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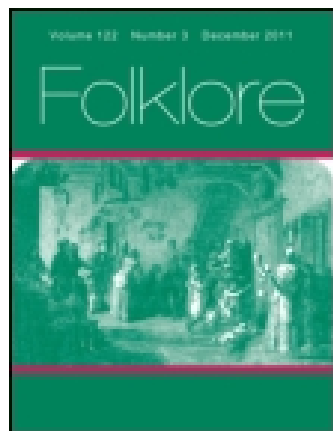
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## THE SCAPE-GOAT IN EUROPEAN FOLKLORE.

BY N. W. THOMAS., M.A.

(*Read at Meeting, 25th April, 1906.*)

TO those who are familiar with the customs of savage and semi-civilised nations, the idea of evil in its various forms as something concrete which can be transferred to a living being, or an inanimate object, is by no means surprising. It is in fact one of the most fertile of primitive ideas, and lies at the root of many customs which survive, in a more or less disguised form, up to the present day among civilised nations. In its more specialised form of the Scapegoat the idea is equally familiar to the average educated man, thanks to the fact that the ritual of the Jews, handed down in the Old Testament, has enshrined this memento of a rude past, and borne witness to the vitality of the underlying principle.

Dr. Frazer has shown in the *Golden Bough* that there is in Europe a widely-spread custom of burying or casting out, in effigy or otherwise, a personage known as Death, the Carnival, Lent, Winter, or some similar name, and these ceremonies take place in spring for the most part. Among the Slavs the rites are obviously connected with the cult of spirits of vegetation, or are magical practices intended to promote the revival of plant life or to stay its decline; it is therefore a reasonable hypothesis that the customs among non-Slavonic peoples are of similar origin. In support of

this view Dr. Frazer points to the fact that in many cases the effigy of Death is destroyed or buried and its place in the returning procession taken by a tree or branches dressed in gay attire, while elsewhere a primitive dramatic contest, typical of the revival of vegetation, takes place between Summer and Winter. He goes on to show that there are features in these ceremonies which cannot be explained on the hypothesis that we have to do with nothing but ceremonies connected with the death and revival of vegetation. "The solemn funeral, the lamentations, and the mourning attire, which often characterise these ceremonies," says he, "are indeed appropriate at the death of the beneficent spirit of vegetation. But what shall we say of the glee with which the effigy is often carried out, of the sticks and stones with which it is assailed, and the taunts and curses which are hurled at it?" These latter features Dr. Frazer interprets on the theory that the Death was "not merely the dying god of vegetation, but also a public scapegoat, upon whom were laid all the evils that had afflicted the people during the past year." He sees in these rites a combination of two customs which were at one time distinct and independent—the killing of the human or animal god in order to save his divine life from being weakened by the inroads of age on the one hand, and on the other hand the annual expulsion of evils.

The popular idea of the Scapegoat is that it is a living being driven from the habitations of man and bearing with it the sins of the community. But although this description holds true of some cases, it does not apply, as Dr. Frazer points out in a footnote to his Scapegoat chapter in the *Golden Bough*, to the scapegoat of the Jews, which seems to have been thrown over a crag near Jerusalem instead of being set free and driven into the wilderness, as the popular version of the

ceremony has it.<sup>1</sup> However this may be, it is abundantly clear that a scapegoat must, for purposes of folklore, be defined as a living being to whom are transferred evils of any sort in order to get rid of them; it is in no way essential that the animal or man should be set at liberty. As a matter of nomenclature it may be convenient to restrict the use of the term "scapegoat" to such cathartic ceremonies as are characterised by the setting free of a living creature; but then we must recognise that these ceremonies form only a part of a much larger whole and can only be interpreted with reference to that whole. This is particularly essential in dealing with the subject from the point of view of European folklore; for the original intention of many of the customs with which I deal has been obscured, and would not be discoverable, were I to restrict my researches to the scapegoat proper. It is clear that cathartic ceremonies, as I have defined them, include not only rites intended for the purification of whole communities, but also the magical rites for the benefit of individuals to which we more commonly apply the term "transference of evils"; and it is perhaps an open question how far the term "scapegoat" should be used of such individual cases. But no logical distinction can be drawn between individual and collective cases; if therefore in what follows I restrict myself in the main to collective rites, it is in the interests of brevity and not because I discern any line of demarcation between the two classes.

If we cannot with accuracy assert that fear is the origin of religion, it is at any rate true that this motive lies at the root of a large number of ceremonies practised in nearly all stages of culture. If we look at the Australian natives, who are certainly as primitive, so far as we can see, as any people now on the face of the globe, we find

<sup>1</sup>Two animals were provided, of which one was sacrificed: cf. the purification for leprosy, Lev. xiv. 48.

that their fears are aroused mainly by two classes of objects—spirits and magicians. A slight acquaintance with the beliefs of the Australian blacks shows that he divides spirits into two classes—non-human and human. When he ventures beyond the circle of light thrown by the camp fire, the Australian is careful to carry with him a fire-stick, as a means of keeping at a distance all the host of spirits with which he peoples the bush. The spirit of the dead man inspires him with equal terror, though we may see traces of another attitude towards the dead in the custom of keeping a fire lighted on or near the grave, no less than in the custom, formerly practised in New South Wales, of actually sleeping upon the grave. Perhaps these variations point to a distinction between the corpse and the ghost of the dead man, perhaps they are due merely to the fact that one set is practised by the relatives of the dead, who are to some extent exempt from his hostility, while the stranger's fear of a ghost is measured by the avoidance of the grave practised by the general public. However that may be, the important point is that fear of the dead is very widespread in Australia; and the only custom analogous to the expulsion of evils in other parts of the world has, in Australia, exclusive reference to the ghosts of the dead.

The Rev. W. Ridley has recorded from the Barwon a ceremony of expulsion of ghosts which consisted in a mimic battle between a party of warriors as representatives of the living and their invisible foes, and the victory of the human actors in this scene was regarded as equivalent to the expulsion of the ghosts of the dead.<sup>1</sup>

If Ridley has correctly reported the object of this custom, it is a somewhat curious thing that the Australians, who dwell in the midst of malevolent spirits, as they believe, and dare hardly stir from the camp fire

<sup>1</sup>Lang, *Queensland*, p. 441.

at night without a fire stick, do not seem to have hit upon the device, common in other parts of the world, of an annual expulsion of evil spirits and evils in general. On the other hand, if the Australian type is the primitive one, we have no European examples exactly on all fours with it; but when once the idea of expelling other evils or evil spirits had been adopted, the expulsion of ghosts might easily fall into the background.

