

## TONGA RELIGIOUS BELIEFS AND CUSTOMS

*(Continued from p. 190.)*

IN carrying the corpse out to burial the *asukuru* alone entered the hut. The body was wrapped now in a mat and the whole firmly tied to a pole with which to carry it between two. In taking the body out of the hut, exit was not made by the door, for by that the living only passed out, and they must not slight the dead by treating him as though he were still alive. So they broke down the back wall of the hut opposite the door and through the hole so made passed out with the body. The children of the village had meanwhile been told to hide out of the way, although the children of the deceased were brought up to the bier and passed over the body, being lifted over by the *asukuru*. Before they bore the corpse away, they also swung it to and fro outside the hut, where it had passed out, chanting the while, "We are leaving to-day: we follow our fellows." In front of the procession walked a man blowing a reed whistle, while friends and other mourners followed the bier carrying weapons, utensils, trinkets, and offerings to be buried in the grave or as sacrifices to be laid on the top. Last of all the cortège went a woman with a hoe and a basket, into which she dropped various roots of trees and bushes growing beside the path which the funeral had followed, and which she had dug up with the hoe. These were hurriedly prepared by her as a charm with which to purify the party on their return from the graves to the village.

On arrival at the graveyard, the people began to shout and to clap their hands to warn the spirits that were supposed to be about. The body was laid down and the funeral party squatted on the ground till the nearest relative chose the

site of the grave by cutting a few sods with a hoe. The *asukuru* then undertook the digging of the grave into which when completed they lowered the body. The *chimbwi* next descended into the grave and untied the fastenings round the dead, exposing the face, for a few minutes; whatever had been brought to be buried along with the dead was arranged about the corpse according to custom, and finally arranging the grave-clothes and re-covering the face, the *chimbwi* climbed out again. The nearest relatives thereafter, one on each side of the grave, kneeling down and doing homage to the dead, pushed the first earth into the open grave, using their elbows to do so. After a little, the whole company assisted in filling up the grave. After all had been filled in, the pole on which the corpse had been carried was broken across, part being driven into the ground at the head and part at the feet, the body of course being *always* interred with the feet to the east. On top of the grave other articles belonging to the dead were disposed, all having first been broken, and last of all sacrifices of flour, beer, &c., were laid or poured out at the *head* of the grave. Prayers to the dead, conducted by the *chimbwi*, with responses from the other mourners, completed the obsequies at the grave, all the company having paid respect to the dead by falling from a sitting position on to their backs, clapping their hands the while.

The dead were not all buried in a grave dug in the ground. Certain clans, such as the Kapunda, nearly always buried so. If the person were of high rank in his village, it was commonly the practice, however, to lay the body on the ground and drive into the soil all round it a low, strong fence of sapling wood, the top of this *chipanga*, as it was called, being composed of heavy logs. Other clans, such as the Manda, commonly buried their dead in trees, placing the corpses in their mats on convenient forked branches. These, after a short time, presented a very gruesome sight owing to decomposition and the attacks of wild animals. On other occasions, as commonly in the case of slaves, the bodies were simply thrown away in the woods, to be devoured by the first prowling hyena.

Chiefs were very frequently buried in their huts, and slaves were never buried in the same graveyard as freemen, except in such cases as are mentioned below.

When a chief died, it was thought necessary to send along with him to the spirit world one or more slaves. On these occasions, they were arrayed in the finest clothes to be had, just as their dead master had been, and they first were put into the grave *alive*. If only one was buried with the chief, this slave was laid in the grave so as to clasp the dead in his arms; if there were several to be offered, they were sometimes made to sit in the grave facing each other, their backs against one wall of the grave, their feet touching the other. The chief's corpse was then laid across their knees and between the two rows of living bodies. The grave was then filled in amid the wailing of the mourners and agonized cries of the condemned slaves. In addition to the ceremonies observed in other cases and described above, another slave was sometimes impaled beside the grave, a stake being driven through his skull and right through his body, and the lower end planted firmly in the ground. In the outstretched left hand was placed a bent bow, while the right hand held an arrow on the string, this ghastly figure being left to guard the grave against body-snatchers, human or other. The last of such practices in the district took place about ten miles away and only twelve years ago.

