exorcist, and perhaps, when at this period spirits likely to make themselves unpleasant are abroad, it is preferable that a holy man, immune from their attacks, should impersonate the Rāna. But even he is subject to rigid taboos. Church and State are always closely linked together in India. The

⁹⁶ *Ethnographic Survey, Central Provinces*, part ix. (1911), p. 131; R. V. Russell, *Wardha Gazetteer* (1906), vol. i. p. 47.

⁹⁷ E. Thurston, *op. cit.* vol. vi. p. 262 sq.

⁹⁸ H. A. Oldfield, *op. cit.* vol. ii. 343.

⁹⁹ J. E. Harrison, *op. cit.* p. 127; Sir J. G. Frazer, *The Golden Bough*,^{*} part ii. (1911), p. 293 sqq. 316.

leading case is that of the Mahrattas, where the Brāhman Peshwa finally overshadowed the weak descendant of Sivajī, the founder of the State.

The instances which I have given, selected from a large mass of materials, sufficiently indicate the ritual of the Dasahra. The primitive rites have been so worked over by priests and courtiers that it is not easy to identify them. The Durga Pūja has become a celebration of the defeat by the goddess of the buffalo demon Mahishāsura, who gives his name to the State and city of Mysore. The *sami* tree is said to be worshipped on this day because when the Pāndava princes, whose exploits are recorded in the *Mahābhārata*, in their banishment came to the city of Rāja Virāta, they laid aside their weapons and hung them on this tree at the Dasahra. Finding a corpse close by they suspended it from the branches, saying, "This is the dead body of our mother, and it must remain there for a whole year, after which we will take it down and burn it." So, of course, no one dared to touch their weapons, which they found safe on their return.¹⁰⁰ Here, again, the tree seems to have been regarded as a haunt of spirits. The jay is said to be sacred because Siva, like the bird, has a blue throat, produced when he drank the deadly poison which would have destroyed the world.¹⁰¹ The peacock, we are told, is worshipped because on it rides Kārttikeya, god of war. Such is the mythological rubbish which we must sift before we can secure the true grain, the original elements of Hinduism.

The Dasahra, then, seems to be an autumn festival representing the time both of harvest and seed-time. It is a *rite de passage*, the time for beginning war, business, education, or any other undertaking, because, with the cessation of the rainy season, the roads become open and all work can start afresh. These objects can be attained

¹⁰⁰ J. T. Wheeler, *History of India*, vol. i. (1867), p. 206.

¹⁰¹ J. Dowson, *Classical Dictionary* (1879), p. 299.

only by a series of magical or semi-magical observances—animistic, or, if you will, pre-animistic, in their primitive form unconnected with the worship of these later gods in whose cultus they have now been included by the perverse ingenuity of the priestly body. Their primary object is the dispersal of those malevolent spirit influences which are most dangerous at periods of crisis in agriculture, the main occupation of the Hindus. This purgation of evil spirits and the quest of good luck naturally promote the fertility of man, beast, and crops. Much of the interpretation thus suggested is still obscure. I cannot claim to have winnowed the wheat from the chaff, but I am quite certain that it is only by a process of analysis conducted in this way that we can reach the bedrock of Hindu beliefs.

W. CROOKE.