I may here point out in passing that though the animistic idea is prominent in many ceremonies having for their object the expulsion of evils, we are hardly justified in regarding them as necessarily animistic. If I may for a moment turn aside from my path to illustrate this, I will quote the Celebes belief as to the cause of lycanthropy. The view seems to be that some kind of poison, a toxin as it were, infects the soul of the human being; but this toxin is hardly conceived animistically; it is a power, not a spirit, of evil.

Dr. Frazer has given many examples from all parts of the world both of immediate expulsions of evils and of the expulsions by means of scapegoats, with which I am more immediately concerned; I need not therefore go over familiar ground; but I will call attention to the fact that two of the chief seasons mentioned in his collection of facts as chosen by the European peasantry for the expulsion of evils, witches, or whatever they happen to call the ills of which they seek to rid themselves, are the winter solstice and May day, which in many cases is to be regarded as the original season for the celebration of many Easter customs. Another Christmas custom, to which Dr. Frazer does not allude, but which obviously bears the same interpretation, was the so-called "Klopfleinsnacht" of South Germany, when young people went round with whips and sticks, exactly as did the Cherokee Indians at their annual festival of purification.<sup>1</sup> Perhaps

<sup>1</sup> Panzer, *Beitrag*, ii. 118.

some of our own Christmas customs are a survival of similar ceremonies.<sup>1</sup>

Besides this direct expulsion of invisible evils, there are, as Dr. Frazer has shown in great detail, various forms of indirect expulsion. The invisible evils may be conceived as loaded on the back of an animal or human being; in this form, from the best known example, the custom is known as the Scapegoat; or where the evil principle is regarded as spiritual and personal, it may be compelled to enter into the body of an animal or bird, and is thus removed from the midst of the community.

Corresponding to these ceremonies we have the expulsion of evils in visible form. Dr. Frazer quotes the Esthonian custom of driving out the devil; if it is rumoured that he has been seen about a village, the whole population turns out to give chase; the object of the hunt is usually a wolf or a cat. Of considerable interest from the point of view of my paper is another European custom cited by Dr. Frazer. In Westphalia there is a form of the expulsion of evils known as the driving out of the Sommervogel or Suentevogel, *i.e.* the butterfly. On the 22nd of February the children go from house to house knocking on them with hammers and singing doggerel rhymes in which they bid the Sommervogel depart. An alternative form of the practice is for the inmates of the house to drive the Sommervogel out.<sup>2</sup>

A similar custom prevails in Barcelona at Easter. The children, armed with wooden mallets, amuse themselves with beating the pavements and the walls of the houses. The blows are supposed to kill any Jews who may be hiding in the houses.<sup>3</sup>

Closely connected with the former case, in which the

<sup>1</sup> *Rev. Hist. Rel.* xxxviii. 335; Burne, *Shropshire Folklore*, pp. 410, 484-8: cf. *Guisers' Play and Songs from Staffordshire*, same author, in *F.L. Journal*, vol. iv. (1885).

<sup>2</sup> *G.B.* iii. 92 n.

<sup>3</sup> *N. and Q.* 9th series, v. 315.



expelled animal is the evil thing itself, is the practice of expelling animals connected in popular belief with magicians. In West Africa the owl is the messenger of the wizard, and when one is caught it is the custom to break its claws and otherwise maltreat it, under the belief that its human counterpart is suffering in like manner<sup>1</sup> The expulsion of ghosts may take this form also, for it is a widespread belief that the human soul after death assumes animal form or that it enters into an animal, either for a time or permanently. In the South of Australia it was the custom to drive away a certain bird with black plumage, known as *mooldtharp*, on the alleged ground that it was an evil spirit; in reality it was believed that the souls of the dead assumed that form.<sup>2</sup>

This primitive example of immediate expulsion of evils in concrete form might suggest that the custom of the scapegoat proper is not primitive, and that the mediate expulsion of evils in this manner is of secondary character, being rather of the nature of an aetiological myth, invented to explain a custom no longer understood. But against this must be set the fact that the scapegoat is only one form of the mediate expulsion of evils, for we also find disease boats; further, the scapegoat itself is sometimes regarded as divine, or is at any rate respected, which, on the supposition that it was originally regarded as a power of evil and not as a vehicle on which was laden the evil, would hardly be probable.

At this point it may be well to indicate the areas in which the cathartic ceremonies are found. It is not easy to state with precision the distribution of the cathartic sacrifice; for in too many cases we are left in the dark as to the meaning of the ceremony described by an author. On the other hand, it is fairly simple to show where ceremonies of expulsion of evils are found in connection with the expulsion of an animal or human

<sup>1</sup> *Les. Missions cath.* 1884, 249.

<sup>2</sup> *Angas, Savage Life*, I. 96.

being from the community or from human society, temporarily or permanently. If therefore the present list errs, it errs on the side of including too few and not too many peoples.

In the Old World scapegoats seem to have been known, not only among the Semites, but also in Greece and Rome. Dr. Frazer quotes many examples of them from East and South Asia; and they were not unknown in mediaeval Europe. In Africa, on the other hand, they seem to be rare, on the west coast, unless indeed, we include customs of setting free animals or birds, which however may in many, if not all cases, with equal or greater probability be connected with totemism.

Turning to the New World, we have the well-known case of the sacrifice of the white dog among the Iroquois in connection with an annual expulsion of evils; it is true this sacrifice is said to be of late origin; but on this point further evidence seems to be necessary. In South America, we have a very interesting case of the scapegoat among the Piaroas of the Orinoco and perhaps the custom was more widely found; but our information about the southern half of the New World is extraordinarily sparse; and I do not presume to say whether similar customs are likely to be widely found or not.