When a chief died, he was sometimes buried a whole day before his people were allowed to hear that he was dead. It was given out that he was still very ill, and the funeral rites with the accompanying sacrifice were gone through in the darkness of night, the interment being made inside the hut in which he died. Next day it was reported that he was dead, and in due course either a dummy corpse of straw or cassava, or a slave who had been killed in secret to take the place of his master, was carried out to the graves and buried with the customary rites. This secrecy was observed so as to outwit the *afwiti*, those ghouls who were supposed to prey on human flesh and by means of their magic to be able to "snatch" the body awaiting burial.

Some of the poor slaves had marvellous escapes from the

doom marked out for them. Some one in the "know" might give them an inkling of what their fate was to be when still there was time to flee. Others, grown suspicious, contrived journeys at the convenient time: one old man, recently dead from natural causes, managed to elude his would-be murderers several times. One very curious superstition which they had, led to the escape of a few from this awful end: they firmly believed that if a slave who had been lowered into the grave, sneezed naturally, the spirit of the departed thus signified its refusal of that victim, who was forthwith drawn out of the grave. When a native sneezes, he may sometimes still be seen to beat his breast and heard to call out "*Umoyo*"—life. In our Bandawe Church we have one woman, a baptized member, who was actually lowered into the grave of one of the late chiefs of this neighbourhood to be sent with his spirit, and who was drawn out again, as she most providentially sneezed before they began to throw in the earth.

In returning to the village after the funeral, the whole party goes to wash in running water, the men at some point up the stream and the women lower down. As contact with the dead renders the person unclean, none of them would be allowed to re-enter their village without this ceremonial cleansing. As they come nearer the village the *chimbwi* fetches fire—a torch of grass from the roof of the house where their friend died, lit at the fire still burning there, or, if some days had elapsed since the death, at the fire outside the hut which had previously been lit from the dead man's fire—and over this torch, held low down on the path, first the *chimbwi*, then his assistants, and after them the friends of the dead and the whole funeral party, leap and proceed to the house of the mourning. Each, as he or she passes on, is smeared on breast and back with the medicine gathered by the old woman who followed the party along the road to the graves and had returned in advance of them.

A little way in front of the door of the hut is burning the *moto wakwanguzga*, if a night has passed since the person died and the mourners have already lain one night on the leaves. If not, the *chimbwi* tells the people about that they

have properly buried the dead, sometimes keeping up the play on his name and saying that hyena-like they have eaten the body; then he pulls out a wisp of grass from the roof of the stricken house and, having brought a light from the fire within, he kindles the "forbidden fire," as it is called— forbidden, because no one may cook on that fire or take a light for his pipe or put it to any ordinary use. Fires for these purposes must be brought from the houses of the living.

In the evening, all the mourners gather to the house again, in front of which they are now to sleep on leaves while the mourning lasts. No one of them may use a mat to sleep on during that time, nor may they use salt in their food, or wash themselves. Night by night the *mweneko* or nearest relative of the deceased lies in front of the locked door, his feet outward, while on the right hand side of the hut lie the male mourners and on the left the women. Should any of them be found negligent of the restraints in food or anything else peculiar to the time of mourning, the *chimbwi* imposes a fine on the defaulter. If any of the mourners requires to go home or to leave the *mani*, wishing now to sleep in his own house, permission must first be sought and had from the *chimbwi* to do so.

Until they leave the "leaves" each mourner wears a badge of his sorrow round his head or chest or wrist. What of the cloth used for wrapping the dead had been left over, was torn up into strips and a piece given to and worn by each of the party. Sometimes strips of dried banana leaves were worn instead.

