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103. Note on a Magical Curative Practice in Use at Benares

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India: Folklore.

Hildburgh.

**Note on a Magical Curative Practice in Use at Benares.** By **103**  
*W. L. Hildburgh.*

The following practice was described to me at Benares, and as being in use among the Hindus of that city. It was said to be carried out when the patient's sufferings are due to the malignant spirit of a woman who has died in childbirth. Although the natures neither of the patients nor of their malady were specified in the description, we may, I think, from certain well-recognised characteristics of such a spirit, judge that the patients to be treated are either infants or pregnant or parturient women. The various small objects mentioned below as employed in carrying the process into effect were purchased for me by my informant, some at one shop, some at another; their total cost amounted to about one anna.

The performance is preferably carried out on a Sunday, a Tuesday or a Saturday. Into a small paper palanquin, such as is used by children as a toy, are put toy or other representations of the following objects:—(a) A plate, generally red on its upper surface, and usually with silver-coloured streaks; (b) a box, containing two of the spangles used by women for decorating their foreheads; (c) a comb; (d) rolls for placing in the holes in the lobes of the ears; (e) two bangles; (f) two bracelets made of cord; (g) a necklace; and (h) a doll. The palanquin, with the other things in it, is then carried round the patient's body—or, sometimes, passed round his (or her) head—usually three times or five times, and the afflicting spirit is requested to leave her victim in peace, it being believed (according to my informant) that, presumably pleased with the offerings of the ornaments, &c., for her use which she finds within the palanquin, and with the gift of the vehicle, she will be disposed to transfer her activities from the sufferer. The doll, which my informant stated was for the spirit "to play with," has been, I am inclined to think, probably intended to represent the victim, and to supply the offender with a substitute for the application of her attentions. The palanquin and its contents are finally taken, at night, to a cross-roads, and left at the junction; the person carrying the objects should not be spoken to on his way to the spot, lest the efficacy of the performance be impaired. After the palanquin has been left at the cross-roads, should anyone chance to step upon or over it, the patient will be cured, while (according to my informant) the person who has passed over the palanquin will become ill in the patient's place; and should it happen that no one steps over the palanquin, the patient will probably be only imperfectly relieved, and only in accordance with the charitable inclinations of the afflicting spirit.

I think, basing my judgment on the greater part of the features of the above operation, that my informant was probably in error in stating its underlying conception to be the pleasing of the afflicting spirit to such a degree that she will voluntarily give up her victim. The attempted bribery of a supernatural being to whom a malady is ascribed occurs not infrequently in curative practices among Asiatic peoples, but it occurs generally when the supposed cause of the harm is regarded as being of so powerful a nature that it must be treated with respect, and persuaded, rather than compelled, to leave its victim—small-pox, for example, furnishes many illustrations of treatments based on this idea. To me the present practice appears to embody rather the idea of a spirit-trap, into which the ghost—doubtless looked upon as being, like most ghosts, somewhat stupid—is to be enticed, and in which she will find things to amuse her, and, until it is too late for her to return to her victim, make her forget all about the evil work on which she has been engaged. The principal objection to this theory seems to me to lie in the statements—which might conceivably be regarded as associated with a powerful demon rather than with a comparatively feeble ghost—that, if the palanquin be stepped over, the person stepping over it will contract the

malady, and that if it be not stepped over the malady may recur ; but this objection is almost extinguished by the possibility that my informant was erroneously adding a detail properly belonging to some other operation, the probability that the malady is thought to affect only those who are of an age or a sex liable to its attacks, and the conception—a fairly common one in at least other parts of the East—that a thing which is stepped over is weakened, or even rendered powerless. The taking of the objects to the cross-roads at night is, perhaps, to be accounted for by the very practical consideration that, if the palanquin be deposited during the night, there is more chance of its being stepped over, unnoticed in the darkness, than if it were left during the day-time, as well as by some such general conceptions as that, the evil spirit being one of those most (or entirely) active during hours of darkness, all transactions with her should be carried through during those hours ; that, fearing the sunlight, she may refuse to leave her victim's house excepting in darkness ; and that at night there is less chance of her being caused, by some random word or action of a passer-by, to leave her vehicle before the cross-roads has been reached and to return to her victim along the road she has gone over ; while the somewhat anti-social character of one of the elements of the operation—the transference of the malady to an unsuspecting stranger—is not improbably accompanied by a fear of reprobation should the bearer of the objects be detected at his task.

W. L. HILDBURGH.

This is an interesting example of the beliefs in Northern India as to the *Churël*. The following passage from Mr. Crooke's *Popular Religion and Folklore of Northern India*, Vol. I, pp. 273, 274, is worth reference, as further illustrating the idea of amusing or diverting these malicious spirits. "In the Hills the place where a pregnant woman died is carefully scraped and the earth removed. The spot is then sown with mustard (*sarson*), which is also sprinkled along the road traversed by the corpse on its way to the burial ground. The reason given for this is two-fold. First, the mustard blossoms in the world of the dead, and the sweet smell pleases the spirit and keeps her content, so that she does not long to revisit her earthly home ; secondly, the *Churël* rises from her grave at nightfall and seeks to return to her friends. She sees the minute grains of the mustard scattered abroad and stoops to pick it up, and while so engaged Cock-crow comes ; she is unable to visit her home, and must return to her grave. This is another instance of the rule that evil spirits move about only at night." M. L. D.

## Anthropology.

Petrie.

**Links of North and South.** By *W. M. Flinders Petrie, D.C.L., F.R.S.* 104

As those who study classical and northern history follow somewhat different lines, it seems desirable to bring together a few connections, however simple they may be, which may help to join the two fields. There is no connected argument in this paper ; it is only hod-man work in collecting anthropologic material.

The account of Zamolxis varies. Strabo states that he was a disciple of Pythagoras, afterwards a priest, and then "esteemed as a god, and, having retired into a district of caverns, inaccessible and unfrequented by other men, he there passed his life. . . . The custom continues to our time, for there is always found someone of this character who assists the king in his counsels, and is styled a god by the Getæ. This mountain likewise where Zamolxis retired is held sacred" (*Strabo*, VII., iii., 3). Again, "Prophets received so much honour as to be thought worthy of thrones, because they were supposed to communicate ordinances and precepts from the gods, both during their lifetime and after their death, as, for example, Teiresias. Such were Amphiarus, Trophonius, Orpheus, and Musæus ; in former times there was Zamolxis, a Pythagorean, who was accounted a god