Before I turn to the European facts with which I am specially concerned it will be well to take from another area an illustrative case, for in Europe the ceremonies are either ambiguous in their interpretation or subsist only in a truncated form. As my example I choose a South American ceremony, not only because it has been described with some fulness, but also because it presents features closely allied to some of the European customs to which I shall call your attention.

It is a well known European and African belief that a new house is tenanted by an evil spirit; in some parts a cat or other animal is thrown into the new

house and is supposed to fall a victim to the evil spirit. The Piaroas, according to Marcoy, have the same belief and the same custom in what is probably a more primitive form. They, too, conceive that a new hut is occupied by an evil spirit, which must be dislodged before they can take possession of their new abode. They proceed to capture some bird, by preference a toucan, and wrap it up in leaves; they then place it across the threshold; this is supposed to have the effect of preventing the spirit from making its escape. This done, the men of the family set to work to dance, gesticulate, and menace the evil spirit according to the familiar methods of savage rites of exorcism. At last the evil spirit attempts to leave the hut, but it cannot pass over the body of the toucan, and is compelled to enter it. The bird, terrified as well it may be, by the noise and confusion, struggles within the covering of leaves; an old woman keeps her eye upon it and at the proper moment sets it free and herself escapes at full speed into the forest. The bird makes use of its recovered liberty and carries away the evil spirit.<sup>1</sup>

This description is confirmed by a later traveller, Chaf-fanjon, who adds some details of considerable interest. I abridge his description of the ceremony. The evil spirit has to be driven out of a newly finished hut, which from the description is evidently of the communal type found elsewhere in South America. The community which is to inhabit it goes out in quest of a bird, by preference a toucan, which is put near the door in a basket. Then the oldest man plucks from its tail and wings three feathers, which he fastens to the top of a stick taken from a tree termed by our author "l'Arbre aux Demons." Holding this in his left hand he enters the hut and lights as many fires as there are families to inhabit it. Then he plants his stick and the fire-brand

<sup>1</sup> *Tour du Monde*, 1888, 348.

in the middle of the hut and rejoins the remainder of the community. Each man then removes from the toucan as many feathers as there are women and children in his family and fastens them to the top of a stick with resin; this he plants in the earth near the fire assigned to him, the order of the fires being determined by the seniority of the men. Then, decked out with all his ornaments, necklaces, armlets, etc., each man makes for a fire tended by the oldest woman, who serves out a liquid called *bruquilla*. They enter the hut and each takes possession of his own fire; while this is going on the women and children retire to the forest, the only exception being the old woman who takes charge of the toucan, wraps it in leaves (banana) and places it across the threshold to stop the passage for the escaping evil spirit. Meanwhile the men dance, swing their sticks, and shout, till the evil spirit attempts to escape; but on the threshold the toucan stops it and compels it to enter its body; if it does this it must remain there as long as the toucan lives. The old woman already mentioned keeps her eye on the toucan, and when it shows signs of uneasiness she concludes that the spirit has entered it, and sets it free. The feather-ornamented sticks with which the men have put the evil spirit to flight are carefully preserved; the feathers serve to make feather headdresses, and the stick itself is put on the roof.<sup>1</sup>

I pass over the details of the ceremony, some of which are closely paralleled in the Old World; but I will digress for a moment and deal with the subsequent use of the magical stick. The wood of it is perhaps sacred; but it is certain that a part of its cathartic virtue comes from the toucan feathers; now in another ceremony, that of the initiation of girls, there is carved on a post the grimacing face of the evil spirit, which the flagellation inflicted on the unfortunate young woman is supposed to expel; in

<sup>1</sup> Chaffanjon, *Oremogue*, p. 202.

the case of the feather stick, therefore, the carving would perhaps, if it were carved, be that of a toucan's head. The Piaroas have not, as a matter of fact, taken this step; but though I can point to no exact American parallel to the European custom of carving horses' heads and other designs upon the gable heads,<sup>1</sup> we seem to have its first cousin in the Caraya practice, found also in Guiana, of putting on the gable the figure of an archer; the meaning of this is however conjectural.<sup>2</sup>

We have of course in Europe, concurrently with the carving of heads on the gable ends, the hanging up of skulls, and in Africa the sacrifice of a human victim; we cannot therefore assume that a custom like that of the Piaroas is necessarily the lineal ancestor of the horses' heads on the gable. At the same time, bearing in mind that the skulls are put everywhere *but* on the gable, the explanation suggested here cannot be dismissed as impossible or improbable. Both the skull and the gable head are amulets intended to protect the house; but we cannot assume that the skull was the earlier, the gable head the later custom, when we see in South America a practice which indicates that the gable decoration may have been unconnected with sacrifice.

Returning now to the scapegoat, I think it will be admitted that in the Piaroan custom we have an excellent example of the cathartic ceremony of the type with which I am dealing to-night. Equally clear in intention is the Dahomey custom—recorded by the Jesuits nearly forty years ago. It appears that the serpent-god Danbe was brought out every three years and carried round the city in order to rid the community of its ills and diseases. There is here, it is true, no subsequent expulsion of the serpent; and it may be argued that the object of the ceremony was rather to annihilate the evil influences by diffusing the holy influence; it is certainly of importance

<sup>1</sup> *Folklore*, xi. 322.

<sup>2</sup> *Veröff. kgl. Museum zu Berlin*, ii. 75.

to note in this connection that the Dahomey custom required that the god should be carried round, whereas in other scapegoat ceremonies the animal does not possess a specifically sacred character, nor even in all cases undergo any rite of sacralisation such as is often held indispensable to fit the victim for sacrifice. Perhaps, however, we have only to thank the imperfection of our records for this apparent indifference to the character of the scapegoat.