Drinking and dancing sometimes relieved the tedium of their mourning, one of the dances commonly engaged in being the *kawole*. If the friends were satisfied with the settlement that had been made by the husband over the death of his wife, supposing a woman to be the person mourned, they gave permission at the end of a longer or shorter time to bring these rites to a close. They might have lasted from a fortnight to two months or even more. There was then a big brewing of beer, and when this was ready for drinking, all who had joined in the mourning at the funeral were called

to finish it off, which they usually succeeded in doing in one day. Thereafter, each had his or her head shaved—the hair that their late friend had seen must not outlast the period of his obsequies—a fresh fire was made by the rubbing of two sticks together, and into the fire so kindled the shorn hair was cast. The *moto wakwanguga* was also put out, and thus the long season of public mourning was brought to a close. With certain modifications to suit the rank of the deceased the same sort of ceremonies was gone through after nearly every death in the village. Infants of but a few days old who died were buried by the women of the village alone, and these were not publicly mourned. Nor were the unhappy many who died through the poison ordeal.

#### THE SPIRITS.

Among the Tonga, man in his disembodied state was supposed to enjoy great peace and happiness, and to engage in pursuits to which he had been accustomed in the mortal state, such as hunting and, at times, revelling in the dance, all of which occupations were conceived as on a scale far grander than anything known on earth. The imagination of the people was very lively in regard to such matters, and the tread of a traveller's heels on the resonant forest ground or the falling branch of a decayed tree even had some story of the spirits connected with it. Thus they thought that the sounds of spirit-world revelry were sometimes to be heard by human ears, as when, passing near the graves, some one thought he caught the beat of a drum rhythmically struck in among the shadows, or other sounds of unearthly music with accompaniment of laughter.<sup>1</sup> Again as a passing company heard a stick snap in the wood, and, looking round, saw nothing to account for the sound, their superstition at once suggested that the spirits had been in alter-

<sup>1</sup> In the district of Ngun (in Udoe, German East Africa), there is a forest haunted, so the Wadoe say, by spirits. In this forest, there are sandy places, smooth and clean, as if swept in readiness for a dance, and passers-by have heard the sound of drums and shouting, "as if at a wedding."—See the *Safari sa Wamakehi*, published by Dr. Velten in 1901. M. Junod was told by the Baronga of people who had heard the spirits "drumming and singing" in the Bush.—ED.

cation as to who were passing and had made the noise that the travellers might look round, when the sight of the faces would at once settle the question of identity.

While the manes of the dead were thus believed to find their common abode in the graveyard, they were not supposed to be confined to these, but were thought of as free to roam at will over the country and frequent the village or house in which as living men they dwelt. Occasionally their hee-heeing and muttering were to be heard near the village, and in dreams they constantly held intercourse with the living. Perhaps the individual who claimed to have heard them speaking near by the village was disbelieved by his friends, but if next day it was found that anything untoward had happened overnight, somebody taken seriously ill or perhaps dead, the coincidence was accepted as convincing proof of the truth of the story. When a sleeper spoke or laughed in his sleep, he was supposed to be in converse with a visitant from the other world. A mother would anxiously watch the face of her sleeping child, and if she supposed a spirit was talking with it, she would at once awaken it, as there was always something uncanny in this other-world intercourse and something from which children, at least, should be saved. As previously noticed, the spirits were believed to have considerable influence over their friend's welfare or ill, and survivors in consequence endeavoured to keep on good terms with them. But this leads to the question of spirit-worship, which we shall have to consider in a later paper.

Intercourse between the living and the dead was believed possible to a very considerable extent, as far indeed as to "possession" in certain individuals by the spirit of some dead friend or acquaintance. The *mchimi*, or soothsayer, was believed to receive his message from the spirits, and his word was seldom called in question, claiming, as it did, such supernatural origin. The spirit might choose a dream in which to make his communication, or it might come on the *mchimi* during his waking hours. The deliverance of the message was usually preceded by sickness real or feigned, or by the prophet's falling into a trance.

These physical disturbances were sure indications to the villagers that some prediction would shortly be forthcoming; and when the soothsayer began his hee-heeing and inarticulate mumbling several would be ready to support him in their arms while he delivered his message. In making his statement the *mchimi* (from *kuchima*, to mutter) always named the spirit whose communication he had to give, either by saying that So-and-so had talked with him in his dream, or by identifying himself with the spirit for the time being and saying, "I, So-and-so (naming the spirit), have to tell you, &c." As I said, the genuineness of the utterance as a prophecy was never called in question; if it promised them good-fortune they took care to be ready for it, or if it foreshadowed coming evil in the event of certain intentions being carried out, they took heed and gave up their plans. The influence acquired by these *amchimi*, men or women (there were probably more of the latter than the former), was very great, and was not impaired by an occasional mishap when the issue expected did not happen. The *mchimi* or his friends were usually ready with some explanation of the miscarriage. If the soothsayer was also a *waula* or diviner, his or her power was correspondingly greater on that account.

The prophecies of the soothsayer were not always the utterances of the same spirit, though often the *mchimi* had some one "familiar" spirit who frequently communicated with him. The rôle of soothsayer was not supposed to be assumed by any who were not under special spiritual influence, and he was not asked to foretell the future: the utterances were voluntarily made under the spell of some *chiwanda*. He received no payment for his prophecies and in this respect differed greatly from the *waula*, (diviner), who sometimes exacted heavy fees. "Divination" played so important a part in native life and is a subject so interesting in itself, that it deserves separate study.

Possession by a spirit did not always lead to prophetic utterance. There was a very interesting kind of supposed possession, under the influence of which an individual might be drawn to the *makunthu* (burial enclosure) of the dead. The people thought that the dead had called him, and he



was shown every mark of respect in consequence, being addressed by the name of the dead and admitted by the survivors to the relationship which the dead bore to them. An old man, the father of one of our teachers, used to call a certain woman in his village "mother," as he believed that his mother's spirit possessed her. So firmly did they believe that such people had been drawn to them by the *azimu*, that if a relative of the "possessed" demanded that he should be returned to his own village, the others would refuse to give him up. If they insisted on having him, they had to buy him back, if poor by means of cloth, but in most cases by substituting for him a slave, who in turn would be held as a sort of "sacred" person, "devoted" to the *chiwanda*.

There is a still more interesting side to this old superstition, which shows these *makunthu* as a sort of city of refuge. If anyone plagued or pursued by another, it might be even because of some offence really committed by him, fled to the *makunthu* and sat down there, or tearing aside the cloth or grass that encircled the place, entered within the enclosure, it was believed that the spirit had called him to his protection, and no one was then allowed to touch him. In the shrine he found a true asylum. Anyone so drawn by the spirits was called *wavituta*, i.e., belonging to the spirits.

In returning to the land of the living, spirits were supposed most commonly to take other than human forms. They might visit their former haunts either in the form of snakes, lions, leopards, crocodiles, or other animals, and by such transmigrations either express their wishes regarding the living or work on them their revenge. If some few days after the burial of a man or woman, a snake was seen to haunt the *makunthu*, the relatives made no doubt about its being their deceased relative risen under this form. On no account would it be interfered with; they rather left it to come and go as it chose, even if it entered their houses. Various snakes might be so regarded but the one most generally believed to be a spirit-form was the *mlinga*, a short, stubby, blackish, non-poisonous snake. If it appeared about the village or entered a house, it was left to wander

at will in and out in its characteristically slow way, and probably some offering was presented to the spirit it represented. If it crossed the path of anyone on a journey, the traveller would return home on the instant, considering that some spirit whom he must obey, was opposed to his proceeding further then. If any of these creatures, tenanted for the time being by a spirit, was killed accidentally or on purpose, there followed both wailing and strife. The offence was serious, and was only to be atoned for by liberal payment to the friends of the dead, whose way back to the world of living men was supposed to have been thus cut off. Some years ago a python took to frequenting a village near Bandawe, and committed extensive depredations among the villagers' fowls. Very wisely some of them killed the python and, following native custom in the matter, took the dead reptile to the head chief of the district who lived in a neighbouring village, *kutura*, i.e., to render up to one what as superior he can claim. Hearing of what was taking place, a woman in the chief's village began to *chima*, and to say that the late Sawira wanted to know what sort of treatment this was he was being served with, when desirous of knowing who these strangers were that had settled on his land, he had gone there in the form of this python: had he not a right to fowls in villages on his own ground? No one dared to call the *mchimi* in question, and the matter was settled up only by the payment of a heavy fine by the offending village. I remember very well myself incurring the displeasure of a young woman for a somewhat similar reason. I was camped over the Sabbath in a little lakeshore village to the north of Ruarwe, and when in the afternoon I was about to commence service, a little snake crawled out from a heap of firewood near by. I seized a stick and promptly killed the snake, when looking very reproachfully at me, the woman said, "*Wabaya chiwanda*" (You have killed a spirit), meaning, I believe, not that I had killed the spirit itself, but cut off its chance of visiting former haunts by killing the form it made use of.