In this connection I may perhaps quote an account of an Indian festival which is in other respects parallel to some of the European customs to which I am going to draw attention. The Mhars are said to celebrate the Dusserah festival in order to appease the evil spirits. A young buffalo is driven in front of the temple of Bhawani and certain prayers are said; these are perhaps a consecration of the animal. Then the chief wounds the animal with his sword in the neck and it is set free and hunted; in the course of the chase the participants try to strike it either with their hands or with a weapon; and it is believed to carry away the sins of all those who are successful in touching it. After it has been driven round the walls and in at the entrance gate again, the head of the buffalo is cut off and this must take place at one blow. Thereupon the Mhars throw themselves upon the victim and each takes possession of 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 offerings, which are thrown backwards over the wall.<sup>1</sup>

I now pass to the European practices with which I am more especially concerned in this paper. The view is, as we have seen put forward by Dr. Frazer in the *Golden Bough*, that there is a scapegoat element in many of the springtide vegetation customs, and one or two unmistakeable examples of such a practice are there brought

<sup>1</sup> *Globus*, xvii. 24.

forward. There are other customs which seem to me capable of no other interpretation. Thus, in more than one village in Holland the last day of the Kirmess, which has in many cases absorbed elements from other festivals, was known as "Kat-uit"; and old people say that down to 1815 the custom existed, at any rate in Wambeck, of throwing a living cat out of the gates.<sup>1</sup>

I showed in a former paper read before this society<sup>2</sup> that the cat figured in a number of annual ceremonies, among which was casting it down from a tower or other high place; we have seen that there is reason to suppose the Biblical scapegoat to have been thrown down a precipice, and we seem to have here another case of the same rite; other parallels might readily be quoted, but I pass on to better known customs.

Prominent among European animal customs is the hunting of the wren. I need not retrace the ground already covered by Dr. Frazer in the *Golden Bough*; it will be sufficient for me here to call attention, first, to the fact that, like the serpent of Dahomey, the wren is taken in procession round the village or town; secondly, that as among the Piaroas the feathers are distributed and kept; and, thirdly, that in many cases the end of the whole ceremony was the burial of the wren. More significant, however, for my purpose is the custom at Entraigues quoted by Dr. Frazer; at this place the wren was hunted on Christmas Eve; when they caught one alive, they humbly presented it to the priest, who, after the midnight mass, set the bird free in the church.<sup>3</sup> In Nivernais one of the landowners had to come every year and kneel bareheaded without sword or spurs on the threshold of the principal gate of Champ d'Ioux; and in this position to set free a wren brought to him for that purpose.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Volkskunde*, vi. 155.

<sup>2</sup> *Folklore*, xi. 228.

<sup>3</sup> *G.B.* ii. 445.

<sup>4</sup> Rolland, *Faunes*, ii. 297.

These practices are by no means confined to France; for at Kirkmaiden in Scotland there is a custom of catching a wren on New Year's Day and setting it free after decking it with ribbons.<sup>1</sup> This recalls a French custom; to keep a swallow in a cage is said to bring misfortune;<sup>2</sup> anyone who catches a swallow ties a ribbon to its foot and sets it free; this is said to bring good luck.<sup>3</sup>

In the West of Germany we find at Liepe near Eberswald an Ascension Day custom which closely resembles the setting free of the wren. The young men of Liepe and the neighbouring village of Lower Finow used to go into the forest, where two "eagles" always built their nest; two of the young ones, one for each village, were taken and kept till Whitsuntide on a fish diet. Then they were made fast to a handbarrow or other means of carrying them and a hoop set over them; on the second day they were carried in procession from house to house, just as the wren frequently is; as in the case of the wren a song was sung:

Wi brengen ju en jungschen Jänse-oar  
Wi hebben en utjenoam!  
Wi sin mit uwer Berch un Toal jekoam.  
Band! Band! Band!

Thereupon the girls brought out ribbons and made them fast to the hoop; subsequently they were divided among the young men. The day after this procession they wore the ribbons in their hats and after a few days the "Jänseoar" was set free.<sup>4</sup>

We have already seen that the butterfly is called the "Sommervogel" and driven out. The same name is given in Grosselfingen to the pigeon which is made fast

<sup>1</sup> *Brit. Ass. Ethnogr. Survey*, No. 199.

<sup>2</sup> *La Tradition*, v. 199.

<sup>3</sup> *Rev. des Trad. pop.* iv. 229, cf. Rolland, ii. 321.

<sup>4</sup> *Kor.blatt für niederd. Spr.forschung.* vi. 43.



the Thursday before Fastnacht to a pole at the side of the bridge. The pole is surrounded by the "Butzen" or wearers of masks, and the dancers, who defend it against robbers; in the end, however, the latter succeed and carry off the bird, while the Butzen and the rest of the people break out into lamentations: "The Summer-bird is stolen; now it will never be summer again," until the thieves are caught and thrown into the pond. Then the Narrenvogt solemnly sets the pigeon free.<sup>1</sup>

We have in this ceremony, I think, an excellent example of the mixed motives of many popular festivals; on my interpretation the "Sommervogel" was originally set free to remove the accumulated evils; the thieves who carry it off represent the powers of evil; consequently they must be conquered; hence the bird which acts as the scapegoat must actually be recaptured and brought back. The ducking of the thieves is doubtless a rain-charm; and the introduction of the ideas of a contest between summer and winter has finally metamorphosed the ceremony and made it appear that the bird is a precious possession and not the embodiment of evils.

Although there is little actual suggestion in any of the cases to which I have so far called attention, that the rite is one of purification or expulsion of evils, the form of the ceremony strongly suggests that this was the original meaning of the liberation of the animal. In the case of the wren this conclusion is supported by the fact that it figures in another part of France in a ceremony which has already been shown by Dr. Frazer to form part of Indian purificatory ceremonies; this is the tug-of-war, which is seen in a modified form in the contest for the pigeon. At Laguenne, near Tulle in Lower Limousin, the inhabitants elected a person who bore the name of Roi de la Tire-vessie. He had to strip before his fellow-citizens and a crowd of curious

<sup>1</sup>Mannhardt, *Myth. Forsch.* p. 134.

visitors and then throw himself into the water; then he had to pass three times underneath the bridge with his head under water. This done he proceeded to the town; but before he did so, he mounted a waggon, holding on his wrist a wren, its head covered with a hood such as is used in falconry, and silk tassels on its feet. To one side of the waggon were assigned the people who had married within seven years of the ceremony, to the other side those who hoped to enter into the bonds of matrimony; and the two parties then struggled till one pulled the waggon over to its side. Then the king entered the town with his wren and seated himself on a large stone; three times in succession he called upon the Seigneur de Laroche or his representative to receive his homage. Then he plucked feathers from the wren and threw them in the air. This done, the Seigneur or his representative took the place of the king, received from him the wren and his homage. In the early part of the seventeenth century a wooden wren was made fast to a pole after the homage had been rendered, and each inhabitant of the town had to shoot an arrow at it; if it was not hit they had to give to the Seigneur a silver bow of the value of sixty livres.<sup>1</sup>