A medicine, called *mphiyu*, was believed to possess the power of enabling any who ate it to turn themselves, living

or dead, into whatever animal they chose—lion, leopard, crocodile, hippopotamus, &c., each animal form having a *mphiyu* peculiar to itself. The living man might inform his friends that he had medicine to change him into a crocodile, and if after his death a crocodile made its appearance in a pool where crocodiles had not often been seen before, it was of course believed to be their friend come back. If these animals took to killing people, a representation would very probably be made to the relatives of the dead to go and attend to their spirit, and have it appeased. That a man-eating lion or other beast of prey was a real *msuka*, (one risen from the dead under another form) people could easily tell, when the corpses were left uneaten: a real lion, it was thought, would be sure to devour its victim. If this killing went on after complaint had been made to the supposed relatives of the *msuka*, the issue would probably be a *mlandu* with these on account of their alleged carelessness of the rites due to their dead. People who were known to have eaten *mphiyu* very curiously were not mourned for in the ordinary way with loud wailing and outcry. They were silently wept for by their relatives, the only sound of mourning that might be heard being the mimic pounding in the empty grain-mortar into which pieces of rubber were thrown from time to time to still further deaden the sound. When after a time they heard lions or leopards roaring in the bush, the villagers said, "There's Karakatu (*i.e.*, one risen), he's mourning for himself."

Lepers, who were supposed to be smitten with their disease as a punishment for some forbidden act during burial ceremonies in which they had taken part, were believed to assume after death the forms of hippopotami, the spoor of that monster suggesting deformed and maimed limbs.

All this will indicate that in native belief the spirit-world was nearly coextensive with the world of living men and things, although the common habitat of disembodied spirits was believed to be the graveyard. The graveyard we should perhaps say rather than the graves, for they showed a reluctance to speak of graves as the resting place of man. They employed many euphemistic phrases in speaking of death

and the other world, phrases which perhaps indicate both their fears and their hopes. "Chiuta wamto" (God has taken him) they said; or again, "Wakuya ku muzi ukuru" (he has gone to the great city), which is the Tonga way of saying, "he has joined the majority."

After death the rank and estate of the *azimu* seem to have remained what they were in the earthly life. Chiefs continued to be chiefs in the other world, and slaves, although attaining to a spiritual existence like freemen, still remained the servants of their masters. Matrimonial relationship continued after death to exist in name. They had no idea of rewards and punishments after death, and character seems to have remained the same.

Whether the spirits continued to live on forever or not, they did not concern themselves. It did not matter to them whether the spirits of the ancient dead still existed or not, for not knowing them and not being known by them, they did not give them reverence nor seek from them any favour. Those whom they personally knew were the most likely to be of service to them, and these they were frequently propitiating by prayer and sacrifice. Worship was essentially utilitarian.

Occasionally the *chiwanda* might be spoken of as turned into a *chuu*, or heap, but there probably was nothing more in the phrase than that the old grave was become a heap. The same thought perhaps suggested one of their pathetic proverbs. A father might be warning his child as to his behaviour, and to make his advice the more impressive might quote "*mkucha nkhasunguliyanga chuu*," (another day I will be wandering round a heap) meaning, of course, that he would be beyond and out of sight. If the child made light of it, saying, "If you go round the one side, I'll go round the other, and so we'll meet at the back," the mother probably would join in with "Ah, my child, it is not so easy to meet after death."

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