It is apparent at a glance that these ceremonies are by no means of simple origin. Perhaps we may interpret the dipping and walking in the water as a rain charm; the shooting at the wren, a point to which I shall return later, is usually a distinct ceremony, unconnected with the hunting, which, we may suppose, preceded the rites here described; or perhaps it is rather an alternative form to the hunt. The association of the custom with the homage to the lord of the manor can hardly be anything but late; perhaps it is the nucleus round which other, previously-disconnected, ceremonies have focussed. It may be that the tug-of-war between

<sup>1</sup> *La Tradition*, iv. 166.

the married and unmarried was not originally connected with the wren custom at all; and I do not, therefore, lay much stress on that feature as a proof that wren customs are connected with ceremonies of expulsion of evils. There are, however, elements both in the hunting of the wren and other birds or animals on which some stress may be laid as proof of the cathartic nature of the rites. We have seen that at the Dusserah festival the Mhars endeavour to strike the buffalo, believing that each person who does so relieves himself of the load of sin. Similar rites are a feature of more than one human sacrifice. One of the features of the hunting customs is that the animals are struck at by those who take part in the rite. It may be said that this a necessary feature of any hunt and does not bear any esoteric meaning. That is so, but the beating is not confined to hunting ceremonies only. In many cases the animal or bird is shut up or made fast to a pole, as in the Laguenne custom; here too, it may be said, the choice of a king, which is usually the end and aim of the contest at the present day, involves a trial of skill of some sort, and the throwing at cocks and similar customs is no more than a trial of skill. It might indeed be argued that it was very much more in its primitive form. In fact, in some of the forms of Blind Man's Buff, which, as I showed in my former paper, are a reproduction with human performers of the games of sacrifice of which throwing at cocks is a typical example, the players strike the "blind man" as often as they can and he attempts to guess who hit him. That this was a very early form is clear from the fact that it is mentioned among Greek games by Pollux in his *Onomastikon*.

But is unnecessary to produce collateral evidence of this sort except in proof of the wide-spread character of the element in these customs to which I am calling attention, viz., the striking or beating either of the

performer or of an animal. For in the Welsh form of the custom, known as *mwgwd* or blindfold, a young man was blindfolded on Shrove Tuesday and beaten with switches as he ran about the streets; sometimes the custom was varied, and here we see the connection of the blindfolded man with the cockthrowing, he had a fowl attached to his shoulders.<sup>1</sup>

From this it is clear that the custom of striking or beating animals was not simply a part of the process of securing them either in the chase or in a trial of skill, but something apparently more intimately connected with the central idea of the rite, as indeed has already been shown by Dr. Frazer in another connection. If, therefore, the *prima facie* interpretation—the scapegoat theory—of the liberation of the wren and other birds is correct, we can with some probability regard the hunt and similar customs as based upon the same idea.

I have already pointed out that it is no necessary feature of the cathartic rite that a scapegoat should be set free; and, in fact, it seems arguable that many of the annual sacrifices to which I called attention in my former paper are explicable as cathartic sacrifices. But it may be well to give some examples which admit of no doubt. Near Maubeuge a ram was formerly led in procession in the same way as in the ceremonies already described, and the object of the ceremony is expressly stated to have been the removal of the sins of the people; but instead of the ram being set free it was killed by a gentleman of the neighbourhood.<sup>2</sup>

Equally clear is the cathartic intention of the Jewish sacrifice on the eve of the Day of Atonement. The father of the family knocks the head of the cock thrice against his own head; then he kills it, cuts its throat, throws it down and so on; all these elements of the ceremony are or have been interpreted symbolically. Formerly it

<sup>1</sup> *Montgomeryshire Coll.* x. 264.

<sup>2</sup> Rolland, *Fauna*, v. 206.

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was given to the poor ; but they are said to have refused it because it was laden with iniquities, and from that time onwards only the money value of the bird was given.<sup>1</sup>

It is therefore clear that the cathartic intention explains not only scapegoat ceremonies proper but also sacrifices. I will cite further examples where the intention is less clear.

There was a custom prevalent in Wales at the end of the 18th century, of throwing a victim over a precipice when a murrain broke out among the cattle.<sup>2</sup> In the case of the Jewish scapegoat, precipitation from a height seems to have been the important point in the rite. We may, therefore, perhaps regard that Welsh custom as a ceremony intended for the expulsion of evil ; so too, the sacrifice of a cat at Ypern in Belgium and at Attendorf in the Mark, where a cat was thrown from a church tower or other edifice ; in the same way a goat was sacrificed at Liepa and among the Wends.<sup>3</sup>

The intention of these ceremonies is, it is true, nowhere explicitly stated, but in similar customs elsewhere the object of the rite is not yet forgotten. In the Oberpfalz a goat is thrown from the church tower on September 1st, *i.e.* about the time of harvest ; and at Jičín in Bohemia a goat or ram is decorated with ribbons and wreaths during the Kirmess and thrown from the church tower in order to secure a good harvest the following year. This custom is widely practised in Hungary, Bohemia and Moravia.

Ceremonies of this kind, practised from time immemorial by the uncultured classes, are not and never were intended as sacrifices to this or that deity, any more than the customs of the harvest-field and sowing-tide, which formed

<sup>1</sup> *G.B.* iii. 109 n.

<sup>2</sup> Owen, *Heroic Elagies of Llywarch Hen*, p. xxxl.

<sup>3</sup> Coremans, *L'Année*, p. 53. *Zeits. f. D. M.* ii. 93. *Mitt. des Nordböh. Excursionsclubs*, xxiii., 108. Sommer, *Sagen aus Thüringen*, p. 179.

the subject of Mannhardt's epoch-making researches, are to be interpreted as relics of the cult of this or that god.

But there is a practice, also found in Bohemia, of killing a cat on Christmas eve and burying it in the cornfield or under a fruit-tree in order that the evil spirit may not damage them.<sup>1</sup> This may perhaps be taken as casting some doubt on my interpretation of the sacrifices previously considered. It cannot indeed be said that the cat is buried as the representative of the corn-spirit; nor indeed is it probable that, as in some cases of the foundation sacrifice, it is killed to provide the field or the orchard with a tutelary spirit, tempting as this theory of the origin of the animal corn-spirit might be. It may, however, legitimately be argued that the evil spirit whom the Bohemian seeks to propitiate is not a mere aetiological personage but a chthonic deity, and that the slaughter of an animal is to serve the same purpose as was believed by the Khonds to be attained by the sacrifice of the Meriah.

But it is less easy to explain in this way the custom of precipitation from a height; still less can the simple expulsion of the cat or other animal be regarded as a propitiation of chthonic deities. Even therefore in the case of rites connected with the crops, some sacrifices may be cathartic.

However that may be, it is abundantly clear that purely cathartic sacrifices are known. That being so, I now pass on to argue the cathartic character of certain customs in which animals figure but are not set free. These are (a) rites connected with the first of the species seen after the new year and (b) wedding customs.

In my former paper<sup>2</sup> I mentioned some examples of killing the first butterfly, wasp, or snake, for luck. It is true that the explanations given of these particular practices do not explicitly confirm the view that this is

<sup>1</sup> Grohmann, *Aberglaube*, no. 367.

<sup>2</sup> *Folklore*, xi. 228.

another case of cathartic sacrifice ; but when we consider the corresponding customs with the living birds and insects this view is seen to be highly probable. From Aristophanes onwards many authorities may be quoted for customs connected with seeing the first swallow, stork, butterfly or snake, or hearing the first cuckoo. At the present day the interpretations are very varied ; but even now we see distinct traces of what I take to be the primitive idea and foundation of the customs. For example, you must greet the first stork, if you desire to be free of backache during the year ; another recipe is to roll on the ground, but in this case the object is unspecified. Sometimes it is said to be lucky to see the first stork in flight ; and here, perhaps, the idea may be that it removes ill fortune from you.<sup>1</sup> In the same way when the first swallow is seen, the proper thing to do is to wash your face ; for then you will not be troubled with freckles ; another authority says it is well to jump, but assigns no specific advantage to the person who carries out the recommendation ;<sup>2</sup> when the first cuckoo is heard, rolling is equally in place ; and the Huculs, when they see a snake for the first time in the year, spit and say : "Go into the forest, I am going into the field."<sup>3</sup> Those who wish to find a swarm of bees are variously recommended to set free the first butterfly or to catch it ; but it is clear that the latter case must be a mutilated version of the former ; very significant in this connection is the practice of letting the first butterfly escape through the arm of one's coat.<sup>4</sup> But as absolute evidence of the cathartic intention of these customs I will quote the North German custom of catching the first gosling, taking care to preserve silence during the ceremony, and solemnly

<sup>1</sup> *Baltische Studien*, 33, p. 119 ; Straus, *Die Bulgaren*, p. 335.

<sup>2</sup> *Globus*, xxxviii. 314 ; *Folklore J.L.* v. 187.

<sup>3</sup> *Folklore Rec.* ii. 88 ; *Rev. der Trad. pop.* iii. 345 ; *Globus*, lxi. 72.

<sup>4</sup> Strackerjan, *Aberglaube*, i. 105 ; *Melusine*, iv. 478 ; *Folklore*, xii.

stroking the face with it and then letting it go; this too is a remedy for freckles.<sup>1</sup> Many other similar customs might be quoted both with regard to animals and to phenomena such as the rainbow, thunder,<sup>2</sup> and so on; but the mere heaping up of examples will not establish the suggested explanation, if it is not justified by those already cited. I therefore pass on to my second point.

I have suggested above that the custom of throwing at cocks is a variant of the scapegoat. One period at which it is or was largely practised was the spring, a time of year which, on other grounds, we have reason to connect with cathartic practices. But throwing at cocks is also a feature of marriage customs in many parts of Europe; and it seems possible that here too the same explanation may apply. In this connection the part taken by the newly-married in many spring customs, their share in the tug-of-war mentioned above, and especially the ducking of the newly-married man, and the carrying of the wren to the house of the newly-married, may perhaps be significant. At any rate as evidence of the belief that purificatory ceremonies are desirable at such a juncture I may cite the widely-found practice of beating the bride or bridegroom; the *Polterabend*, in its primitive form, seems closely allied to expulsion ceremonies.

Throwing at cocks is not the only form of the customs dealt with earlier in this paper which is practised at weddings; occasionally we find that the male guests are privileged to raid the neighbouring hen-roosts<sup>3</sup> and farm yards; possibly this may be the survival of a hunt. Another wedding custom, which I discussed some years ago, is that of the mimetic dance; the mimetic dance seems to be of unmistakeable cathartic intention in some cases, and, if the suggestions made in this paper as to

<sup>1</sup> Bartuch, *Sagen*, ii. 363, cf. 158.

<sup>2</sup> *Jahrb. Schlesw. Holst.* viii. 102; Boecler-Kreutzwald, *Elstern*, 115.

<sup>3</sup> *Romania*, ix. 554; *Wiss. Mitt. aus Bormien*, vi. 639, vii. 37.



the meaning of the connection of animals with weddings are valid, it is possible that the mimetic dance at weddings may also be interpreted in the same manner.

As showing the connection of the hunt with European marriage ceremonies a Poitou custom is of interest. The newly-married had to pursue a ram in a large field.<sup>1</sup> More obscure is the "bachelette" of Chatillon-sur-Seine; here on Good Friday the young husbands and wives had to perform a ceremony known as "fesser le mouton." A cask was set up with a cloth on it; and on the cloth bread and wine which a sheep had to eat. When it had made a good meal the last-married woman took a stick and drove it three times round the cask; then each of the husbands put it on his shoulders and twisted it three times round his head.<sup>2</sup> The meaning of this custom is not clear, but it is tempting to connect the eating and drinking of the sheep with the idea of sin-eating.

Some features of the wren customs tell in favour of the cathartic meaning of marriage customs. Whereas in Wales the wren is taken to the newly-married,<sup>3</sup> in Berry it is the newly-married who have to take the wren to the lord of the manor.<sup>4</sup> The two customs combined seem to make it clear that the association of the wren with the newly-married cannot have been accidental.

But these by no means exhaust the wedding customs connected with animals. There is the well-known custom of the "Brauthahn"; before I deal with this, however, I may refer to a South German practice. In the Upper Palatinate, pork is an essential dish at the wedding breakfast; in order to remove the odour from the meat the animal is rolled from the roof before the butcher slaughters it.<sup>5</sup> The same practice is found, though not in connection with weddings, in the Kurile Islands and in Nias,<sup>6</sup> but

<sup>1</sup> *Mem. Soc. Antiq. France*, i. 437.

<sup>2</sup> *Ib.* iv. 119.

<sup>3</sup> *Byegones*, Ap. 22, 1885.

<sup>4</sup> *La Tradition*, iv. 364.

<sup>5</sup> Schönwert, *Aus dem Oberpfalz*, i. 98.

<sup>6</sup> *Globus*, lxx. 373.

we learn nothing as to the intention of the ceremony. Possibly it may be the same as that of throwing objects over the roof; in the Jewish Atonement Day ceremony, the entrails of the cock are thrown over the roof; in Cornwall a pig's nose is thrown over the house for luck;<sup>1</sup> just as we find dead lambs thrown into the trees in England, the Esthonians throw kids and lambs on the roof;<sup>2</sup> and it must be remembered that there is reason to regard many ceremonies for the removal of diseases as in reality ceremonies of transference or expulsion. A cock is killed in Russia on January 13th in order that the fowls may do well; its head is cut off and thrown on the roof.<sup>3</sup> When a hen crows like a cock one remedy is to kill it and throw it over the roof; the same should also be done with a so-called cock's egg, which produces a basilisk.<sup>4</sup> There is, therefore, some ground for connecting these practices also with cathartic ceremonies; and if this is so, the Palatinate custom goes to show that the removal of evils was one of the objects sought in European marriage customs.

We are on more uncertain ground when we come to the "Brauthahn." But even here there are traces of similar ideas. In Poland the bride of a widower has to enter through a broken window, by which a cat has previously been thrown into the house;<sup>5</sup> taken in connection with the throwing of a cat into a new house, this custom seems very significant. Elsewhere the cat is rocked on a table before the bride, or cooked and given to the newly married couple,<sup>6</sup> but as a rule the animal so offered is a cock, partridge, goose, swan, sheep or other ordinary article of food, as I shall show below; from this it might be concluded that the eating was the essential part of the rite;

<sup>1</sup> *Folklore J.* v. 195.

<sup>2</sup> Boecler-Krentzwald, *loc. cit.* p. 118.

<sup>3</sup> Globus, lvi. 269.

<sup>4</sup> Grimm, no. 583; *Zts. d. Myth.* iii. 339.

<sup>5</sup> *La Tradition*, v. 346.

<sup>6</sup> Haltrich, *Zur. V.* 290; Rolland, *Faunes*, vi. 102.

but this view neglects the cock-throwing and other customs, which are sometimes only a preliminary to the eating of the bird, and may well have been the important feature at the outset. Thus a cock is burnt in Podliassie on the occasion of a wedding ;<sup>1</sup> but in the Government of Siedlitz a living cock is carried by its claws, when the newly married couple come out of church, and swung in the air ; it is subsequently taken into a field and fastened to a post wrapped in straw to which they set fire ; only the feathers of the cock are burnt, however, and the flesh is eaten.<sup>2</sup> If we compare these two customs it is clear that the burning is far more likely to be the original custom than that it should have been developed out of the practice of eating a cock at the wedding breakfast.

The same may be said of a custom practised in the department of Indre. A young man before his marriage takes a cock to the house of his intended but stops at the door to pluck it. The custom is on all fours with the plucking of the wren and may be regarded as the essential element ; at the same time its significance is not quite clear.

Thus, though the "Brauthahn" is apparently a side issue, there are some grounds for regarding wedding ceremonies, including the "Brauthahn," as cathartic. I will, therefore, offer no excuse for giving at this point a brief survey of the group of analogous practices.<sup>3</sup> In parts of Germany the cock no longer figured, though the name "Brauthahn" survived ; sometimes there was a pat of butter on the table in the form of a cock ; sometimes the name was given to the custom of offering a present of some sort, as in the well-known Welsh custom. Similarly in Great Russia the young wife the day after the wedding was presented with a cake on which were figures of cocks, ducks, etc.<sup>4</sup> In the

<sup>1</sup> *Globus*, lxi. 271.

<sup>2</sup> *Anthropologie*, iii. 543.

<sup>3</sup> *Globus*, xlii. 244 ; *Wiss. Mitt. aus Bosnien*, vii. 325.

<sup>4</sup> *Anthropologie*, ii. 423, n. 1.

east of France the custom has become so far symbolical that the cock is white and is given only to a virtuous bride.<sup>1</sup> Among the South Slavs it is the bridegroom who receives from his mother-in-law the cock and a cake.<sup>2</sup> Sometimes it is the guests who eat the cock, sometimes the married couple, either in public or private.<sup>3</sup> Sometimes the cock is kept all night in the nuptial chamber.<sup>4</sup> Sometimes it is only brought on the morrow and introduced alive. In the Middle Ages there was a German custom which faintly suggests something of the nature of a tug-of-war between the newly-married couple. A cock was brought, whose wing had been cut in a manner to permit of the bride separating it from the body of the cock, while the husband held the other wing. It is, perhaps, not unimportant that the bride had to throw the wing away or get rid of it in some manner.<sup>5</sup>

The cock is not the only animal which figures in these ceremonies. In Pojk, Illyria, the bride receives from her husband or his brother an ox, cow, or sheep; she takes it by the horns, and then one of her near relatives must lead it three times round in a circle.<sup>6</sup> Among the Crim Tartars a lamb is given; in Bulgaria a goat or a sheep, which is eaten.<sup>7</sup> In the Caucasus, on the other hand, the sheep are offered to the gods.<sup>8</sup> In La Creuse a cat and a fowl are killed and cooked together for the newly married.<sup>9</sup> More remote from the original custom is the Vosges practice, according to which the younger 'sister who marries first must give a white goat to her elder sister.<sup>10</sup>

In Moscow geese, which have perhaps replaced swans, are presented to the newly-married.<sup>11</sup> In the Ukraine an

<sup>1</sup> *Rev. der Trad. pop.* iv. 364.

<sup>2</sup> Krauss, *Sitte*, p. 397.

<sup>3</sup> *Bavaria*, i. 390, 394; Rolland, vi. 102; Krauss, p. 487; Soester Dannell, p. 119; Pröhle, *Harabilder*, p. 87, etc.

<sup>4</sup> Soester Dannell, 113.

<sup>5</sup> *Russ. Rev.* xii. 268.

<sup>6</sup> *Die ill. Prov.* p. 155.

<sup>7</sup> Holderness, *New Russia*, p. 236.

<sup>8</sup> *Anthropologie*, v. 287.

<sup>9</sup> Rolland, *Fauna*, vi. 102.

<sup>10</sup> *Mémoires*, i. 454.

<sup>11</sup> *Rev. Trad. Pop.* iv. 324.

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owl adorns the *korovai*, or wedding-cake, and is the perquisite of the father.<sup>1</sup> In Podolia pigeons are on the cake, and a living pigeon is given in Poitou.<sup>2</sup> In Naabburg and Normandy the pigeon was eaten by the newly-married.<sup>3</sup> Among the Letts the husband had to carve a partridge on his wedding day.<sup>4</sup>

From this epitome of wedding customs it will be apparent that the "Brauthahn" ceremony is found in many different forms; in fact, if we had no other animal customs connected with weddings, it would be rash to speculate as to its significance. But it seems to me to be a fair hypothesis that in this group of customs also we find the idea of a transference of evils as the primitive feature, which has subsequently been transfigured out of all recognition. As an explanation, therefore, of many wedding and annual sacrificial customs in which animals figure I suggest that they are cathartic. And if this hypothesis seems to labour under the familiar disadvantage of seeking to explain too much by one key, may I point out that, so far as I know, the customs in question do not exist outside Europe and perhaps a portion of North Asia; they may well, therefore, have spread from a single centre. On the other hand Dr. Frazer has, I think, demonstrated the immense importance of this idea of the expulsion of evils in all parts of the world; it is, therefore, by no means improbable *a priori* that they should be widely spread in Europe, nor yet that they should have survived till our own day.

But the annual customs, hunt, sacrifice, liberation and so on, are only one side of the attitude of the folk towards animals. Side by side with these annual customs is the belief that the animal is sacrosanct, and popular

<sup>1</sup> *Anthropologie*, ii. 558, n. 4.

<sup>2</sup> Baumgarten, *die kom. Mysterien*, p. 312.

<sup>3</sup> *Anthropologie*, ii. 423, n. 1; Dumine, *Tenchebray*, p. 483.

<sup>4</sup> *Rev. Trad. Pop.* iv. 324.

superstition holds it to be unlucky to kill or even injure many animals or birds. Here I do not wish to suggest that one explanation covers the whole of the cases; probably the belief in the sanctity of certain animals and birds may be traced back to more than one origin. At the same time it seems possible that this very cathartic function, with which we have been occupied in this paper, is the origin, at least in part, of the sacrosanctity of these species. For clearly if a bird or animal is set free to carry away the sins or evils of a community, it is a highly dangerous thing to come in contact with it; and from this may well arise the belief that it is inviolable; it is a commonplace that cleanness and uncleanness, holiness and impurity, are not distinguished by primitive man. In this connection I may call attention to the fact that although there is no suggestion that these birds or animals are malevolent in the ordinary course of things, it is expressly held to be very unlucky to bring them into a house—precisely what we should expect if they were regarded as beneficent but laden with the ills of the community. To this it may be objected that in many cases the presence of birds in or about houses is regarded as lucky; this may, of course, be due to the operation of some completely different set of ideas; but, on the other hand, it may also be due to the belief that precisely through their cathartic influence do they benefit the house; and it is on this ground that the cock, the hoopoe, the pigeon, the donkey and other species are often valued in popular superstition. In Wales, for example, it is expressly believed that a cock of a certain colour attracts all the evil influences that are in the house; and other examples could readily be cited.

It seems, therefore, possible that the sacrosanctity of some species may be accounted for on the supposition that as the bearers of the ills of community they are, in popular belief, dangerous, or at any rate may be so, for

there is clearly no means of distinguishing an animal charged with contagious ills from one which bears no such burden. At the same time this solution leaves unsolved the problem of why one animal or bird came to be chosen rather than another; it is possible that the selection of the scapegoat was determined by some deeper-lying cause to which we cannot now penetrate; whether this cause was some physical peculiarity of the species, something in its habits—migratory birds might well seem specially suitable—or some subjective foundation which it is hopeless to try to discover, these are questions which lack of the essential data compels me to pass over, and perhaps we can hardly expect to arrive at any conclusion upon them.

The facts adduced here make clear the wide prevalence of cathartic ceremonies in Europe and thus bear out Dr. Frazer's views as to the presence of this element in the custom of "carrying out Death." Dr. Frazer holds that it was on the one hand customary to kill the human or animal god in order to save his divine life from being weakened by the inroads of old age. With this custom was combined, he supposes, one of annually expelling the accumulated evils and sins of the community. In the cases we have been considering, however, when the animal scapegoat is killed, it seems to bear no marks of the dying god. So far as we can see the animal was selected as a convenient vehicle on which to load the burden of evil. It is, of course, possible that the divine character of the victim has been gradually effaced in the course of ages, but there does not seem to be any foundation for the view in the European facts which are here adduced. But whether the animal was originally regarded as divine or not, it is evident that there was a practice of killing the scapegoat, and this suggests that Dr. Frazer's theory of the dying god may not be the true explanation of the spring customs

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in which a victim figures. These are questions which open a wide field of controversy and I will not attempt to deal with them here. I will merely suggest that if a representative of this vegetation spirit is killed it may be that it is killed as a cathartic victim and not to save its life from the inroads of old age.

N. W. THOMAS.

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